

The Vision of Purgatory, Part 2 Translated By The Rev. H. F. Cary, Illustrated by Gustave Dore

Dante Alighieri

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THE VISION

OF

HELL, PURGATORY, AND PARADISE

BY DANTE ALIGHIERI

TRANSLATED BY

THE REV. H. F. CARY

PURGATORY

Part 2

Cantos 5 - 10

CANTO V

Now had I left those spirits, and pursued
The steps of my Conductor, when beheld
Pointing the finger at me one exclaim'd:
"See how it seems as if the light not shone
From the left hand of him beneath, and he,
As living, seems to be led on." Mine eyes
I at that sound reverting, saw them gaze
Through wonder first at me, and then at me
And the light broken underneath, by turns.
"Why are thy thoughts thus riveted?" my guide
Exclaim'd, "that thou hast slack'd thy pace? or how
Imports it thee, what thing is whisper'd here?
Come after me, and to their babblings leave
The crowd. Be as a tower, that, firmly set,
Shakes not its top for any blast that blows!
He, in whose bosom thought on thought shoots out,
Still of his aim is wide, in that the one
Sicklies and wastes to nought the other's strength."

What other could I answer save "I come?"
I said it, somewhat with that colour ting'd
Which oftentimes pardon meriteth for man.

Meanwhile traverse along the hill there came,
A little way before us, some who sang
The "Miserere" in responsive Strains.
When they perceiv'd that through my body I
Gave way not for the rays to pass, their song
Straight to a long and hoarse exclaim they chang'd;
And two of them, in guise of messengers,
Ran on to meet us, and inquiring ask'd:
"Of your condition we would gladly learn."

To them my guide. "Ye may return, and bear
Tidings to them who sent you, that his frame
Is real flesh. If, as I deem, to view
His shade they paus'd, enough is answer'd them.
Him let them honour, they may prize him well."

Ne'er saw I fiery vapours with such speed
Cut through the serene air at fall of night,
Nor August's clouds athwart the setting sun,
That upward these did not in shorter space
Return; and, there arriving, with the rest
Wheel back on us, as with loose rein a troop.

"Many," exclaim'd the bard, "are these, who throng
Around us: to petition thee they come.
Go therefore on, and listen as thou go'st."

"O spirit! who go'st on to blessedness
With the same limbs, that clad thee at thy birth."
Shouting they came, "a little rest thy step.
Look if thou any one amongst our tribe
Hast e'er beheld, that tidings of him there
Thou mayst report. Ah, wherefore go'st thou on?
Ah wherefore tarriest thou not? We all
By violence died, and to our latest hour
Were sinners, but then warn'd by light from heav'n,
So that, repenting and forgiving, we
Did issue out of life at peace with God,
Who with desire to see him fills our heart."

Then I: "The visages of all I scan
Yet none of ye remember. But if aught,
That I can do, may please you, gentle spirits!
Speak; and I will perform it, by that peace,
Which on the steps of guide so excellent
Following from world to world intent I seek."

In answer he began: "None here distrusts
Thy kindness, though not promis'd with an oath;
So as the will fail not for want of power.
Whence I, who sole before the others speak,
Entreat thee, if thou ever see that land,
Which lies between Romagna and the realm
Of Charles, that of thy courtesy thou pray
Those who inhabit Fano, that for me
Their adorations duly be put up,
By which I may purge off my grievous sins.
From thence I came. But the deep passages,
Whence issued out the blood wherein I dwelt,
Upon my bosom in Antenor's land
Were made, where to be more secure I thought.
The author of the deed was Este's prince,
Who, more than right could warrant, with his wrath
Pursued me. Had I towards Mira fled,
When overta'en at Oriaco, still
Might I have breath'd. But to the marsh I sped,
And in the mire and rushes tangled there
Fell, and beheld my life-blood float the plain."

Then said another: "Ah! so may the wish,
That takes thee o'er the mountain, be fulfill'd,
As thou shalt graciously give aid to mine.
Of Montefeltro I; Buonconte I:
Giovanna nor none else have care for me,
Sorrowing with these I therefore go." I thus:
"From Campaldino's field what force or chance
Drew thee, that ne'er thy sepulture was known?"

"Oh!" answer'd he, "at Casentino's foot
A stream there courseth, nam'd Archiano, sprung
In Apennine above the Hermit's seat.
E'en where its name is cancel'd, there came I,
Pierc'd in the heart, fleeing away on foot,
And bloodying the plain. Here sight and speech
Fail'd me, and finishing with Mary's name
I fell, and tenantless my flesh remain'd."

I will report the truth; which thou again
Tell to the living. Me God's angel took,
Whilst he of hell exclaim'd: "O thou from heav'n!
Say wherefore hast thou robb'd me? Thou of him
Th' eternal portion bear'st with thee away
For one poor tear that he deprives me of.
But of the other, other rule I make."

"Thou knowest how in the atmosphere collects
That vapour dank, returning into water,
Soon as it mounts where cold condenses it.
That evil will, which in his intellect
Still follows evil, came, and rais'd the wind
And smoky mist, by virtue of the power
Given by his nature. Thence the valley, soon
As day was spent, he cover'd o'er with cloud
From Pratomagno to the mountain range,
And stretch'd the sky above, so that the air
Impregnate chang'd to water. Fell the rain,
And to the fosses came all that the land
Contain'd not; and, as mightiest streams are wont,
To the great river with such headlong sweep
Rush'd, that nought stay'd its course. My stiffen'd frame
Laid at his mouth the fell Archiano found,
And dash'd it into Arno, from my breast
Loos'ning the cross, that of myself I made
When overcome with pain. He hurl'd me on,
Along the banks and bottom of his course;
Then in his muddy spoils encircling wrapt."

"Ah! when thou to the world shalt be return'd,
And rested after thy long road," so spake
Next the third spirit; "then remember me.
I once was Pia. Sienna gave me life,
Maremma took it from me. That he knows,
Who me with jewell'd ring had first espous'd."

CANTO VI

When from their game of dice men separate,
He, who hath lost, remains in sadness fix'd,
Revolving in his mind, what luckless throws
He cast: but meanwhile all the company
Go with the other; one before him runs,
And one behind his mantle twitches, one
Fast by his side bids him remember him.
He stops not; and each one, to whom his hand
Is stretch'd, well knows he bids him stand aside;
And thus he from the press defends himself.
E'en such was I in that close-crowding throng;
And turning so my face around to all,
And promising, I 'scap'd from it with pains.

Here of Arezzo him I saw, who fell
By Ghino's cruel arm; and him beside,
Who in his chase was swallow'd by the stream.
Here Frederic Novello, with his hand
Stretch'd forth, entreated; and of Pisa he,

Who put the good Marzucco to such proof
Of constancy. Count Orso I beheld;
And from its frame a soul dismiss'd for spite
And envy, as it said, but for no crime:
I speak of Peter de la Brosse; and here,
While she yet lives, that Lady of Brabant
Let her beware; lest for so false a deed
She herd with worse than these. When I was freed
From all those spirits, who pray'd for others' prayers
To hasten on their state of blessedness;
Straight I began: "O thou, my luminary!
It seems expressly in thy text denied,
That heaven's supreme decree can never bend
To supplication; yet with this design
Do these entreat. Can then their hope be vain,
Or is thy saying not to me reveal'd?"

He thus to me: "Both what I write is plain,
And these deceiv'd not in their hope, if well
Thy mind consider, that the sacred height
Of judgment doth not stoop, because love's flame
In a short moment all fulfils, which he
Who sojourns here, in right should satisfy.
Besides, when I this point concluded thus,
By praying no defect could be supplied;
Because the pray'r had none access to God.
Yet in this deep suspicion rest thou not
Contented unless she assure thee so,
Who betwixt truth and mind infuses light.
I know not if thou take me right; I mean
Beatrice. Her thou shalt behold above,
Upon this mountain's crown, fair seat of joy."

Then I: "Sir! let us mend our speed; for now
I tire not as before; and lo! the hill
Stretches its shadow far." He answer'd thus:
"Our progress with this day shall be as much
As we may now dispatch; but otherwise
Than thou supposest is the truth. For there
Thou canst not be, ere thou once more behold
Him back returning, who behind the steep
Is now so hidden, that as erst his beam
Thou dost not break. But lo! a spirit there
Stands solitary, and toward us looks:
It will instruct us in the speediest way."

We soon approach'd it. O thou Lombard spirit!
How didst thou stand, in high abstracted mood,
Scarce moving with slow dignity thine eyes!
It spoke not aught, but let us onward pass,
Eyeing us as a lion on his watch.
But Virgil with entreaty mild advanc'd,
Requesting it to show the best ascent.
It answer to his question none return'd,
But of our country and our kind of life
Demanded. When my courteous guide began,
"Mantua," the solitary shadow quick
Rose towards us from the place in which it stood,
And cry'd, "Mantuan! I am thy countryman

Sordello." Each the other then embrac'd.

Ah slavish Italy! thou inn of grief,
Vessel without a pilot in loud storm,
Lady no longer of fair provinces,
But brothel-house impure! this gentle spirit,
Ev'n from the Pleasant sound of his dear land
Was prompt to greet a fellow citizen
With such glad cheer; while now thy living ones
In thee abide not without war; and one
Malicious gnaws another, ay of those
Whom the same wall and the same moat contains,
Seek, wretched one! around thy sea-coasts wide;
Then homeward to thy bosom turn, and mark
If any part of the sweet peace enjoy.
What boots it, that thy reins Justinian's hand
Befitted, if thy saddle be unpress'd?
Nought doth he now but aggravate thy shame.
Ah people! thou obedient still shouldst live,
And in the saddle let thy Caesar sit,
If well thou marked'st that which God commands.

Look how that beast to felness hath relaps'd
From having lost correction of the spur,
Since to the bridle thou hast set thine hand,
O German Albert! who abandon'st her,
That is grown savage and unmanageable,
When thou should'st clasp her flanks with forked heels.
Just judgment from the stars fall on thy blood!
And be it strange and manifest to all!
Such as may strike thy successor with dread!
For that thy sire and thou have suffer'd thus,
Through greediness of yonder realms detain'd,
The garden of the empire to run waste.
Come see the Capulets and Montagues,
The Philippeschi and Monaldi! man
Who car'st for nought! those sunk in grief, and these
With dire suspicion rack'd. Come, cruel one!
Come and behold the' oppression of the nobles,
And mark their injuries: and thou mayst see.
What safety Santafigiore can supply.
Come and behold thy Rome, who calls on thee,
Desolate widow! day and night with moans:
"My Caesar, why dost thou desert my side?"
Come and behold what love among thy people:
And if no pity touches thee for us,
Come and blush for thine own report. For me,
If it be lawful, O Almighty Power,
Who wast in earth for our sakes crucified!
Are thy just eyes turn'd elsewhere? or is this
A preparation in the wond'rous depth
Of thy sage counsel made, for some good end,
Entirely from our reach of thought cut off?
So are the' Italian cities all o'erthrong'd
With tyrants, and a great Marcellus made
Of every petty factious villager.

My Florence! thou mayst well remain unmov'd
At this digression, which affects not thee:

Thanks to thy people, who so wisely speed.
Many have justice in their heart, that long
Waiteth for counsel to direct the bow,
Or ere it dart unto its aim: but shine
Have it on their lip's edge. Many refuse
To bear the common burdens: readier thine
Answer uncall'd, and cry, "Behold I stoop!"

Make thyself glad, for thou hast reason now,
Thou wealthy! thou at peace! thou wisdom-fraught!
Facts best witness if I speak the truth.
Athens and Lacedaemon, who of old
Enacted laws, for civil arts renown'd,
Made little progress in improving life
Tow'rds thee, who usest such nice subtlety,
That to the middle of November scarce
Reaches the thread thou in October weav'st.
How many times, within thy memory,
Customs, and laws, and coins, and offices
Have been by thee renew'd, and people chang'd!

If thou remember'st well and can'st see clear,
Thou wilt perceive thyself like a sick wretch,
Who finds no rest upon her down, but oft
Shifting her side, short respite seeks from pain.

CANTO VII

After their courteous greetings joyfully
Sev'n times exchang'd, Sordello backward drew
Exclaiming, "Who are ye?" "Before this mount
By spirits worthy of ascent to God
Was sought, my bones had by Octavius' care
Been buried. I am Virgil, for no sin
Depriv'd of heav'n, except for lack of faith."

So answer'd him in few my gentle guide.

As one, who aught before him suddenly
Beholding, whence his wonder riseth, cries
"It is yet is not," wav'ring in belief;
Such he appear'd; then downward bent his eyes,
And drawing near with reverential step,
Caught him, where of mean estate might clasp
His lord. "Glory of Latium!" he exclaim'd,
"In whom our tongue its utmost power display'd!
Boast of my honor'd birth-place! what desert
Of mine, what favour rather undeserv'd,
Shows thee to me? If I to hear that voice
Am worthy, say if from below thou com'st
And from what cloister's pale?"--"Through every orb
Of that sad region," he reply'd, "thus far
Am I arriv'd, by heav'nly influence led
And with such aid I come. There is a place
There underneath, not made by torments sad,
But by dun shades alone; where mourning's voice

Sounds not of anguish sharp, but breathes in sighs.

"There I with little innocents abide,
Who by death's fangs were bitten, ere exempt
From human taint. There I with those abide,
Who the three holy virtues put not on,
But understood the rest, and without blame
Follow'd them all. But if thou know'st and canst,
Direct us, how we soonest may arrive,
Where Purgatory its true beginning takes."

He answer'd thus: "We have no certain place
Assign'd us: upwards I may go or round,
Far as I can, I join thee for thy guide.
But thou beholdest now how day declines:
And upwards to proceed by night, our power
Excels: therefore it may be well to choose
A place of pleasant sojourn. To the right
Some spirits sit apart retir'd. If thou
Consentest, I to these will lead thy steps:
And thou wilt know them, not without delight."

"How chances this?" was answer'd; "who so wish'd
To ascend by night, would he be thence debarr'd
By other, or through his own weakness fail?"

The good Sordello then, along the ground
Trailing his finger, spoke: "Only this line
Thou shalt not overpass, soon as the sun
Hath disappear'd; not that aught else impedes
Thy going upwards, save the shades of night.
These with the wont of power perplex the will.
With them thou haply mightst return beneath,
Or to and fro around the mountain's side
Wander, while day is in the horizon shut."

My master straight, as wond'ring at his speech,
Exclaim'd: "Then lead us quickly, where thou sayst,
That, while we stay, we may enjoy delight."

A little space we were remov'd from thence,
When I perceiv'd the mountain hollow'd out.
Ev'n as large valleys hollow'd out on earth,

"That way," the' escorting spirit cried, "we go,
Where in a bosom the high bank recedes:
And thou await renewal of the day."

Betwixt the steep and plain a crooked path
Led us traverse into the ridge's side,
Where more than half the sloping edge expires.
Refulgent gold, and silver thrice refin'd,
And scarlet grain and ceruse, Indian wood
Of lucid dye serene, fresh emeralds
But newly broken, by the herbs and flowers
Plac'd in that fair recess, in color all
Had been surpass'd, as great surpasses less.
Nor nature only there lavish'd her hues,
But of the sweetness of a thousand smells

A rare and undistinguish'd fragrance made.

"Salve Regina," on the grass and flowers
Here chanting I beheld those spirits sit
Who not beyond the valley could be seen.

"Before the west'ring sun sink to his bed,"
Began the Mantuan, who our steps had turn'd,

"Mid those desires not that I lead ye on.
For from this eminence ye shall discern
Better the acts and visages of all,
Than in the nether vale among them mix'd.
He, who sits high above the rest, and seems
To have neglected that he should have done,
And to the others' song moves not his lip,
The Emperor Rodolph call, who might have heal'd
The wounds whereof fair Italy hath died,
So that by others she revives but slowly,
He, who with kindly visage comforts him,
Sway'd in that country, where the water springs,
That Moldaw's river to the Elbe, and Elbe
Rolls to the ocean: Ottocar his name:
Who in his swaddling clothes was of more worth
Than Wincelaud his son, a bearded man,
Pamper'd with rank luxuriousness and ease.
And that one with the nose depress, who close
In counsel seems with him of gentle look,
Flying expir'd, with'ring the lily's flower.
Look there how he doth knock against his breast!
The other ye behold, who for his cheek
Makes of one hand a couch, with frequent sighs.
They are the father and the father-in-law
Of Gallia's bane: his vicious life they know
And foul; thence comes the grief that rends them thus.

"He, so robust of limb, who measure keeps
In song, with him of feature prominent,
With ev'ry virtue bore his girdle brac'd.
And if that stripling who behinds him sits,
King after him had liv'd, his virtue then
From vessel to like vessel had been pour'd;
Which may not of the other heirs be said.
By James and Frederick his realms are held;
Neither the better heritage obtains.
Rarely into the branches of the tree
Doth human worth mount up; and so ordains
He who bestows it, that as his free gift
It may be call'd. To Charles my words apply
No less than to his brother in the song;
Which Pouille and Provence now with grief confess.
So much that plant degenerates from its seed,
As more than Beatrice and Margaret
Costanza still boasts of her valorous spouse.

"Behold the king of simple life and plain,
Harry of England, sitting there alone:
He through his branches better issue spreads.

"That one, who on the ground beneath the rest
Sits lowest, yet his gaze directs aloft,
Us William, that brave Marquis, for whose cause
The deed of Alexandria and his war
Makes Conferrat and Canavese weep."

CANTO VIII

Now was the hour that wakens fond desire
In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart,
Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell,
And pilgrim newly on his road with love
Thrills, if he hear the vesper bell from far,
That seems to mourn for the expiring day:
When I, no longer taking heed to hear
Began, with wonder, from those spirits to mark
One risen from its seat, which with its hand
Audience implor'd. Both palms it join'd and rais'd,
Fixing its steadfast gaze towards the east,
As telling God, "I care for naught beside."

"Te Lucis Ante," so devoutly then
Came from its lip, and in so soft a strain,
That all my sense in ravishment was lost.
And the rest after, softly and devout,
Follow'd through all the hymn, with upward gaze
Directed to the bright supernal wheels.

Here, reader! for the truth makes thine eyes keen:
For of so subtle texture is this veil,
That thou with ease mayst pass it through unmark'd.

I saw that gentle band silently next
Look up, as if in expectation held,
Pale and in lowly guise; and from on high
I saw forth issuing descend beneath
Two angels with two flame-illumin'd swords,
Broken and mutilated at their points.
Green as the tender leaves but newly born,
Their vesture was, the which by wings as green
Beaten, they drew behind them, fann'd in air.
A little over us one took his stand,
The other lighted on the' Opposing hill,
So that the troop were in the midst contain'd.

Well I descried the whiteness on their heads;
But in their visages the dazzled eye
Was lost, as faculty that by too much
Is overpower'd. "From Mary's bosom both
Are come," exclaim'd Sordello, "as a guard
Over the vale, ganst him, who hither tends,
The serpent." Whence, not knowing by which path
He came, I turn'd me round, and closely press'd,
All frozen, to my leader's trusted side.

Sordello paus'd not: "To the valley now

(For it is time) let us descend; and hold
Converse with those great shadows: haply much
Their sight may please ye." Only three steps down
Methinks I measur'd, ere I was beneath,
And noted one who look'd as with desire
To know me. Time was now that air arrow dim;
Yet not so dim, that 'twixt his eyes and mine
It clear'd not up what was conceal'd before.
Mutually tow'rds each other we advanc'd.
Nino, thou courteous judge! what joy I felt,
When I perceiv'd thou wert not with the bad!

No salutation kind on either part
Was left unsaid. He then inquir'd: "How long
Since thou arriv'd'st at the mountain's foot,
Over the distant waves?"--"O!" answer'd I,
"Through the sad seats of woe this morn I came,
And still in my first life, thus journeying on,
The other strive to gain." Soon as they heard
My words, he and Sordello backward drew,
As suddenly amaz'd. To Virgil one,
The other to a spirit turn'd, who near
Was seated, crying: "Conrad! up with speed:
Come, see what of his grace high God hath will'd."
Then turning round to me: "By that rare mark
Of honour which thou ow'st to him, who hides
So deeply his first cause, it hath no ford,
When thou shalt be beyond the vast of waves.
Tell my Giovanna, that for me she call
There, where reply to innocence is made.
Her mother, I believe, loves me no more;
Since she has chang'd the white and wimpled folds,
Which she is doom'd once more with grief to wish.
By her it easily may be perceiv'd,
How long in women lasts the flame of love,
If sight and touch do not relume it oft.
For her so fair a burial will not make
The viper which calls Milan to the field,
As had been made by shrill Gallura's bird."

He spoke, and in his visage took the stamp
Of that right seal, which with due temperature
Glowed in the bosom. My insatiate eyes
Meanwhile to heav'n had travel'd, even there
Where the bright stars are slowest, as a wheel
Nearest the axle; when my guide inquir'd:
"What there aloft, my son, has caught thy gaze?"

I answer'd: "The three torches, with which here
The pole is all on fire." He then to me:
"The four resplendent stars, thou saw'st this morn
Are there beneath, and these ris'n in their stead."

While yet he spoke. Sordello to himself
Drew him, and cry'd: "Lo there our enemy!"
And with his hand pointed that way to look.

Along the side, where barrier none arose
Around the little vale, a serpent lay,

Such haply as gave Eve the bitter food.
Between the grass and flowers, the evil snake
Came on, reverting oft his lifted head;
And, as a beast that smoothes its polish'd coat,
Licking his hack. I saw not, nor can tell,
How those celestial falcons from their seat
Mov'd, but in motion each one well descried,
Hearing the air cut by their verdant plumes.
The serpent fled; and to their stations back
The angels up return'd with equal flight.

The Spirit (who to Nino, when he call'd,
Had come), from viewing me with fixed ken,
Through all that conflict, loosen'd not his sight.

"So may the lamp, which leads thee up on high,
Find, in thy destin'd lot, of wax so much,
As may suffice thee to the enamel's height."
It thus began: "If any certain news
Of Valdimagra and the neighbour part
Thou know'st, tell me, who once was mighty there
They call'd me Conrad Malaspina, not
That old one, but from him I sprang. The love
I bore my people is now here refin'd."

"In your dominions," I answer'd, "ne'er was I.
But through all Europe where do those men dwell,
To whom their glory is not manifest?
The fame, that honours your illustrious house,
Proclaims the nobles and proclaims the land;
So that he knows it who was never there.
I swear to you, so may my upward route
Prosper! your honour'd nation not impairs
The value of her coffer and her sword.
Nature and use give her such privilege,
That while the world is twisted from his course
By a bad head, she only walks aright,
And has the evil way in scorn." He then:
"Now pass thee on: sev'n times the tired sun
Revisits not the couch, which with four feet
The forked Aries covers, ere that kind
Opinion shall be nail'd into thy brain
With stronger nails than other's speech can drive,
If the sure course of judgment be not stay'd."

CANTO IX

Now the fair consort of Tithonus old,
Arisen from her mate's beloved arms,
Look'd palely o'er the eastern cliff: her brow,
Lucent with jewels, glitter'd, set in sign
Of that chill animal, who with his train
Smites fearful nations: and where then we were,
Two steps of her ascent the night had past,
And now the third was closing up its wing,
When I, who had so much of Adam with me,

Sank down upon the grass, o'ercome with sleep,
There where all five were seated. In that hour,
When near the dawn the swallow her sad lay,
Rememb'ring haply ancient grief, renews,
And with our minds more wand'rers from the flesh,
And less by thought restrain'd are, as 't were, full
Of holy divination in their dreams,
Then in a vision did I seem to view
A golden-feather'd eagle in the sky,
With open wings, and hov'ring for descent,
And I was in that place, methought, from whence
Young Ganymede, from his associates 'reft,
Was snatch'd aloft to the high consistory.
"Perhaps," thought I within me, "here alone
He strikes his quarry, and elsewhere disdains
To pounce upon the prey." Therewith, it seem'd,
A little wheeling in his airy tour
Terrible as the lightning rush'd he down,
And snatch'd me upward even to the fire.

There both, I thought, the eagle and myself
Did burn; and so intense th' imagin'd flames,
That needs my sleep was broken off. As erst
Achilles shook himself, and round him roll'd
His waken'd eyeballs wond'ring where he was,
Whenas his mother had from Chiron fled
To Scyros, with him sleeping in her arms;
E'en thus I shook me, soon as from my face
The slumber parted, turning deadly pale,
Like one ice-struck with dread. Solo at my side
My comfort stood: and the bright sun was now
More than two hours aloft: and to the sea
My looks were turn'd. "Fear not," my master cried,
"Assur'd we are at happy point. Thy strength
Shrink not, but rise dilated. Thou art come
To Purgatory now. Lo! there the cliff
That circling bounds it! Lo! the entrance there,
Where it doth seem departed! re the dawn
Usher'd the daylight, when thy wearied soul
Slept in thee, o'er the flowery vale beneath
A lady came, and thus bespake me: "I
Am Lucia. Suffer me to take this man,
Who slumbers. Easier so his way shall speed."
Sordello and the other gentle shapes
Tarrying, she bare thee up: and, as day shone,
This summit reach'd: and I pursued her steps.
Here did she place thee. First her lovely eyes
That open entrance show'd me; then at once
She vanish'd with thy sleep. Like one, whose doubts
Are chas'd by certainty, and terror turn'd
To comfort on discovery of the truth,
Such was the change in me: and as my guide
Beheld me fearless, up along the cliff
He mov'd, and I behind him, towards the height.

Reader! thou markest how my theme doth rise,
Nor wonder therefore, if more artfully
I prop the structure! nearer now we drew,
Arriv'd' whence in that part, where first a breach

As of a wall appear'd, I could descry
A portal, and three steps beneath, that led
For inlet there, of different colour each,
And one who watch'd, but spake not yet a word.
As more and more mine eye did stretch its view,
I mark'd him seated on the highest step,
In visage such, as past my power to bear.

Grasp'd in his hand a naked sword, glanc'd back
The rays so toward me, that I oft in vain
My sight directed. "Speak from whence ye stand:"
He cried: "What would ye? Where is your escort?
Take heed your coming upward harm ye not."

"A heavenly dame, not skillless of these things,"
Replied the' instructor, "told us, even now,
"Pass that way: here the gate is." --"And may she
Befriending prosper your ascent," resum'd
The courteous keeper of the gate: "Come then
Before our steps." We straightway thither came.

The lowest stair was marble white so smooth
And polish'd, that therein my mirror'd form
Distinct I saw. The next of hue more dark
Than sablest grain, a rough and singed block,
Crack'd lengthwise and across. The third, that lay
Massy above, seem'd porphyry, that flam'd
Red as the life-blood spouting from a vein.
On this God's angel either foot sustain'd,
Upon the threshold seated, which appear'd
A rock of diamond. Up the trinal steps
My leader cheerily drew me. "Ask," said he,

"With humble heart, that he unbar the bolt."

Piously at his holy feet devolv'd
I cast me, praying him for pity's sake
That he would open to me: but first fell
Thrice on my bosom prostrate. Seven times
The letter, that denotes the inward stain,
He on my forehead with the blunted point
Of his drawn sword inscrib'd. And "Look," he cried,
"When enter'd, that thou wash these scars away."

Ashes, or earth ta'en dry out of the ground,
Were of one colour with the robe he wore.
From underneath that vestment forth he drew
Two keys of metal twain: the one was gold,
Its fellow silver. With the pallid first,
And next the burnish'd, he so ply'd the gate,
As to content me well. "Whenever one
Faieth of these, that in the keyhole straight
It turn not, to this alley then expect
Access in vain." Such were the words he spake.
"One is more precious: but the other needs
Skill and sagacity, large share of each,
Ere its good task to disengage the knot
Be worthily perform'd. From Peter these
I hold, of him instructed, that I err

Rather in opening than in keeping fast;
So but the suppliant at my feet implore."

Then of that hallow'd gate he thrust the door,
Exclaiming, "Enter, but this warning hear:
He forth again departs who looks behind."

As in the hinges of that sacred ward
The swivels turn'd, sonorous metal strong,
Harsh was the grating; nor so surlily
Roar'd the Tarpeian, when by force bereft
Of good Metellus, thenceforth from his loss
To leanness doom'd. Attentively I turn'd,
List'ning the thunder, that first issued forth;
And "We praise thee, O God," methought I heard
In accents blended with sweet melody.
The strains came o'er mine ear, e'en as the sound
Of choral voices, that in solemn chant
With organ mingle, and, now high and clear,
Come swelling, now float indistinct away.

CANTO X

When we had passed the threshold of the gate
(Which the soul's ill affection doth disuse,
Making the crooked seem the straighter path),
I heard its closing sound. Had mine eyes turn'd,
For that offence what plea might have avail'd?

We mounted up the riven rock, that wound
On either side alternate, as the wave
Flies and advances. "Here some little art
Behooves us," said my leader, "that our steps
Observe the varying flexure of the path."

Thus we so slowly sped, that with cleft orb
The moon once more o'erhangs her wat'ry couch,
Ere we that strait have threaded. But when free
We came and open, where the mount above
One solid mass retires, I spent, with toil,
And both, uncertain of the way, we stood,
Upon a plain more lonesome, than the roads
That traverse desert wilds. From whence the brink
Borders upon vacuity, to foot
Of the steep bank, that rises still, the space
Had measur'd thrice the stature of a man:
And, distant as mine eye could wing its flight,
To leftward now and now to right dispatch'd,
That cornice equal in extent appear'd.

Not yet our feet had on that summit mov'd,
When I discover'd that the bank around,
Whose proud uprising all ascent denied,
Was marble white, and so exactly wrought
With quaintest sculpture, that not there alone
Had Polycletus, but e'en nature's self

Been sham'd. The angel who came down to earth
With tidings of the peace so many years
Wept for in vain, that op'd the heavenly gates
From their long interdict, before us seem'd,
In a sweet act, so sculptur'd to the life,
He look'd no silent image. One had sworn
He had said, "Hail!" for she was imag'd there,
By whom the key did open to God's love,
And in her act as sensibly impress
That word, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord,"
As figure seal'd on wax. "Fix not thy mind
On one place only," said the guide belov'd,
Who had me near him on that part where lies
The heart of man. My sight forthwith I turn'd
And mark'd, behind the virgin mother's form,
Upon that side, where he, that mov'd me, stood,
Another story graven on the rock.

I passed athwart the bard, and drew me near,
That it might stand more aptly for my view.
There in the self-same marble were engrav'd
The cart and kine, drawing the sacred ark,
That from unbidden office awes mankind.
Before it came much people; and the whole
Parted in seven quires. One sense cried, "Nay,"
Another, "Yes, they sing." Like doubt arose
Betwixt the eye and smell, from the curl'd fume
Of incense breathing up the well-wrought toil.
Preceding the blest vessel, onward came
With light dance leaping, girt in humble guise,
Sweet Israel's harper: in that hap he seem'd
Less and yet more than kingly. Opposite,
At a great palace, from the lattice forth
Look'd Michol, like a lady full of scorn
And sorrow. To behold the tablet next,
Which at the hack of Michol whitely shone,
I mov'd me. There was storied on the rock
The' exalted glory of the Roman prince,
Whose mighty worth mov'd Gregory to earn
His mighty conquest, Trajan th' Emperor.
A widow at his bridle stood, attir'd
In tears and mourning. Round about them troop'd
Full throng of knights, and overhead in gold
The eagles floated, struggling with the wind.

The wretch appear'd amid all these to say:
"Grant vengeance, sire! for, woe beshrew this heart
My son is murder'd." He replying seem'd;

"Wait now till I return." And she, as one
Made hasty by her grief; "O sire, if thou
Dost not return?"--"Where I am, who then is,
May right thee."--"What to thee is other's good,
If thou neglect thy own?"--"Now comfort thee,"
At length he answers. "It beseemeth well
My duty be perform'd, ere I move hence:
So justice wills; and pity bids me stay."

He, whose ken nothing new surveys, produc'd

That visible speaking, new to us and strange
The like not found on earth. Fondly I gaz'd
Upon those patterns of meek humbleness,
Shapes yet more precious for their artist's sake,
When "Lo," the poet whisper'd, "where this way
(But slack their pace), a multitude advance.
These to the lofty steps shall guide us on."

Mine eyes, though bent on view of novel sights
Their lov'd allurements, were not slow to turn.

Reader! would not that amaz'd thou miss
Of thy good purpose, hearing how just God
Decreases our debts be cancel'd. Ponder not
The form of suffering. Think on what succeeds,
Think that at worst beyond the mighty doom
It cannot pass. "Instructor," I began,
"What I see hither tending, bears no trace
Of human semblance, nor of aught beside
That my foil'd sight can guess." He answering thus:
"So court'd to earth, beneath their heavy teems
Of torment stoop they, that mine eye at first
Struggled as thine. But look intently thither,
An disentangle with thy lab'ring view,
What underneath those stones approacheth: now,
E'en now, mayst thou discern the pangs of each."

Christians and proud! poor and wretched ones!
That feeble in the mind's eye, lean your trust
Upon unsteady perverseness! now ye not
That we are worms, yet made at last to form
The winged insect, imp'd with angel plumes
That to heaven's justice unobstructed soars?
Why buoy ye up aloft your unfleg'd souls?
Abortive then and shapeless ye remain,
Like the untimely embryo of a worm!

As, to support incumbent floor or roof,
For corbel is a figure sometimes seen,
That crumples up its knees unto its breast,
With the feign'd posture stirring ruth unfeign'd
In the beholder's fancy; so I saw
These fashion'd, when I noted well their guise.

Each, as his back was laden, came indeed
Or more or less contract; but it appear'd
As he, who show'd most patience in his look,
Wailing exclaim'd: "I can endure no more."

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