

# The Vision of Hell, Part 1, Illustrated by Gustave Dore - The Inferno

Dante Alighieri, Translated By The Rev. H. F. Cary

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Translated By The Rev. H. F. Cary, Illustrated by Gustave Dore

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Title: The Vision of Hell, Part 1, Illustrated by Gustave Dore  
The Inferno

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Release Date: August 6, 2004 [EBook #8779]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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Produced by David Widger

THE VISION

OF

HELL, PURGATORY, AND PARADISE

BY

DANTE ALIGHIERI

TRANSLATED BY

THE REV. H. F. CARY, M.A.

HELL

OR THE INFERNO

Part 1

Cantos 1 - 2

CANTO I

IN the midway of this our mortal life,  
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray  
Gone from the path direct: and e'en to tell  
It were no easy task, how savage wild  
That forest, how robust and rough its growth,  
Which to remember only, my dismay  
Renews, in bitterness not far from death.  
Yet to discourse of what there good befell,  
All else will I relate discover'd there.  
How first I enter'd it I scarce can say,  
Such sleepy dullness in that instant weigh'd  
My senses down, when the true path I left,  
But when a mountain's foot I reach'd, where clos'd  
The valley, that had pierc'd my heart with dread,  
I look'd aloft, and saw his shoulders broad  
Already vested with that planet's beam,  
Who leads all wanderers safe through every way.

Then was a little respite to the fear,  
That in my heart's recesses deep had lain,  
All of that night, so pitifully pass'd:  
And as a man, with difficult short breath,  
Forespent with toiling, 'scap'd from sea to shore,  
Turns to the perilous wide waste, and stands  
At gaze; e'en so my spirit, that yet fail'd  
Struggling with terror, turn'd to view the straits,  
That none hath pass'd and liv'd. My weary frame  
After short pause recomforted, again  
I journey'd on over that lonely steep,

The hinder foot still firmer. Scarce the ascent  
Began, when, lo! a panther, nimble, light,  
And cover'd with a speckled skin, appear'd,  
Nor, when it saw me, vanish'd, rather strove  
To check my onward going; that ofttimes  
With purpose to retrace my steps I turn'd.

The hour was morning's prime, and on his way  
Aloft the sun ascended with those stars,  
That with him rose, when Love divine first mov'd  
Those its fair works: so that with joyous hope  
All things conspir'd to fill me, the gay skin  
Of that swift animal, the matin dawn

And the sweet season. Soon that joy was chas'd,  
And by new dread succeeded, when in view  
A lion came, 'gainst me, as it appear'd,

With his head held aloft and hunger-mad,  
That e'en the air was fear-struck. A she-wolf  
Was at his heels, who in her leanness seem'd  
Full of all wants, and many a land hath made  
Disconsolate ere now. She with such fear  
O'erwhelmed me, at the sight of her appall'd,  
That of the height all hope I lost. As one,  
Who with his gain elated, sees the time  
When all unwares is gone, he inwardly  
Mourns with heart-gripping anguish; such was I,  
Haunted by that fell beast, never at peace,  
Who coming o'er against me, by degrees  
Impell'd me where the sun in silence rests.

While to the lower space with backward step  
I fell, my ken discern'd the form one of one,  
Whose voice seem'd faint through long disuse of speech.  
When him in that great desert I espied,  
"Have mercy on me!" cried I out aloud,  
"Spirit! or living man! what e'er thou be!"

He answer'd: "Now not man, man once I was,  
And born of Lombard parents, Mantuana both  
By country, when the power of Julius yet  
Was scarcely firm. At Rome my life was past  
Beneath the mild Augustus, in the time  
Of fabled deities and false. A bard  
Was I, and made Anchises' upright son  
The subject of my song, who came from Troy,  
When the flames prey'd on Ilium's haughty towers.  
But thou, say wherefore to such perils past  
Return'st thou? wherefore not this pleasant mount  
Ascendest, cause and source of all delight?"  
"And art thou then that Virgil, that well-spring,  
From which such copious floods of eloquence  
Have issued?" I with front abash'd replied.  
"Glory and light of all the tuneful train!  
May it avail me that I long with zeal  
Have sought thy volume, and with love immense  
Have conn'd it o'er. My master thou and guide!  
Thou he from whom alone I have deriv'd  
That style, which for its beauty into fame  
Exalts me. See the beast, from whom I fled.  
O save me from her, thou illustrious sage!"

"For every vein and pulse throughout my frame  
She hath made tremble." He, soon as he saw  
That I was weeping, answer'd, "Thou must needs  
Another way pursue, if thou wouldst 'scape  
From out that savage wilderness. This beast,  
At whom thou criest, her way will suffer none  
To pass, and no less hindrance makes than death:  
So bad and so accursed in her kind,  
That never sated is her ravenous will,  
Still after food more craving than before.

To many an animal in wedlock vile  
She fastens, and shall yet to many more,  
Until that greyhound come, who shall destroy  
Her with sharp pain. He will not life support  
By earth nor its base metals, but by love,  
Wisdom, and virtue, and his land shall be  
The land 'twixt either Feltro. In his might  
Shall safety to Italia's plains arise,  
For whose fair realm, Camilla, virgin pure,  
Nisus, Euryalus, and Turnus fell.  
He with incessant chase through every town  
Shall worry, until he to hell at length  
Restore her, thence by envy first let loose.  
I for thy profit pond'ring now devise,  
That thou mayst follow me, and I thy guide  
Will lead thee hence through an eternal space,  
Where thou shalt hear despairing shrieks, and see  
Spirits of old tormented, who invoke  
A second death; and those next view, who dwell  
Content in fire, for that they hope to come,  
Whene'er the time may be, among the blest,  
Into whose regions if thou then desire  
T' ascend, a spirit worthier than I  
Must lead thee, in whose charge, when I depart,  
Thou shalt be left: for that Almighty King,  
Who reigns above, a rebel to his law,  
Adjudges me, and therefore hath decreed,  
That to his city none through me should come.  
He in all parts hath sway; there rules, there holds  
His citadel and throne. O happy those,  
Whom there he chooses!" I to him in few:  
"Bard! by that God, whom thou didst not adore,  
I do beseech thee (that this ill and worse  
I may escape) to lead me, where thou saidst,  
That I Saint Peter's gate may view, and those  
Who as thou tell'st, are in such dismal plight."

Onward he mov'd, I close his steps pursu'd.

## CANTO II

NOW was the day departing, and the air,  
Imbrown'd with shadows, from their toils releas'd  
All animals on earth; and I alone  
Prepar'd myself the conflict to sustain,  
Both of sad pity, and that perilous road,  
Which my unerring memory shall retrace.

O Muses! O high genius! now vouchsafe  
Your aid! O mind! that all I saw hast kept  
Safe in a written record, here thy worth  
And eminent endowments come to proof.

I thus began: "Bard! thou who art my guide,  
Consider well, if virtue be in me

Sufficient, ere to this high enterprise  
Thou trust me. Thou hast told that Silvius' sire,  
Yet cloth'd in corruptible flesh, among  
Th' immortal tribes had entrance, and was there  
Sensible present. Yet if heaven's great Lord,  
Almighty foe to ill, such favour shew'd,  
In contemplation of the high effect,  
Both what and who from him should issue forth,  
It seems in reason's judgment well deserv'd:  
Sith he of Rome, and of Rome's empire wide,  
In heaven's empyreal height was chosen sire:  
Both which, if truth be spoken, were ordain'd  
And 'stablish'd for the holy place, where sits  
Who to great Peter's sacred chair succeeds.  
He from this journey, in thy song renown'd,  
Learn'd things, that to his victory gave rise  
And to the papal robe. In after-times  
The chosen vessel also travel'd there,  
To bring us back assurance in that faith,  
Which is the entrance to salvation's way.  
But I, why should I there presume? or who  
Permits it? not, Aeneas I nor Paul.  
Myself I deem not worthy, and none else  
Will deem me. I, if on this voyage then  
I venture, fear it will in folly end.  
Thou, who art wise, better my meaning know'st,  
Than I can speak." As one, who unresolves  
What he hath late resolv'd, and with new thoughts  
Changes his purpose, from his first intent  
Remov'd; e'en such was I on that dun coast,  
Wasting in thought my enterprise, at first  
So eagerly embrac'd. "If right thy words  
I scan," replied that shade magnanimous,  
"Thy soul is by vile fear assail'd, which oft  
So overcasts a man, that he recoils  
From noblest resolution, like a beast  
At some false semblance in the twilight gloom.  
That from this terror thou mayst free thyself,  
I will instruct thee why I came, and what  
I heard in that same instant, when for thee  
Grief touch'd me first. I was among the tribe,  
Who rest suspended, when a dame, so blest  
And lovely, I besought her to command,  
Call'd me; her eyes were brighter than the star  
Of day; and she with gentle voice and soft  
Angelically tun'd her speech address'd:  
"O courteous shade of Mantua! thou whose fame  
Yet lives, and shall live long as nature lasts!  
A friend, not of my fortune but myself,  
On the wide desert in his road has met  
Hindrance so great, that he through fear has turn'd.  
Now much I dread lest he past help have stray'd,  
And I be ris'n too late for his relief,  
From what in heaven of him I heard. Speed now,  
And by thy eloquent persuasive tongue,  
And by all means for his deliverance meet,  
Assist him. So to me will comfort spring.  
I who now bid thee on this errand forth  
Am Beatrice; from a place I come

(Note: Beatrice. I use this word, as it is pronounced in the Italian, as consisting of four syllables, of which the third is a long one.)

Revisited with joy. Love brought me thence,  
Who prompts my speech. When in my Master's sight  
I stand, thy praise to him I oft will tell."

She then was silent, and I thus began:  
"O Lady! by whose influence alone,  
Mankind excels whatever is contain'd  
Within that heaven which hath the smallest orb,  
So thy command delights me, that to obey,  
If it were done already, would seem late.  
No need hast thou farther to speak thy will;  
Yet tell the reason, why thou art not loth  
To leave that ample space, where to return  
Thou burnest, for this centre here beneath."

She then: "Since thou so deeply wouldst inquire,  
I will instruct thee briefly, why no dread  
Hinders my entrance here. Those things alone  
Are to be fear'd, whence evil may proceed,  
None else, for none are terrible beside.  
I am so fram'd by God, thanks to his grace!  
That any suffrance of your misery  
Touches me not, nor flame of that fierce fire  
Assails me. In high heaven a blessed dame  
Besides, who mourns with such effectual grief  
That hindrance, which I send thee to remove,  
That God's stern judgment to her will inclines."  
To Lucia calling, her she thus bespake:  
"Now doth thy faithful servant need thy aid  
And I commend him to thee." At her word  
Sped Lucia, of all cruelty the foe,  
And coming to the place, where I abode  
Seated with Rachel, her of ancient days,  
She thus address'd me: "Thou true praise of God!  
Beatrice! why is not thy succour lent  
To him, who so much lov'd thee, as to leave  
For thy sake all the multitude admires?  
Dost thou not hear how pitiful his wail,  
Nor mark the death, which in the torrent flood,  
Swoln mightier than a sea, him struggling holds?"  
"Ne'er among men did any with such speed  
Haste to their profit, flee from their annoy,  
As when these words were spoken, I came here,  
Down from my blessed seat, trusting the force  
Of thy pure eloquence, which thee, and all  
Who well have mark'd it, into honour brings."

"When she had ended, her bright beaming eyes  
Tearful she turn'd aside; whereat I felt  
Redoubled zeal to serve thee. As she will'd,  
Thus am I come: I sav'd thee from the beast,  
Who thy near way across the goodly mount  
Prevented. What is this comes o'er thee then?  
Why, why dost thou hang back? why in thy breast

Harbour vile fear? why hast not courage there  
And noble daring? Since three maids so blest  
Thy safety plan, e'en in the court of heaven;  
And so much certain good my words forebode."

As florets, by the frosty air of night  
Bent down and clos'd, when day has blanch'd their leaves,  
Rise all unfolded on their spiry stems;  
So was my fainting vigour new restor'd,  
And to my heart such kindly courage ran,  
That I as one undaunted soon replied:  
"O full of pity she, who undertook  
My succour! and thou kind who didst perform  
So soon her true behest! With such desire  
Thou hast dispos'd me to renew my voyage,  
That my first purpose fully is resum'd.  
Lead on: one only will is in us both.  
Thou art my guide, my master thou, and lord."

So spake I; and when he had onward mov'd,  
I enter'd on the deep and woody way.

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