

INFERNO

CANTO XI

At the brink of a high bank formed
by broken boulders in a circle
we stopped above a still more grievous throng. 3

Here, the unbearable foul stench
belched from that bottomless abyss
made us draw back behind the slab 6

of an imposing tomb, on which I saw inscribed
the words: 'I hold Pope Anastasius:
Photinus drew him from the right and proper path.' 9

'We must delay descending so our sense,
inured to that vile stench,
no longer heeds it.' 12

So spoke the master. I replied: 'I know
you'll find a useful way to pass this time.'
And he: 'You'll see that is my plan.' 15

'My son,' he then began, 'beneath these rocks
there are three circles, smaller, one below the other,
but otherwise like those you leave behind. 18

'All these are filled with souls condemned.
So that the sight alone may later be enough,
know how and why they are confined this way. 21

'Every evil deed despised in Heaven
has as its end injustice. Each such end
harms someone else through either force or fraud. 24

'But since the vice of fraud is man's alone,
it more displeases God, and thus the fraudulent
are lower down, assailed by greater pain. 27

'The first circle holds the violent
but is divided and constructed in three rings,
since violence takes three different forms. 30

'Violence may be aimed at God, oneself,
or at one's neighbor -- thus against all three
or their possessions -- as I shall now explain. 33

'Violent death and grievous wounds may be inflicted
upon a neighbor or upon his goods:
pillage, arson, and violent theft. 36

'And so murderers and everyone who wounds
unjustly, spoilers and plunderers -- the first ring
punishes all these in separate groups. 39

'A man may lay injurious hands upon himself
or on his goods, and for that reason
in the second ring must he repent in vain 42

'who robs himself of the world above
or gambles away and wastes his substance,
lamenting when he should rejoice. 45

'Violence may be committed against God
when we deny and curse Him in our hearts,
or when we scorn nature and her bounty. 48

'And so the smallest ring stamps with its seal
both Sodom and Cahors and those
who scorn Him with their tongues and hearts. 51

'Fraud gnaws at every conscience,
whether used on him who trusted
or on one who lacked such faith. 54

'Fraud against the latter only severs
the bond of love that nature makes.
Thus in the second circle nest 57

'hypocrisy, flatteries, and sorcerers;
lies, theft, and simony;
panders, barrators, and all such filth. 60

'Fraud against the trusting fails to heed
not only natural love but the added bond
of faith, which forms a special kind of trust. 63

'Therefore, in the tightest circle,
the center of the universe and seat of Dis,
all traitors are consumed eternally.' 66

And I: 'Master, your account is clear
and clearly designates the nature
of this abyss and its inhabitants. 69

'But tell me, those spirits in the viscous marsh,
those the wind drives, those the rain beats down on,
those clashing with such bitter tongues, 72

'why are they not punished inside the fiery city
 if God's anger is upon them?
 And if not, why are they so afflicted?' 75
 And he: 'Not often do your wits stray
 far afield, as they do now -- or is your mind
 bent on pursuing other thoughts? 78
 'Do you not recall the words
 your Ethics uses to expound
 the three dispositions Heaven opposes, 81
 'incontinence, malice, and mad brutishness,
 and how incontinence offends God less
 and incurs a lesser blame? 84
 'If you consider well this judgment
 and consider who they are
 that suffer punishment above, outside the wall, 87
 'you'll understand why they are set apart
 from these wicked spirits and why God's vengeance
 smites them with lesser wrath.' 90
 'O sun that heals all troubled sight,
 you so content me by resolving doubts
 it pleases me no less to question than to know. 93
 'But go back a little way,' I said,
 'to where you told me usury offends
 God's goodness, and untie that knot for me.' 96
 'Philosophy, for one who understands her,
 observes,' he said, 'and not in one place only,
 how nature takes her course 99
 'from heavenly intellect and its operation.
 And, if you study well your Physics,
 you will find, after not too many pages, 102
 'that human toil, as far as it is able,
 follows nature, as the pupil does his master,
 so that it is God's grandchild, as it were. 105
 'By toil and nature, if you remember Genesis,
 near the beginning, it is man's lot
 to earn his bread and prosper. 108
 'The usurer, who takes another path,
 scorns nature in herself and in her follower,
 and elsewhere sets his hopes. 111

'But follow me now, for it is time to go.
The Fishes are flickering at the horizon
and all the Wain lies over Caurus. And here,
a short way off, is the descent.'

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