

INFERNO

CANTO XIX

O Simon Magus! O wretches of his kind, greedy for gold and silver, who prostitute the things of God that should be brides of goodness!	3
Now must the trumpet sound for you, because your place is there in that third ditch.	6
Now we had come to where the next tomb lay, having climbed to the point upon the ridge that overlooks the middle of the trench.	9
O Supreme Wisdom, what great art you show in Heaven, on earth, and in the evil world, and what true justice does your power dispense!	12
Along the sides and bottom I could see the livid stone was pierced with holes, all round and of a single size.	15
They seemed to me as wide and deep as those in my beautiful Saint John made for the priests to baptize in, one of which, not many years ago, I broke to save one nearly drowned in it -- and let this be my seal, to undeceive all men.	18
From the mouth of each stuck out a sinner's feet and legs up to the thighs while all the rest stayed in the hole.	21
They all had both their soles on fire. It made their knee-joints writhe so hard they would have severed twisted vines or ropes.	24
As flames move only on the surface of oily matter caught on fire, so these flames flickered heel to toe.	27
'Who is that, master, who in his torment wriggles more than any of his fellows and is licked by redder flames?'	30
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And he: 'If you like, I'll take you down
 along the lower bank and you will learn,
 from him, his life and his misdeeds.' 36

And I: 'Whatever pleases you is my desire.
 You are my lord and know I do your will.
 You know, too, what I leave unsaid.' 39

Then we came to the fourth embankment,
 turned and descended on our left
 into a narrow bottom pierced with holes. 42

The good master clasped me to his side
 and did not set me down until we came
 to the pit of one lamenting with his shanks. 45

'Whoever you are, with your upper parts below,
 planted like a post, you wretched soul,'
 said I, 'come out with something, if you can.' 48

I stood there like a friar who confesses
 a treacherous assassin. Once done,
 he calls the friar back to stay his death. 51

And he cried out: 'Is that you already,
 are you here already, Boniface?
 By several years the writing lied to me. 54

'Are you so swiftly sated with those profits
 for which you did not fear to take by guile
 the beautiful Lady and to do her outrage?' 57

I became like those who stand there mocked,
 not comprehending what is said to them,
 and thus not knowing what to say in turn. 60

Then Virgil said: 'Tell him right away,
 "I'm not the one, I'm not the one you think."
 I gave the answer I was told to give. 63

At that the spirit's feet began to writhe.
 Then, sighing , with a plaintive voice, he said:
 'What is it then you want from me? 66

'If you are so keen to learn my name
 that you descended from the bank for it,
 know that I was cloaked in the great mantle. 69

'But in truth I was a son of the she-bear
 and so avid was I to advance my cubs
 I filled my purse as now I fill this hole. 72

'Beneath my head are crushed the others
who practiced simony before me,
now flattened into fissures in the rock. 75

'In turn I, too, shall be thrust lower down
as soon as he arrives whom I mistook you for
when I called out my hasty question. 78

'But the time I have already roasted my feet,
standing here upside down, is already longer
than he'll be planted with his feet on fire. 81

'For after him shall come a lawless shepherd
from the west, one even fouler in his deeds,
fit to be the cover over him and me. 84

'A new Jason shall he be, the one of whom
we read in Maccabees, and even as the king indulged
Jason, so the king of France shall deal with him.' 87

I do not know if then I was too bold
when I answered him in just this strain:
'Please tell me, how much treasure 90

'did our Lord insist on from Saint Peter
before He gave the keys into his keeping?
Surely He asked no more than "Follow me," 93

'nor did Peter, or the others, take gold or silver
from Matthias when he was picked by lot
to fill the place lost by the guilty soul. 96

'Stay there then, for you are justly punished,
guarding well those gains, ill-gotten,
that made you boldly take your stand against King Charles. 99

'And were it not that I am still restrained
by the reverence I owe the keys supreme,
which once you held in the happy life above, 102

'I would resort to even harsher words
because your avarice afflicts the world,
trampling down the good and raising up the wicked. 105

'Shepherds like you the Evangelist had in mind
when he saw the one that sits upon the waters
committing fornication with the kings, 108

'she that was born with seven heads
and from ten horns derived her strength
so long as virtue pleased her bridegroom. 111

'You have wrought yourselves a god of gold and silver. How then do you differ from those who worship idols except they worship one and you a hundred?	114
'Ah, Constantine, to what evil you gave birth, not by your conversion, but by the dowry that the first rich Father had from you!'	117
And while I sang such notes to him, whether gnawed by anger or by conscience, he kicked out hard with both his feet.	120
Truly I believe this pleased my leader, he listened with a look of such contentment to the sound of the truthful words I spoke.	123
Therefore, he caught me in his arms and, when he had me all upon his breast, remounted by the path he had descended,	126
nor did he tire of holding me so close but bore me to the summit of the arch that crosses from the fourth dike to the fifth.	129
Here gently he set down his burden, gently on account of the steep, rough ridge that would have made hard going for a goat.	132
And there, before me, another valley opened.	133