

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXII

The angel who had shown the way
to the sixth circling now was left behind,
having erased another swordstroke from my brow 3
as he declared that those who long for righteousness
are blessed, ending on *sitiunt*
without the other words he might have said. 6
And now I could move on, lighter
than at the other entrances, so that I followed
the swifter spirits up with ease, 9
when Virgil began: 'A love that is kindled by virtue
has always ignited another, as long as its flame
was shining where it could be seen. 12
'From the hour, therefore, when Juvenal descended
into the Limbo of Hell, among us,
and made your affection known to me, 15
'my good will toward you was as great
as anyone has ever felt for someone never seen,
so that to me these stairs will now seem short. 18
'But tell me--and as a friend forgive me
if with too much assurance I relax the reins,
and as a friend speak with me now-- 21
'how could avarice find room
amidst such wisdom in your breast,
the wisdom that you nourished with such care.' 24
These words made Statius smile a little
before he answered: 'Every word of yours
is to me a welcome token of your love. 27
'But, in truth, things often are misleading
when their true causes remain hidden,
thus leading us to false conclusions. 30
'Your question shows me you believe,
perhaps because of the terrace I was on,
that I was avaricious in the other life. 33

'Know then that avarice was much too far
removed from me and that this lack of measure
lunar months in thousands now have punished. 36

'And had I not reformed my inclination
when I came to understand the lines in which,
as if enraged at human nature, you cried out: 39

"To what end, O cursèd hunger for gold,
do you not govern the appetite of mortals?"
I would know the rolling weights and dismal jousts. 42

'Then I learned that we can spread
our wings too wide with spending hands,
and I repented that and other sins. 45

'How many more will have to rise again, hair shorn
through ignorance, which takes away repentance
of this sin in life and in the hour of death! 48

'Note, also, that the fault that moves
directly opposite to a sin
is here grouped with it and is withered of its green. 51

'Therefore, if I, to purge my sins, have been
among those shades who weep for avarice,
this has befallen me for the opposing fault.' 54

'But, when you sang the cruel warfare
between the twofold sorrows of Jocasta,'
said the singer of the *Eclogues*, 57

'it does not seem, from what you wrote with Clio's help,
that you had found as yet the faith,
that faith without which good works fail. 60

'If that is so, what sun, what candles
dispelled your darkness so that afterwards
you hoisted sail, following the fisherman?' 63

And the other answered him: 'It was you who first
set me toward Parnassus to drink in its grottoes,
and you who first lit my way toward God. 66

'You were as one who goes by night, carrying
the light behind him--it is no help to him,
but instructs all those who follow-- 69

'when you said: "The centuries turn new again.
Justice returns with the first age of man,
new progeny descends from Heaven." 72

'Through you I was a poet, through you a Christian.
 But, that you may see better what I outline,
 I will set my hand to fill the colors in. 75

'Already all the world was pregnant
 with the true faith, inseminated
 by the messengers of the eternal kingdom, 78

'and the words of yours I have just recited
 did so accord with the new preachers
 that I began to visit them. 81

'More and more they seemed to me so holy
 that when Domitian started with his persecutions
 their weeping did not lack my tears. 84

'While I remained on earth,
 I gave them comfort. Their upright ways
 made me despise all other sects. 87

'I was baptized before, in my verses,
 I had led the Greeks to the rivers of Thebes,
 but, from fear, I stayed a secret Christian, 90

'long pretending I was still a pagan.
 More than four centuries, because I was lukewarm,
 did I circle the fourth terrace. 93

'You, then, who have raised the veil
 that hid from me the great good I describe,
 tell me, while there is time in this ascent, 96

'where is our ancient Terence, where Cecilius,
 Plautus, Varius, if you know.
 Tell me if they are damned and in what place.' 99

'Those, Persius, and I, and many more,'
 replied my leader, 'are with that Greek
 the Muses suckled more than any other, 102

'in the first circle of the dark prison.
 We often talk about that mountain
 where those who nursed us ever dwell. 105

'Euripides is with us there and Antiphon,
 Simonides and Agathon and many other Greeks
 whose brows were once adorned with laurel. 108

'Among those from your works who may be seen
 are Antigone, Deïphyle, Argia,
 and Ismene, still sad as once she was. 111

'She that revealed Langia also may be seen,
 as well as the daughter of Tiresias,
 and Thetis, and Deïdamia with her sisters.' 114

Both the poets now were silent,
 again intent on looking all around them,
 freed from the constraint of stairs and walls. 117

Already four handmaids of the day were left behind
 and the fifth was at the chariot-shaft,
 guiding its gleaming tip still higher, 120

when my leader said: 'It might be better if we turned
 our right side's shoulders to the outer edge,
 circling the mountain as we are accustomed.' 123

Thus habit was our teacher there,
 and we took our way with less uncertainty
 because that other worthy soul encouraged us. 126

They went along in front and I, alone,
 came on behind, listening to their discourse,
 which gave me understanding of the art of verse. 129

But soon their pleasant talk was interrupted
 by a tree found in the middle of the path,
 with fruits that smelled both savory and good, 132

and, as a fir tree narrows as it branches upward,
 this one tapered down from branch to branch,
 perhaps so that no one can climb it. 135

On that side, where our way was blocked,
 from the high rock fell pellucid water,
 which was dispersed among the upper leaves. 138

As the two poets neared the tree
 a voice from among the boughs called out:
 'This is a food that you shall lack.' 141

And then it said: 'Mary gave more thought
 that the marriage-feast be decorous and complete
 than for the mouth with which she pleads for you. 144

'The Roman matrons of antiquity
 were glad to have but water as their drink,
 and Daniel scorned banquets and acquired wisdom. 147

'The first age was as beautiful as gold.
 Its acorns were made savory by hunger
 and thirst made nectar flow in every brook. 150

'Honey and locusts were the food
that nourished John the Baptist in the desert,
for which he is glorious and as great
as in the Gospel is revealed to you.'

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