

Inferno Canto 6

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Canto VI

Argument

On his recovery, the Poet finds himself in the third circle, where the gluttonous are punished. Their torment is, to lie in the mire, under a continual and heavy storm of hail, snow, and discolored water; Cerberus, meanwhile barking over them with his threefold throat, and rending them piecemeal. One of these, who on earth was named Ciaccio, foretells the divisions with which Florence is about to be distracted. Dante proposes a question to his guide, who solves it; and they proceed toward the fourth circle.

My sense reviving, that erewhile had droop'd
With pity for the kindred shades, whence grief
O'ercame me wholly, straight around I see
New torments, new tormented souls, which way
Soe'er I move, or turn, or bend my sight.
In the third circle I arrive, of showers
Ceaseless, accursed, heavy and cold, unchanged
For ever, both in kind and in degree.
Large hail, discolor'd water, sleety flaw
Through the dun midnight air stream'd down amain:
Stank all the land whereon that tempest fell.

Cerberus, cruel monster, fierce and strange,
Through his wide threefold throat, barks as a dog
Over the multitude immersed beneath.
His eyes glare crimson, black his unctuous beard,
His belly large, and claw'd the hands, with which
He tears the spirits, flays them, and their limbs
Piecemeal disparts. Howling there spread, as curs,
Under the rainy deluge, with one side
The other screening, oft they roll them round,
A wretched, godless crew. When that great worm[1]
Descried us, savage Cerberus, he oped
His jaws, and the fangs show'd us; not a limb
Of him but trembled. Then my guide, his palms
Expanding on the ground, thence fill'd with earth
Raised them, and cast it in his ravenous maw.
E'en as a dog, that yelling bays for food
His keeper, when the morsel comes, lets fall

His fury, bent alone with eager haste
To swallow it; so dropp'd the loathsome cheeks
Of demon Cerberus, who thundering stuns
The spirits, that they for deafness wish in vain.

[1: "When that great worm, descried us . . . he opened his jaws." In Canto xxxiv. Lucifer is called "The abhorred worm, that boreth through the world."]

We, o'er the shades thrown prostrate by the brunt
Of the heavy tempest passing, set our feet
Upon their emptiness, that substance seem'd.

They all along the earth extended lay,
Save one, that sudden raised himself to sit,
Soon as that way he saw us pass. "O thou!"
He cried, "who through the infernal shades art led,
Own, if again thou know'st me. Thou wast framed
Or ere my frame was broken." I replied:
"The anguish thou endurest perchance so takes
Thy form from my remembrance, that it seems
As if I saw thee never. But inform
Me thou art, that in a place so sad
Art set, and in such torment, that although
Other be greater, none disgusteth more."
He thus in answer to my words rejoin'd:
"Thy city, heap'd with envy to the brim,
Aye, that the measure overflows its bounds,
Held me in brighter days. Ye citizens
Were wont to name me Ciacco.[2] For the sin
Of gluttony, damned vice, beneath this rain,
E'en as thou seest, I with fatigue am worn:
Nor I sole spirit in this woe: all these
Have by like crime incurr'd like punishment."

[2: "Ciriaco." So called from his inordinate appetite; "ciacco," in Italian, signifying a pig. The real name of this glutton has not been transmitted to us.]

No more he said, and I my speech resumed:
"Ciacco! thy! dire affliction grieves me much,
Even to tears. But tell me, if thou know'st,
What shall at length befall the citizens
of the divided city;[3] whether any
Just one inhabit there: and tell the cause,
Whence jarring Discord hath assail'd it thus."

[3: "The divided city." The city of Florence, divided into the Bianchi and Neri factions.]

He then: "After long striving they will come
 To blood; and the wild party from the woods[4]
 Will chase the other[5] with much injury forth.
 Then it behooves that this must fall,[6] within
 Three solar circles;[7] and the other rise
 By borrow'd force of one, who under shore
 Now rests.[8] It shall a long space hold aloof
 Its forehead, keeping under heavy weight
 The other opprest, indignant at the load,
 And grieving sore. The just are two in number.[9]
 But they neglected. Avarice, envy, pride,
 Three fatal sparks, have set the hearts of all
 On fire." Here ceased the lamentable sound;
 And I continued thus: "Still would I learn
 More from thee, further parley still entreat.
 Of Farinata and Tegghiaio[10] say,
 They who so well deserved; of Giacopo,[11]
 Arrigo, Mosca,[12] and the rest, who bent
 Their minds on working good. Oh! tell me where
 They bide, and to their knowledge let me come.
 For I am prest with keen desire to hear
 If Heaven's sweet cup, or poisonous drug of Hell,
 Be to their lip assign'd." He answer'd straight:
 "These are yet blacker spirits. Various crimes
 Have sunk them deeper in the dark abyss.
 If thou so far descendest, thou mayst see them.
 But to the pleasant world, when thou return'st,
 Of me make mention, I entreat thee, there.
 No more I tell thee, answer thee no more."

[4: The wild party from the woods." So called, because it was headed by Veri de' Cerchi, whose family had lately come into the city from Acona, and the woody country of the Val di Nievole.]

[5: "The other." The opposite party of the Neri, at the head of which was Corso Donati.]

[6: "This must fall." The Bianchi.]

[7: "Three solar circles." Three years.]

[8: "Of one, who under shore now rests." Charles of Valois, by whose means the Neri were replaced.]

[9: "The just are two in number." Who these two were, the commentators are not agreed. Some understand them to be Dante himself and his friend Guido Cavalcanti.]

[10: "Of Farinata and Tegghiaio." See Canto x. and notes, and Canto xvi. and notes.]

[11: "Giacopo." Giacomo Rusticucci. See Canto xvi. and notes.]

[12: "Arrigo, Mosca." Of Arrigo, who is said by the commentators to have been of the noble family of the Fifanti, no mention afterward occurs. Mosca degli Uberti, or de' Lamberti, is introduced in Canto xxviii.]

This said, his fixed eyes he turn'd askance,
A little eyed me, then bent down his head,
And 'midst his blind companions with it fell.

When thus my guide: "No more his bed he leaves,
Ere the last angel - trumpet blow. The Power
Adverse to these shall then in glory come,
Each one forthwith to his sad tomb repair,
Resume his fleshly vesture and his form,
And hear the eternal doom re - echoing rend
The vault." So pass'd we through that mixture foul
Of spirits and rain, with tardy steps; meanwhile
Touching, though slightly, on the life to come.
For thus I question'd: "Shall these tortures, Sir!
When the great sentence passes, be increased,
Or mitigated, or as now severe?"

He then: "Consult thy knowledge; that decides,
That, as each thing to more perfection grows,
It feels more sensibly both good and pain.
Though ne'er to true perfection may arrive
This race accurst, yet nearer then, than now,
They shall approach it." Compassing that path,
Circuitous we journey'd; and discourse,
Much more than I relate, between us pass'd:
Till at the point, whence the steps led below,
Arrived, there Plutus, the great foe, we found.