

Purgatory Canto 14

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Canto XIV

Argument

Our Poet on this second cornice finds also the souls of Guido del Duca of Brettinoro, and Rinieri da Calboli of Romagna; the latter of whom, hearing that he comes from the banks of the Arno, inveighs against the degeneracy of all those who dwell in the cities visited by that stream; and the former, in like manner, against the inhabitants of Romagna. On leaving these, our Poets hear voices recording noted instances of envy.

"Say,[1] who is he around our mountain winds,
Or ever death has pruned his wing to flight;
That opens his eyes, and covers them at will?"
"I know not who he is, but know thus much;
He comes not singly. Do thou ask of him,
For thou art nearer to him; and take heed,
Accost him gently, so that he may speak."

[1: "Say." The two spirits who thus speak to each other are Guido del Duca, of Brettinoro, and Rinieri da Calboli, of Romagna.]

Thus on the right two spirits, bending each
Toward the other, talk'd of me; then both
Addressing me, their faces backward lean'd,
And thus the one[2] began: "O soul, who yet
Pent in the body, tendest towards the sky!
For charity, we pray thee, comfort us;
Recounting whence thou comest, and who thou art:
For thou dost make us, at the favor shown thee,
Marvel, as at a thing that ne'er hath been."

[2: "The one." Guido del Duca.]

"There stretches through the midst of Tuscany,"
I straight began, "a brooklet,[3] whose well - head
Springs up in Falterona; with his race
Not satisfied, when he some hundred miles
Hath measured. From his banks bring I this frame.
To tell you who I am were words mis - spent:
For yet my name scarce sounds on rumour's lip."

[3: The Arno, that rises in Falterona, a mountain in the Apennines.
Its course is 120 miles.]

"If well I do incorporate with my thought
The meaning of thy speech," said he, who first
Address'd me, "thou dost speak of Arno's wave."

To whom the other:[4] "Why hath he conceal'd
The title of that river, as a man
Doth of some horrible thing?" The spirit, who

[4: Rinieri da Calboli.]

Thereof was question'd, did acquit him thus:
"I know not: but 'tis fitting well the name
Should perish of that vale; for from the source,[5]
Where teems so plenteously the Alpine steep
Maim'd of Pelorus, (that doth scarcely pass
Beyond that limit), even to the point
Where unto ocean is restored what heaven
Drains from the exhaustless store for all earth's streams,
Throughout the space is virtue worried down,
As't were a snake, by all, for mortal foe;
Or through disastrous influence on the place,
Or else distortion of misguided wills
That custom goads to evil: whence in those,
The dwellers in that miserable vale,
Nature is so transform'd, it seems as they
Had shared of Circe's feeding. 'Midst brute swine,[6]
Worthier of acorns than of other food
Created for man's use, he shapeth first
His obscure way; then, sloping onward, finds
Curs,[7] snarlers more in spite than power, from whom
He turns with scorn aside: still journeying down,
By how much more the curst and luckless foss[8]
Swells out to largeness, e'en so much it finds
Dogs turning into wolves.[9] Descending still
Through yet more hollow eddies, next he meets
A race of foxes,[10] so replete with craft,
They do not fear that skill can master it.
Nor will I cease because my words are heard[11]
By other ears than thine. It shall be well
For this man,[12] if he keep in memory
What from no erring spirit I reveal.
Lo! I behold thy grandson,[13] that becomes

[5: From the rise of the Arno in the Apennines, whence Pelorus in
Sicily was torn by a convulsion of the earth, even to the point where the same
river unites with the ocean, Virtue is persecuted by all.]

[6: The people of Casentino.]

[7: "Curs." The Arno leaves Arezzo about four miles to the left.]

[8: "Foss." So in his anger he terms the Arno.]

[9: "Wolves." The Florentines.]

[10: "Foxes." The Pisans.]

[11: Guido still addresses Rinieri.]

[12: For Dante, who has told us that he comes from the banks of Arno.]

[13: "Thy grandson." Fulcieri da Calboli, grandson of Rinieri da Calboli, who is here spoken to. The atrocities predicted came to pass in 1302.]

A hunter of those wolves, upon the shore
Of the fierce stream; and cows them all with dread.
Their flesh, yet living, sets he up to sale,
Then, like an aged beast, to slaughter dooms.
Many of life he reaves, himself of worth
And goodly estimation. Smear'd with gore,
Mark how he issues from the rueful wood;
Leaving such havoc, that in thousand years
It spreads not to prime lustihood again."

As one, who tidings hears of woe to come,
Changes his looks perturb'd, from whate'er part
The peril grasp him; so beheld I change
That spirit, who had turn'd to listen; struck
With sadness, soon as he had caught the word.

His visage, and the other's speech, did raise
Desire in me to know the names of both;
Whereof, with meek entreaty, I inquired.

The shade, who late address'd me, thus resumed:
"Thy wish imports, that I vouchsafe to do
For thy sake what thou wilt not do for mine.
But, since God's will is that so largely shine
His grace in thee, I will be liberal too.
Guido of Duca know then that I am.
Envy so parch'd my blood, that had I seen
A fellow man made joyous, thou had'st mark'd
A livid paleness overspread my cheek.
Such harvest reap I of the seed I sow'd.
O man! why place thy heart where there doth need
Exclusion of participants in good?
This is Rinieri's spirit; this, the boast
And honour of the house of Calboli;
Where of his worth no heritage remains.
Nor his the only blood, that hath been stript

('Twixt Po, the mount, the Reno, and the shore[14])
Of all that truth or fancy asks for bliss:
But, in those limits, such a growth has sprung
Of rank and venom'd roots, as long would mock
Slow culture's toil. Where is good Lizio?[15] where

[14: The boundaries of Romagna.]

[15: "Lizio." Lizio da Valbona introduced into Boccaccio's Decameron,
G. v. N. 4.]

Mainardi, Traversaro, and Carpigna?[16]
O bastard slips of old Romagna's line!
When in Bologna the low artisan,[17]
And in Faenza yon Bernardin[18] sprouts,
A gentle cyon from ignoble stem.
Wonder not, Tuscan, if thou see me weep,
When I recall to mind those once loved names,
Guido of Prata,[19] and of Azzo him[20]
That dwelt with us; Tignoso[21] and his troop,
With Traversaro's house and Anastagio's,[22]
(Each race disherited); and beside these,
The ladies and the knights, the toils and ease,
That witch'd us into love and courtesy;
Where now such malice reigns in recreant hearts
O Brettinoro![23] wherefore tarriest still,
Since forth of thee thy family hath gone,
And many, hating evil, join'd their steps?
Well doeth he, that bids his lineage cease,
Bagnacavallo,[24] Castrocaro ill,
And Conio worse,[25] who care to propagate
A race of Counties[26] from such blood as theirs.
Well shall ye also do, Pagani,[27] then
When from amongst you hies your demon child;
Not so, howe'er, that thenceforth there remain

[16: Arrigo Manardi, of Faenza, or, as some say, of Brettinoro; Pier
Traversaro, Lord of Ravenna; and Guido di Carpigna, of Montefeltro.]

[17: One who had been a mechanic, named Lambertaccio, arrived at
almost supreme power in Bologna.]

[18: Benardin di Fosco, a man of low origin, but great talents, who
governed at Faenza.]

[19: "Prata." A place between Faenza and Ravenna.]

[20: "Of Azzo him." Ugolino, of the Ubaldini family in Tuscany.]

[21: Federigo Tignoso of Rimini.]

[22: Two noble families of Ravenna.]

[23: "O Brettinoro." A beautifully situated castle in Romagna, the hospitable residence of Guido del Duca, who is here speaking. Landino relates that there were several of this family who, when a stranger arrived among them contended with one another by whom he should be entertained; and that in order to end this dispute, they set up a pillar with as many rings as there were father of families among them, a ring being assigned to each, and that accordingly as a stranger on his arrival hung his horse's bridle on one or other of these, he became his guest to whom the ring belonged.]

[24: "Bagnacavallo." A castle between Imola and Ravenna.]

[25: "- Castrocaro ill, and Conio worse." Both in Romagna.]

[26: "Counties." I have used this word here for "counts," as it is in Shakespeare.]

[27: "Pagani." The Pagani were lords of Faenza and Imola. One of them, Machinarado, was named "the Demon," from his treachery. See Hell, Canto xxvii. 47 and note.]

True proof of what ye were. O Hugolin,[28]
Thou sprung of Fantolini's line! thy name
Is safe; since none is look'd for after thee
To cloud its lustre, warping from thy stock.
But, Tuscan! go thy ways; for now I take
Far more delight in weeping, than in words.
Such pity for your sakes hath wrung my heart."

[28: "Hugolin." Ugolino Ubaldini, a noble and virtuous person in Faenza, who, on account of his age probably, was not likely to leave any offspring behind him.]

We knew those gentle spirits, at parting, heard
Our steps. Their silence therefore, of our way,
Assured us. Soon as we had quitted them,
Advancing onward, lo! a voice, that seem'd
Like volley'd lightning, when it rives the air,
Met us, and shouted, "Whosoever finds
Will slay me"; then fled from us, as the bolt
Lanced sudden from a downward - rushing cloud.
When it had given short truce unto our hearing,
Behold the other with a crash as loud
As the quick - following thunder: "Mark in me
Aglauros, turn'd to rock." I, at the sound
Retreating, drew more closely to my guide.

Now in mute stillness rested all the air;
And thus he spake: "There was the galling bit,
Which should keep man within his boundary.
But your old enemy so baits the hook,
He drags you eager to him. Hence nor curb

Avails you, nor reclaiming call. Heaven calls,
And, round about you wheeling, courts your gaze
With everlasting beauties. Yet your eye
Turns with fond doting still upon the earth.
Therefore He smites you who discerneth all."

— Purgatory Canto 14