

# Purgatory Canto 32

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Canto XXXII

Argument

Dante is warned not to gaze too fixedly on Beatrice. The procession moves on, accompanied by Matilda, Statius, and Dante, till they reach an exceeding lofty tree, where divers strange chances befall.

Mine eyes with such an eager coveting  
Were bent to rid them of their ten years' thirst,[1]  
Not other sense was waking: and e'en they  
Were fenced on either side from heed of aught;  
So tangled, in its custom'd toils, that smile  
Of saintly brightness drew me to itself:  
When forcibly, toward the left, my sight  
The sacred virgins turn'd; for from their lips  
I heard the warning sounds: "Too fix'd a gaze!"

[1: "Their ten years' thirst." Beatrice had been dead ten years.]

A while my vision labour'd; as when late  
Upon the o'erstrained eyes the sun hath smote:  
But soon, to lesser object, as the view  
Was now recover'd, (lesser in respect  
To that excess of sensible, whence late  
I had perforce been sunder'd), on their right  
I mark'd that glorious army wheel, and turn,  
Against the sun and sevenfold lights, their front.  
As when, their bucklers for protection raised,  
A well - ranged troop, with portly banners curl'd,  
Wheel circling, ere the whole can change their ground;  
E'en thus the goodly regiment of Heaven  
Proceeding, all did pass us, ere the car  
Had sloped his beam. Attendant at the wheels  
The damsels turn'd; and on the Gryphon moved  
The sacred burden, with a pace so smooth,  
No feather on him trembled. The fair dame,  
Who through the wave had drawn me, companied  
By Statius and myself, pursued the wheel,  
Whose orbit, rolling, mark'd a lesser arch.

Through the high wood, now void, (the more her blame,  
Who by the serpent was beguiled), I pass'd,

With step in cadence to the harmony  
Angelic. Onward had we moved, as far,  
Perchance, as arrow at three several flights  
Full wing'd had sped, when from her station down  
Descended Beatrice. With one voice  
All murmur'd "Adam"; circling next a plant  
Despoil'd of flowers and leaf, on every bough,  
Its tresses, spreading more as more they rose,  
Were such, as 'midst their forest wilds, for height,  
The Indians might have gazed at. "Blessed thou,  
Gryphon![2] whose beak hath never pluck'd that tree  
Pleasant to taste: for hence the appetite  
Was warp'd to evil." Round the stately trunk  
Thus shouted forth the rest, to whom return'd  
The animal twice - gender'd: "Yea! for so  
The generation of the just are saved."  
And turning to the chariot - pole, to foot  
He drew it of the widow'd branch, and bound  
There, left unto the stock whereon it grew.

[2: "Gryphon." Our Saviour's submission to the Roman Empire appears to be intended, and particularly his injunction to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's."]

As when large floods of radiance from above  
Stream, with that radiance mingled, which ascends  
Next after setting of the scaly sign,  
Our plants then burgeon, and each wears anew  
His wonted colours, ere the sun have yoked  
Beneath another star his flamy steeds;  
Thus putting forth a hue more faint than rose,  
And deeper than the violet, was renew'd  
The plant, erewhile in all its branches bare.  
Unearthly was the hymn, which then arose.  
I understood it not, nor to the end  
Endured the harmony. Had I the skill  
To pencil forth how closed the un pitying eyes  
Slumbering, when Syrinx warbled, (eyes that paid  
So dearly for their watching), then, like painter,  
That with a model paints, I might design

The manner of my falling into sleep.  
But feign who will the slumber cunningly,  
I pass it by to when I waked; and tell,  
How suddenly a flash of splendour rent  
The curtain of my sleep, and one cries out,  
"Arise; what dost thou?" As the chosen three,  
On Tabor's mount, admitted to behold

The blossoming of that fair tree,[3] whose fruit  
Is coveted of Angels, and doth make  
Perpetual feast in Heaven; to themselves  
Returning, at the word whence deeper sleeps[4]  
Were broken, they their tribe diminish'd saw;  
Both Moses and Elias gone, and changed  
The stole their Master wore; thus to myself  
Returning, over me beheld I stand  
The piteous one,[5] who, cross the stream, had brought  
My steps. "And where," all doubting, I exclaim'd,  
"Is Beatrice?" - "See her," she replied,  
"Beneath the fresh leaf, seated on its root.  
Behold the associate choir that circles her.  
The others, with a melody more sweet  
And more profound, journeying to higher realms,  
Upon the Gryphon tend." If there her words  
Were closed, I know not; but mine eyes had now  
Ta'en view of her, by whom all other thoughts  
Were barr'd admittance. On the very ground  
Alone she sat, as she had there been left  
A guard upon the wain, which I beheld  
Bound to the twoform beast. The seven nymphs  
Did make themselves a cloister round about her;  
And, in their hands, upheld those lights[6] secure  
From blast septentrion and the gusty south.

[3: "The blossoming of that fair tree." Our Saviour's  
transfiguration. "As the apple - tree among the trees of the wood, so is my  
beloved among the sons." - Solomon's Song, ii. 3.]

[4: "Deeper sleeps." The sleep of death, in the instance of the ruler  
of the synagogue's daughter and of Lazarus.]"

[5: "The piteous one." Matilda.]

[6: "Those lights." The tapers of gold.]

"A little while thou shalt be forester here;  
And citizen shalt be, forever with me,  
Of that true Rome,[7] wherein Christ dwells a Roman,

[7: "Of that true Rome." Of Heaven.]

To profit the misguided world, keep now  
Thine eyes upon the car; and what thou seest,  
Take heed thou write, returning to that place." [8]

[8: "To that place." To the earth.]

Thus Beatrice: at whose feet inclined  
Devout, at her behest, my thought and eyes

I, as she bade, directed. Never fire,  
With so swift motion, forth a stormy cloud  
Leap'd downward from the welkin's farthest bound,  
As I beheld the bird of Jove,[9] descen  
Down through the tree; and, as he rush'd, the rind  
Disparting crush beneath him; buds much more,  
And leaflets. On the car, with all his might  
He struck; whence, staggering, like a ship it reel'd,  
At random driven, to starboard now, o'ercome,  
And now to larboard, by the vaulting waves.

[9: "The bird of Jove." This, which is imitated from Ezekiel, xvii.  
3, 4, is typical of the persecutions which the Church sustained from the Roman  
emperors.]

Next, springing up into the chariot's womb,  
A fox[10] I saw, with hunger seeming pined  
Of all good food. But, for his ugly sins  
The saintly maid rebuking him, away  
Scampering he turn'd, fast as his hide - bound corpse  
Would bear him. Next, from whence before he came,  
I saw the eagle dart into the hull  
O' the car, and leave it with his feathers lined:[11]  
And then a voice, like that which issues forth  
From heart with sorrow rived, did issue forth  
From Heaven, and "O poor bark of mine!" it cried,  
"How badly art thou freighted." Then it seem'd  
That the earth open'd, between either wheel;  
And I beheld a dragon[12] issue thence,  
That through the chariot fix'd his forked train;  
And like a wasp, that draggeth back the sting,  
So drawing forth his baleful train, he dragg'd  
Part of the bottom forth; and went his way,  
Exulting. What remain'd, as lively turf

[10: "A fox." By the fox probably is represented the treachery of the  
heretics.]

[11: "With his feathers lined." In allusion to the donations made by  
Constantine to the Church.]

[12: "A dragon." Probably Mohammed; for what Lombardi offers to the  
contrary is far from satisfactory.]

With green herb, so did clothe itself with plumes,[13]  
Which haply had, with purpose chaste and kind,  
Been offer'd; and therewith were clothed the wheels,  
Both one and other, and the beam, so quickly,  
A sigh were not breathed sooner. Thus transform'd,  
The holy structure, through its several parts,

Did put forth heads;[14] three on the beam, and one  
On every side: the first like oxen horn'd;  
But with a single horn upon their front,  
The four. Like monster, sight hath never seen.  
O'er it[15] methought there sat, secure as rock  
On mountain's lofty top, a shameless whore,  
Whose ken roved loosely round her. At her side,  
As 't were that none might bear her off, I saw  
A giant stand; and ever and anon  
They mingled kisses. But, her lustful eyes  
Chancing on me to wander, that fell minion  
Scourged her from head to foot all o'er; then full  
Of jealousy, and fierce with rage, unloosed  
The monster, and dragg'd on,[16] so far across  
The forest, that from me its shades alone  
Shielded the harlot and the new - form'd brute.

[13: "With plumes." The increase of wealth and temporal dominion, which followed the supposed gift of Constantine.]

[14: "Heads." By the seven heads, it is supposed with sufficient probability, are meant the seven capital sins: by the three with two horns, pride, anger, and avarice, injurious both to man himself and to his neighbor: by the four with one horn, gluttony, gloominess, concupiscence, and envy, hurtful, at least in their primary effects, chiefly to him who is guilty of them.]

[15: "O'er it." The harlot is thought to represent the state of the Church under Boniface VIII, and the giant to figure Philip IV of France.]

[16: "Dragg'd on." The removal of the Pope's residence from Rome to Avignon is pointed at.]