

Inferno: Canto VII

"Pape Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppe!"
Thus Plutus with his clucking voice began;
And that benignant Sage, who all things knew,

Said, to encourage me: "Let not thy fear
Harm thee; for any power that he may have
Shall not prevent thy going down this crag."

Then he turned round unto that bloated lip,
And said: "Be silent, thou accursed wolf;
Consume within thyself with thine own rage.

Not causeless is this journey to the abyss;
Thus is it willed on high, where Michael wrought
Vengeance upon the proud adultery."

Even as the sails inflated by the wind
Involved together fall when snaps the mast,
So fell the cruel monster to the earth.

Thus we descended into the fourth chasm,
Gaining still farther on the dolesome shore
Which all the woe of the universe insacks.

Justice of God, ah! who heaps up so many
New toils and sufferings as I beheld?
And why doth our transgression waste us so?

As doth the billow there upon Charybdis,
That breaks itself on that which it encounters,
So here the folk must dance their roundelay.

Here saw I people, more than elsewhere, many,
On one side and the other, with great howls,
Rolling weights forward by main force of chest.

They clashed together, and then at that point
Each one turned backward, rolling retrograde,
Crying, "Why keepest?" and, "Why squanderest thou?"

Thus they returned along the lurid circle
On either hand unto the opposite point,
Shouting their shameful metre evermore.

Then each, when he arrived there, wheeled about
Through his half-circle to another joust;
And I, who had my heart pierced as it were,

Exclaimed: "My Master, now declare to me
What people these are, and if all were clerks,
These shaven crowns upon the left of us."

And he to me: "All of them were asquint
In intellect in the first life, so much
That there with measure they no spending made.

Clearly enough their voices bark it forth,

Whene'er they reach the two points of the circle,
Where sunders them the opposite defect.

Clerks those were who no hairy covering
Have on the head, and Popes and Cardinals,
In whom doth Avarice practise its excess."

And I: "My Master, among such as these
I ought forsooth to recognise some few,
Who were infected with these maladies."

And he to me: "Vain thought thou entertainest;
The undiscerning life which made them sordid
Now makes them unto all discernment dim.

Forever shall they come to these two buttings;
These from the sepulchre shall rise again
With the fist closed, and these with tresses shorn.

Ill giving and ill keeping the fair world
Have ta'en from them, and placed them in this scuffle;
Whate'er it be, no words adorn I for it.

Now canst thou, Son, behold the transient farce
Of goods that are committed unto Fortune,
For which the human race each other buffet;

For all the gold that is beneath the moon,
Or ever has been, of these weary souls
Could never make a single one repose."

"Master," I said to him, "now tell me also
What is this Fortune which thou speakest of,
That has the world's goods so within its clutches?"

And he to me: "O creatures imbecile,
What ignorance is this which doth beset you?
Now will I have thee learn my judgment of her.

He whose omniscience everything transcends
The heavens created, and gave who should guide them,
That every part to every part may shine,

Distributing the light in equal measure;
He in like manner to the mundane splendours
Ordained a general mistress and guide,

That she might change at times the empty treasures
From race to race, from one blood to another,
Beyond resistance of all human wisdom.

Therefore one people triumphs, and another
Languishes, in pursuance of her judgment,
Which hidden is, as in the grass a serpent.

Your knowledge has no counterstand against her;
She makes provision, judges, and pursues
Her governance, as theirs the other gods.

Her permutations have not any truce;

Necessity makes her precipitate,
So often cometh who his turn obtains.

And this is she who is so crucified
Even by those who ought to give her praise,
Giving her blame amiss, and bad repute.

But she is blissful, and she hears it not;
Among the other primal creatures gladsome
She turns her sphere, and blissful she rejoices.

Let us descend now unto greater woe;
Already sinks each star that was ascending
When I set out, and loitering is forbidden."

We crossed the circle to the other bank,
Near to a fount that boils, and pours itself
Along a gully that runs out of it.

The water was more sombre far than perse;
And we, in company with the dusky waves,
Made entrance downward by a path uncouth.

A marsh it makes, which has the name of Styx,
This tristful brooklet, when it has descended
Down to the foot of the malign gray shores.

And I, who stood intent upon beholding,
Saw people mud-besprent in that lagoon,
All of them naked and with angry look.

They smote each other not alone with hands,
But with the head and with the breast and feet,
Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.

Said the good Master: "Son, thou now beholdest
The souls of those whom anger overcame;
And likewise I would have thee know for certain

Beneath the water people are who sigh
And make this water bubble at the surface,
As the eye tells thee wheresoe'er it turns.

Fixed in the mire they say, 'We sullen were
In the sweet air, which by the sun is gladdened,
Bearing within ourselves the sluggish reek;

Now we are sullen in this sable mire.'
This hymn do they keep gurgling in their throats,
For with unbroken words they cannot say it."

Thus we went circling round the filthy fen
A great arc 'twixt the dry bank and the swamp,
With eyes turned unto those who gorge the mire;

Unto the foot of a tower we came at last.