

Paradise Canto 9

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Canto IX

Argument

The next spirit who converses with our Poet in the planet Venus is the amorous Cunizza. To her succeeds Folco, or Folques, the Provencal bard, who declares that the soul of Rahab the harlot is there also; and then, blaming the Pope for his neglect of the Holy Land, prognosticates some reverse to the papal power.

After solution of my doubt, thy Charles,
O fair Clemenza,[1] of the treachery[2] spake,
That must befall his seed; but, "Tell it not,"
Said he, "and let the destined years come round."
Nor may I tell thee more, save that the meed
Of sorrow well - deserved shall quit your wrongs.

[1: Daughter of Charles Martel, and second wife of Louis X of France.]

[2: "The treachery." He alludes to the occupation of the Kingdom of Sicily by Robert, in exclusion of his brother's son Carobert, or Charles Robert, the rightful heir.]

And now the visage of that saintly light[3]
Was to the sun, that fills it, turn'd again,
As to the good, whose plenitude of bliss
Sufficeth all. O ye misguided souls!
Infatuate, who from such a good estrange
Your hearts, and bend your gaze on vanity,
Alas for you! - And lo! toward me, next,

[3: Charles Martel.]

Another of those splendent forms approach'd,
That, by its outward brightening, testified
The will it had to pleasure me. The eyes
Of Beatrice, resting, as before,
Firmly, upon me, manifested forth
Approval of my wish. "And O," I cried,
"Blest spirit! quickly be my will perform'd;
And prove thou to me,[4] that my inmost thoughts
I can reflect on thee." Thereat the light,
That yet was new to me, from the recess,

Where it before was singing, thus began,
As one who joys in kindness: "In that part[5]
Of the depraved Italian land, which lies
Between Rialto and the fountain springs
Of Brenta and of Piava, there doth rise,
But to no lofty eminence, a hill,
From whence erewhile a firebrand did descend,
That sorely shent the region. From one root
I and it sprang; my name on earth Cunizza:[6]
And here I glitter, for that by its light
This star o'ercame me. Yet I naught repine,[7]
Nor grudge myself the cause of this my lot:
Which haply vulgar hearts can scarce conceive.

[4: The thoughts of all created minds being seen by the Deity, and all that is in the Deity being the object of vision to beatified spirits, such spirits must consequently see the thoughts of all created minds. Dante, therefore, requests of the spirit, who now approaches him, a proof of this truth with regard to his own thoughts. See v. 70.]

[5: Between Rialto in the Venetian territory, and the sources of the rivers Brenta and Piava, is situated a castle called Romano, the birthplace of the famous tyrant Ezzolino or Azzolino, the brother of Cunizza, who is now speaking. See Hell, Canto xii. v. 110.]

[6: "Cunizza." The adventures of Cunizza, overcome by the influence of her star, are related by the chronicler Rolandino, of Padua. She eloped from her first husband, Richard of St. Boniface, in the company of Sordello, with whom she is supposed to have cohabited before her marriage: then lived with a soldier of Trevigi, whose wife was living at the same time in the same city; and, on his being murdered by her brother the tyrant, was by her brother married to a nobleman of Braganzo: lastly, when he also had fallen by the same hand, she after her brother's death, was again, wedded in Verona.]

[7: "I am not dissatisfied that I am not allotted a higher place."]

"This[8] jewel, that is next me in our Heaven,
Lustrous and costly, great renown hath left,
And not to perish, ere these hundred years

[8: "This." Folco of Genoa, a celebrated Provençal poet, commonly termed Folques of Marseilles, of which place he was perhaps bishop.]

Five times[9] absolve their round. Consider thou,
If to excel be worthy man's endeavour,
When such life may attend the first.[10] Yet they
Care not for this, the crowd[11] that now are girt
By Adice and Tagliamento, still
Impenitent, though scourged. The hour is near[12]
When for their stubbornness, at Padua's marsh

The water shall be changed, that laves Vicenza.
And where Cagnano meets with Sile, one[13]
Lords it, and bears his head aloft, for whom
The web[14] is now a - warping. Feltro[15] too
Shall sorrow for its godless shepherd's fault,
Of so deep stain, that never, for the like,
Was Malta's[16] bar unclosed. Too large should be
The skillet[17] that would hold Ferrara's blood,
And wearied he, who ounce by ounce would weigh it,
The which this priest,[18] in show of party - zeal,
Courteous will give; nor will the gift ill suit
The country's custom. We descry above
Mirrors, ye call them Thrones, from which to us
Reflected shine the judgments of our God:
Whence these our sayings we avouch for good."

[9: The 500 years are elapsed.]

[10: When the mortal life of man may be attended by so lasting and glorious a memory, which is a kind of second life.]

[11: The people who inhabited the country bounded by the Tagliamento to the east and Adice to the west.]

[12: Cunizza foretells the defeat of Giacopo da Carrara and the Paduans, by Can Grande, at Vicenza, on September 18, 1314.]

[13: "One." She predicts also the fate of Riccardo da Camino, who is said to have been murdered at Trevigi (where the rivers Sile and Cagnano meet) where he was engaged in playing at chess.]

[14: "The web." The net, or snare, into which he is destined to fall.]

[15: The Bishop of Feltro having received a number of fugitives from Ferrara, who were in opposition to the Pope, under a promise of protection, afterward gave them up; so that they were reconducted to that city, and the greater part of them there put to death.]

[16: "Malta's." A tower, either in the citadel of Padua, which, under the tyranny of Ezzolino, had been "with many a foul and midnight murder fed"; or (as some say) near a river of the same name, that falls into the Lake of Bolsena, in which the Pope was accustomed to imprison such as had been guilty of an irremissible sin.]

[17: "The skillet." The blood shed could not be contained in such a vessel, if it were of the usual size.]

[18: The bishop, who, to show himself a zealous partisan of the Pope, had committed the above - mentioned act of treachery. The commentators are not agreed as to his name. Troya calls him Alessandro Novello, and relates the circumstances at full.]

She ended; and appear'd on other thoughts
Intent, re - entering on the wheel she late
Had left. That other joyance meanwhile wax'd
A thing to marvel at, in splendour glowing,
Like choicest ruby stricken by the sun.
For, in that upper clime, effulgence[19] comes
Of gladness, as here laughter: and below,
As the mind saddens, murkier grows the shade.

[19: As joy is expressed by laughter on earth, so is it by an increase of splendor in Paradise; and, on the contrary, grief is betokened in Hell by augmented darkness.]

"God seeth all: and in Him is thy sight,"
Said I, "blest spirit! Therefore will of His
Cannot to thee be dark. Why then delays
Thy voice to satisfy my wish untold;
That voice, which joins the inexpressive song,
Pastime of Heaven, the which those Ardours sing,
That cowl them with six shadowing wings[20] outspread?
I would not wait thy asking, wert thou known
To me, as thoroughly I to thee am known."

[20: "Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings." - Is. vi. 2.]

He, forthwith answering, thus, his words began:
"The valley of waters,[21] widest next to that[22]
Which doth the earth engarland, shapes its course,
Between discordant shores,[23] against the sun
Inward so far, it makes meridian[24] there,
Where was before the horizon. Of that vale
Dwelt I upon the shore, 'twixt Ebro's stream
And Macra's,[25] that divides with passage brief
Genoan bounds from Tuscan. East and west
Are nearly one to Begga[26] and my land
Whose haven[27] erst was with its own blood warm.
Who knew my name, were wont to call me Folco;
And I did bear impression of this Heaven,[28]

[21: The Mediterranean Sea.]

[22: "That." The great ocean.]

[23: Europe and Africa.]

[24: "Meridian." Extending to the east, the Mediterranean at last reaches the coast of Palestine, which is on its horizon when it enters the Straits of Gibraltar.]

[25: Ebro, a river to the west, and Macra, a river to the east, of

Genoa, where Folco was born; others think that Marseilles, and not Genoa, is here described; and then Ebro must be understood of the river in Spain.]

[26: "Begga." A place in Africa.]

[27: Alluding to the slaughter of the Genoese by the Saracens in 936.]

[28: The planet Venus, by which Folco declares himself to have been formerly influenced.]

That now bears mine: for not with fiercer flame
Glow'd Belus' daughter,[29] injuring alike
Sichaeus and Creusa, than did I,
Long as it suited the unripen'd down
That fledged my cheek; nor she of Rhodope,[30]
That was beguiled of Demophoon;
Nor Jove's son,[31] when the charms of Iole
Were shrined within his heart. And yet there bides
No sorrowful repentance here, but mirth,
Not for the fault, (that doth not come to mind,)
But for the virtue, whose o'erruling sway
And providence have wrought thus quaintly. Here
The skill is look'd into, that fashioneth
With such effectual working, and the good
Discern'd, accruing to the lower world
From this above, But fully to content
Thy wishes all that in this sphere have birth,
Demands my further parle. Inquire thou wouldst,
Who of this light is denizen, that here
Beside me sparkles, as the sunbeam doth
On the clear wave. Know then, the soul of Rahab[32]
Is in that gladsome harbour; to our tribe
United, and the foremost rank assign'd.
She to this Heaven,[33] at which the shadow ends
Of your sublunar world, was taken up,
First, in Christ's triumph, of all soul redeem'd:
For well behoved, that, in some part of Heaven,
She should remain a trophy, to declare
The mighty conquest won with either palm;[34]
For that she favour'd first the high exploit
Of Joshua on the Holy Land, whereof
The Pope[35] recks little now. Thy city, plant
Of him,[36] that on his Maker turn'd the back,
And of whose envying so much woe hath sprung,

[29: "Belus' daughter." Dido.]

[30: "She of Rhodope." Phyllis.]

[31: "Jove's son." Hercules.]

[32: "Rahab." Heb. xi. 31.]

[33: "This planet of Venus, at which the shadow of the earth ends (Almagest) writes Ptolemy." - Vellutello.]

[34: By both hands nailed to the cross.]

[35: "Who cares not that the Holy Land is in the possession of the Saracens."]

[36: "Of him." Of Satan.]

Engenders and expands the cursed flower,[37]
That hath made wander both the sheep and lambs,
Turning the shepherd to a wolf. For this,
The Gospel and great teachers laid aside,
The decretals,[38] as their stuff margins show,
Are the sole study. Pope and Cardinals,
Intent on these, ne'er journey but in thought
To Nazareth, where Gabriel oped his wings.
Yet it may chance, ere long, the Vatican,[39]
And other most selected parts of Rome,
That were the grave of Peter's soldiery,
Shall be deliver'd from the adulterous bond."

[37: The coin of Florence, the florin; the covetous desire of which has excited the Pope to so much evil.]

[38: "The decretals." The canon law. So in the "De Monarchia," lib. iii. p. 137: "There are also a third set, whom they call Decretalists. These, alike ignorant of theology and philosophy, relying wholly on their decretals (which I indeed esteem not unworthy of reverence), in the hope I suppose of obtaining for them a paramount influence, derogate from the authority of the empire. Nor is this to be wondered at, when I have heard one of them impudently maintaining, that traditions are the foundation of the faith of the Church."]

[39: He alludes either to the death of Pope Boniface VIII or to the coming of the Emperor Henry VII into Italy; or else to the transfer of the Holy See from Rome to Avignon, which took place in the pontificate of Clement V.]