

Purgatory Canto 11

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Canto XI

Argument

After a prayer uttered by the spirits, who were spoken of in the last Canto, Virgil inquires the way upward, and is answered by one, who declares himself to have been Omberto, son of the Count of Santafiore. Next our Poet distinguishes Oderigi, the illuminator, who discourses on the vanity of worldly fame, and points out to him the soul of Provenzano Salvani.

O Thou Almighty Father! who dost make
The heavens Thy dwelling, not in bounds confined,
But that, with love intenser, there Thou view'st
Thy primal effluence; hallow'd be thy name:
Join, each created being, to extol

Thy might; for worthy humblest thanks and praise
Is Thy blest Spirit. May Thy kingdom's peace
Come unto us; for we, unless it come,
With all our striving, thither tend in vain.
As, of their will, the Angels unto Thee
Tender meet sacrifice, circling Thy throne
With loud hosannas; so of theirs be done
By saintly men on earth. Grant us, this day,
Our daily manna, without which he roams
Through this rough desert retrograde, who most
Toils to advance his steps. As we to each
Pardon the evil done us, pardon Thou
Benign, and of our merit take no count.
'Gainst the old adversary, prove Thou not
Our virtue, easily subdued; but free
From his incitements, and defeat his wiles.
This last petition, dearest Lord! is made
Not for ourselves; since that were needless now;
But for their sakes who after us remain."

Thus for themselves and us good speed imploring,
Those spirits went beneath a weight like that
We sometimes feel in dreams; all, sore beset,
But with unequal anguish; wearied all;
Round the first circuit; purging as they go
The world's gross darkness off. In our behoof
If their vows still be offer'd, what can here

For them be vow'd and done by such, whose wills
Have root of goodness in them? Well beseems
That we should help them wash away the stains
They carried hence; that so, made pure and light,
They may spring upward to the starry spheres.

"Ah! so may mercy - temper'd justice rid
Your burdens speedily; that ye have power
To stretch your wing, which e'en to your desire
Shall lift you; as ye show us on which hand
Toward the ladder leads the shortest way.
And if there be more passages than one,
Instruct us of that easiest to ascend:
For this man, who comes with me, and bears yet
The charge of fleshly raiment Adam left him,
Despite his better will, but slowly mounts."
From whom the answer came unto these words,
Which my guide spake, appear'd not; but 'twas said:
"Along the bank to rightward come with us;
And ye shall find a pass that mocks not toil
Of living man to climb: and were it not
That I am hinder'd by the rock, wherewith
This arrogant neck is tamed, whence needs I stoop
My visage to the ground; him, who yet lives,
Whose name thou speak'st not, him I fain would view;
To mark if e'er I knew him, and to crave
His pity for the fardel that I bear.
I was of Latium;^[1] of a Tuscan born,
A mighty one: Aldobrandesco's name
My sire's, I know not if ye e'er have heard.
My old blood and forefathers' gallant deeds
Made me so haughty, that I clean forgot
The common mother; and to such excess
Wax'd in my scorn of all men, that I fell,
Fell therefore; by what fate, Siena's sons.
Each child in Campagnatico, can tell.
I am Omberto: not me, only, pride
Hath injured, but my kindred all involved
In mischief with her. Here my lot ordains
Under this weight to groan, till I appease
God's angry justice, since I did it not
Amongst the living, here amongst the dead."

[1: "I was of Latium." Omberto, the son of Guglielmo Aldobrandesco, Count of Santafigiore, in the territory of Siena. His arrogance provoked his countrymen to such a pitch of fury against him that he was murdered by them at Campagnatico.]

Listening I bent my visage down: and one
(Not he who spake) twisted beneath the weight
That urged him, saw me, knew me straight, and call'd;
Holding his eyes with difficulty fix'd
Intent upon me, stooping as I went
Companion of their way. "O!" I exclaim'd,
"Art thou not Oderigi?[2] art not thou
Agobbio's glory, glory of that art
Which they of Paris call the limner's skill?"

[2: The illuminator, or miniature painter, a friend of Giotto and Dante.]

"Brother!" said he, "with tints, that gayer smile,
Bolognian Franco's[3] pencil lines the leaves.
His all the honour now; my light obscured.
In truth, I had not been thus courteous to him
The whilst I lived, through eagerness of zeal
For that pre - eminence my heart was bent on.
Here, of such pride, the forfeiture is paid.
Nor were I even here, if, able still
To sin, I had not turn'd me unto God.
O powers of man! how vain your glory, nipt
E'en in its height of verdure, if an age
Less bright succeed not. Cimabue thought
To lord it over painting's field; and now
The cry is Giotto's,[4] and his name eclipsed.
Thus hath one Guido from the other[5] snatch'd
The letter'd prize: and he, perhaps, is born,
Who shall drive either from their nest. The noise
Of worldly fame is but a blast of wind,
That blows from diverse points, and shifts its name,
Shifting the point it blows from. Shalt thou more
Live in the mouths of mankind, if thy flesh
Part shrivel'd from thee, than if thou hadst died
Before the coral and the pap were left;
Or e'er some thousand years have past? and that
Is, to eternity compared, a space
Briefer than is the twinkling of an eye
To the heaven's slowest orb. He there, who treads
So leisurely before me, far and wide
Through Tuscany resounded once; and now
Is in Siena scarce with whispers named:
There was he sovereign, when destruction caught
The maddening rage of Florence, in that day
Proud as she now is loathsome. Your renown
Is as the herb, whose hue doth come and go;

[3: Franco of Bologna, who is said to have been a pupil of Oderigi's.]

[4: "The cry is Giotto's." In Giotto we have a proof at how early a period the fine arts were encouraged in Italy. His talents were discovered by Cimabue, while he was tending sheep for his father in the neighborhood of Florence, and he was afterward patronized by Pope Benedict XI and Robert, King of Naples; and enjoyed the society and friendship of Dante, whose likeness he has transmitted to posterity.]

[5: Guido Cavalcanti, the friend of our Poet, had eclipsed the literary fame of Guido Guinicelli. See also the twenty - sixth Canto.]

And his might withers it, by whom it sprang
Crude from the lap of earth." I thus to him:
"True are thy sayings: to my heart they breathe
The kindly spirit of meekness, and allay
What tumours rankle there. But who is he,
Of whom thou spakest but now?" - "This," he replied,
"I Provenzano. He is here, because
He reach'd with grasp presumptuous, at the sway
Of all Siena. Thus he still hath gone,
Thus goeth never - resting, since he died.
Such is the acquittance render'd back of him,
Who, in the mortal life, too much hath dared."
I then: "If soul, that to life's verge delays
Repentance, linger in that lower space,
Nor hither mount, (unless good prayers befriend),
Or ever time, long as it lived, be past;
How chanced admittance was vouchsafed to him?"

"When at his glory's topmost height," said he,
"Respect of dignity all cast aside,
Freely he fix'd him on Siena's plain,
A suitor[6] to redeem his suffering friend,
Who languish'd in the prison - house of Charles;
Nor, for his sake, refused through every vein
To tremble. More I will not say; and dark,
I know, my words are; but thy neighbours soon
Shall help thee to a comment on the text.
This is the work, that from these limits freed him."

[6: Provenzano Salvani, for the sake of one of his friends who was detained in captivity by Charles I of Sicily, personally supplicated the people of Siena to contribute the ransom required by the King; and this act of self - abasement atoned for his general ambition. He fell at Vald' Elsa, where the Florentines discomfited the Sienese in June, 1269.]