

Inferno Canto 22

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Canto XXII

Argument

Virgil and Dante proceed, accompanied by the Demons, and see other sinners of the same description in the same gulf. The device of Ciampolo, one of these, to escape from the Demons, who had laid hold on him.

It hath been heretofore my chance to see
Horsemen with martial order shifting camp,
To onset sallying, or in muster ranged,
Or in retreat sometimes outstretch'd for flight:
Light - armed squadrons and fleet foragers
Scouring thy plains, Arezzo! have I seen,
And clashing tournaments, and titling jousts,
Now with the sound of trumpets, now of bells,
Tabors,[1] or signals made from castled heights,
And with inventions multiform, our own,
Or introduced from foreign land; but ne'er
To such a strange recorder I beheld,
In evolution moving, horse nor foot,
Nor ship, the tack'd by sign from land or star.

[1: "Tabour, a drum, a common accompaniment of war, is mentioned as one of the instruments of martial music in this battle (in Richard Coeur - de - Lion) with characteristical propriety. It was imported into the European armies from the Saracens in the holy war." Warton's Hist. of English Poetry, vi.i. (a) 4, p. 167.]

With the ten Demons on our way we went;
Ah, fearful company! but in the church
With saints, with gluttons at the tavern's mess.

Still earnest on the pitch I gazed, to mark
All things whate'er the chasm contain'd, and those
Who burn'd within. As dolphins that, in sign
To mariners, heave high their arched backs,
That thence forewarn'd they may advise to save
Their threaten'd vessel; so, at intervals,
To ease the pain, his back some sinner show'd,
Then hid more nimbly than the lightning - glance.

E'en as the frogs, that of a watery moat
Stand at the brink, with the jaws only out,

Their feet and of the trunk all else conceal'd,
Thus on each part the sinners stood; but soon
As Barbariccia was at hand, so they
Drew back under the wave. I saw, and yet

My heart doth straggle, one, that waited thus,
As it befalls that oft one frog remains,
While the next springs away: and Graffiacan,
Who of the fiends was nearest, grappling seized
His clotted locks, and dragg'd him sprawling up,
That he appear'd to me an otter. Each
Already by their names I knew, so well
When they were chosen I observed, and mark'd
How one the other call'd. "O Rubicant!
See that his hide thou with thy talons flay,"
Shouted together all the cursed crew.

Then I: "Inform thee, Master! if thou may,
What wretched soul is this, on whom their hands
His foes have laid." My leader to his side
Approach'd, and whence he came inquired; to whom
Was answer'd thus: "Born in Navarre's domain,[2]
My mother placed me in a lord's retinue:
For she had borne me to a losel vile,
A spendthrift of his substance and himself.
The good King Thibault[3] after that I served:
To peculating here my thoughts were turn'd,
Whereof I give account in this dire heat."

[2: His name is said to be Ciampolo.]

[3: "Thibault I, King of Navarre, died on June 8, 1233, as much to be commended for the desire he showed of aiding the war in the Holy Land, as reprehensible and faulty for his design of oppressing the rights and privileges of the Church. Thibault undoubtedly merits praise, as for his other endowments, so especially for his cultivation of the liberal arts, his exercise and knowledge of music and poetry, in which he so much excelled that he was accustomed to compose verses and sing them to the viol, and to exhibit his poetical compositions publicly in his palace, that they might be criticised by all."]

Straight Ciriatto, from whose mouth a tusk
Issued on either side, as from a boar,
Ripp'd him with one of these. "Twixt evil claws
The mouse had fallen: but Barbariccia cried,
Seizing him with both arms: "Stand thou apart
While I do fix him on my prong transpierced."
Then added, turning to my guide his face,
"Inquire of him, if more thou wish to learn,

Ere he again be rent." My leader thus:
"Then tell us of the partners in thy guilt;
Knowest thou any sprung of Latin land

Under the tar?" "I parted," he replied,
"But now from one, who sojourn'd not far thence;
So were I under shelter now with him,
Nor hook nor talon then should scare me more."

"Too long we suffer," Libicocco cried;
Then, darting forth a prong, seized on his arm,
And mangled bore away the sinewy part.
Him Draghinazzo by his thighs beneath
Would next have caught; whence angrily their chief,
Turning on all sides round, with threatening brow
Restrain'd them. When their strife a little ceased,
Of him, who yet was gazing on his wound,
My teacher thus without delay inquired:
"Who was the spirit, from whom by evil hap
Parting, as thou hast told, thou camest to shore?"

"It was the friar Gomita,"[4] he rejoin'd,
"He of Gallura, vessel of all guile,
Who had his master's enemies in hand,
And used them so that they commend him well.
Money he took, and them at large dismiss'd;
So he reports; and in each other charge
Committed to his keeping play'd the part
Of barterer to the height. With him doth herd
The chief of Logodoro, Michel Zanche.[5]
Sardinia is a theme whereof their tongue
Is never weary. Out! alas! behold
That other, how he grins. More would I say,
But tremble lest he mean to maul me sore."

[4: He was intrusted by Nino de' Visconti with the government of Gallura, one of the four jurisdictions of Sardinia. He took a bribe from his master's enemies and allowed them to escape. See also Canto xxxiii and Purgatory, Canto viii.]

[5: President of Logodoro, of the four Sardinian jurisdictions. See Canto xxxiii. Note to v. 136.]

Their captain then to Farfarello turning,
Who roll'd his moony eyes in act to strike,
Rebuked him thus: "Off, cursed bird! avaunt!"

"If ye desire to see or hear," he thus
Quaking with dread resumed, "or Tuscan spirits
Or Lombard, I will cause them to appear.

Meantime let these ill talons bate their fury,
So that no vengeance they may fear from them,

And I, remaining in this self - same place,
Will, for myself but one, make seven appear,
When my shrill whistle shall be heard; for so
Our custom is to call each other up."

Cagnazzo at that word deriding grinn'd,
Then wagg'd the head and spake: "Hear his device,
Mischievous as he is, to plunge him down."

Whereto he thus, who fail'd not in rich store
Of nice - wove toils: "Mischief, forsooth, extreme!
Meant only to procure myself more woe."

No longer Alichino then refrain'd,
But thus, the rest gainsaying, him bespake:
"If thou do cast thee down, I not on foot
Will chase thee, but above the pitch will beat
My plumes. Quit we the vantage ground, and let
The bank be as a shield; that we may see,
If singly thou prevail against us all."

Now, reader, of new sport expect to hear.

They each one turn'd his eyes to the other shore,
He first, who was the hardest to persuade.
The spirit of Navarre chose well his time,
Planted his feet on land, and at one leap
Escaping, disappointed their resolve.

Them quick resentment stung, but him the most
Who was the cause of failure: in pursuit
He therefore sped, exclaiming, "Thou art caught."

But little it avail'd; terror outstripp'd
His following flight; the other plunged beneath,
And he with upward pinion raised his breast:
E'en thus the water - fowl, when she perceives
The falcon near, dives instant down, while he
Enraged and spent retires. That mockery
In Calcabrina fury stirr'd, who flew
After him, with desire of strife inflamed;
And, for the barterer had 'scaped, so turn'd
His talons on his comrade. O'er the dyke
In grapple close they join'd; but the other proved
A goshawk able to rend well his foe;
And in the boiling lake both fell. The heat
Was umpire soon between them; but in vain
To lift themselves they strove, so fast were glued

Their pennons. Barbariccia, as the rest,
That chance lamenting, four in flight despatch'd
From the other coast, with all their weapons arm'd.
They, to their post on each side speedily
Descending, stretch'd their hooks toward the fiends,
Who flounder'd, inly burning from their scars:
And we departing left them to that broil.