

Inferno Canto 32

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Canto XXXII

Argument

This Canto treats of the first, and, in part, of the second of those rounds, into which the ninth and last, or frozen circle, is divided. In the former, called Caina, Dante finds Camiccione de' Pazzi, who gives him an account of other sinners who are there punished; and in the next, named Antenora, he hears in like manner from Bocca degli Abbati who his fellow-sufferers are.

Could I command rough rhymes and hoarse, to suit
That hole of sorrow o'er which every rock
His firm abutment rears, then might the vein
Of fancy rise full springing: but not mine
Such measures, and with faltering awe I touch
The mighty theme; for to describe the depth
Of all the universe, is no emprise
To jest with, and demands a tongue not used
To infant babbling. But let them assist
My song, the tuneful maidens, by whose aid
Amphion wall'd in Thebes; so with the truth
My speech shall best accord. Oh ill - starr'd folk,
Beyond all others wretched! who abide
In such a mansion, as scarce thought finds words
To speak of, better had ye here on earth
Been flocks, or mountain goats. As down we stood
In the dark pit beneath the giants' feet,
But lower far than they, and I did gaze
Still on the lofty battlement, a voice
Bespake me thus: "Look how thou walkest. Take
Good heed, thy soles do tread not on the heads
Of thy poor brethren." Thereupon I turn'd,
And saw before and underneath my feet
A lake, whose frozen surface liker seem'd
To glass than water. Not so thick a veil
In winter e'er hath Austrian Danube spread
O'er his still course, nor Tanais far remote
Under the chilling sky. Roll'd o'er that mass
Had Tabernich or Pietrapana[1] fallen,
Not e'en its rim had creak'd. As peeps the frog
Croaking above the wave, what time in dreams

The village gleaner oft pursues her toil,
So, to where modest shame appears, thus low
Blue pinch'd and shrined in ice the spirits stood,
Moving their teeth in shrill note like the stork.
His face each downward held; their mouth the cold,
Their eyes express'd the dolour of their heart.

[1: Tabernich or Pietrapana." The one a mountain in Sclavonia, the other in that tract of country called the Garfagnana, not far from Lucca.]

A space I look'd around, then at my feet
Saw two so strictly join'd, that of their head
The very hairs were mingled. "Tell me ye,
Whose bosoms thus together press," said I,
"Who are ye?" At that sound their necks they bent;
And when their looks were lifted up to me,
Straightway their eyes, before all moist within,
Distill'd upon their lips, and the frost bound
The tears betwixt those orbs, and held them there.
Plank unto plank hath never cramp closed up
So stoutly. Whence, like two enraged goats,
They clash'd together: them such fury seized.

And one, from whom the cold both ears had reft,
Exclaim'd, still looking downward: "Why on us
Dost speculate so long? If thou wouldst know
Who are these two,[2] the valley, whence his wave
Bisenzio slopes, did for its master own
Their sire Alberto, and next him themselves.
They from one body issued: and throughout
Caina thou mayst search, nor find a shade
More worthy in congealment to be fix'd;
Not him,[3] whose breast and shadow Arthur's hand
At that one blow dissever'd; not Focaccia,[4]

[2: Alessandro and Napoleone, sons of Alberto Alberti, who murdered each other. They were proprietors of the valley of Falterona, where the Bisenzio rises, falling into the Arno six miles from Florence.]

[3: Mordred, son of King Arthur. In the romance of Lancelot of the Lake, Arthur, having discovered the traitorous intentions of his son, pierces him through with his lance, so that the sunbeam passes through the body.]

[4: Focaccia of Cancellieri (the Pistoian family), whose atrocious act of revenge against his uncle is said to have given rise to the parties, Bianchi and Neri, in the year 1300.]

No, not this spirit, whose o'erjutting head
Obstructs my onward view; he bore the name
Of Mascheroni:[5] Tuscan if thou be,

Well knowest who he was. And to cut short
All further question, in my form behold
What once was Camiccione.[6] I await
Carlino[7] here my kinsman, whose deep guilt
Shall wash out mine." A thousand visages
Then mark'd I, which the keen and eager cold
Had shaped into a doggish grin; whence creeps
A shivering horror o'er me, at the thought
Of those frore shallows. While we journey'd on
Toward the middle, at whose point unites
All heavy substance, and I trembling went
Through that eternal chillness, I know not
If will it were, or destiny, or chance,
But, passing 'midst the heads, my foot did strike
With violent blow against the face of one.

[5: Sassol Mascheroni, a Florentine, who murdered his uncle.]

[6: Camiccione de' Pazzi of Valdarno, by whom his kinsman Ubertino was treacherously put to death.]

[7: "Carlino." One of the same family. He betrayed the Castel di Piano Travigne, in Valdarno, to the Florentines, after the refugees of the Bianca and Ghibelline party had defended it against a siege for twenty - nine days, in the summer of 1302.]

"Wherefore dost bruise me?" weeping the exclaim'd;
"Unless thy errand be some fresh revenge
For Montaperto,[8] wherefore troublest me?"

[8: The defeat of the Guelfi at Montaperto through the treachery of Bocca degli Abbati, who, during the engagement, cut off the hand of Giacopo del Vacca de' Pazzi, the Florentine standard - bearer.]

I thus: "Instructor, now await me here,
That I through him may rid me of my doubt:
Thenceforth what haste thou wilt." The teacher paused
And to that shade I spake, who bitterly
Still cursed me in his wrath. "What art thou, speak,
That railest thus on others?" He replied:
"Now who art thou, that smiting others' cheeks,
Through Antenora[9] roamest, with such force
As were past sufferance, wert thou living still?"

[9: So called from Antenor, who, according to Dictys Cretensis (de Bello Troj. lib. v.) and Dares Phrygius (De Excidio Trojae) betrayed Troy his country," Lombardi.]

"And I am living, to thy joy perchance,"
Was my reply, "if fame be dear to thee,
That with the rest I may thy name enrol."

"The contrary of what I covet most,"
Said he, "thou tender'st: hence! nor vex me more.
Ill knowest thou to flatter in this vale."

Then seizing on his hinder scalp I cried"
"Name thee, or not a hair shall tarry here."

"Rend all away," he answer'd, "yet for that
I will not tell, nor show thee, who I am,
Though at my head thou pluck a thousand times."

Now I had grasp'd his tresses, and stript off
More than one tuft, he barking, with his eyes
Drawn in and downward, when another cried,
"What ails thee, Bocca? Sound not loud enough
Thy chattering teeth, but thou must bark outright?
What devil wrings thee?" - "Now," said I, "be dumb,
Accursed traitor! To thy shame, of thee
True tidings will I bear." - "Off!" he replied;
"Tell what thou list: but, as thou 'scape from hence,
To speak of him whose tongue hath been so glib,
Forget not: here he wails the Frenchman's gold.
'Him of Duera,'[10] Thou canst say, 'I mark'd,
Where the starved sinners pine.' If thou be ask'd
What other shade was with them, at thy side
Is Beccaria,[11] whose red gorge distain'd
The biting axe of Florence. Further on,
If I misdeem not, Soldanieri,[12] bides,
With Ganellon,[13] and Tribaldello,[14] him
Who oped Faenza when the people slept."

[10: Buoso of Cremona, of the family of Duera, bribed by Guy de Montfort to leave a pass between Piedmont and Parma, with the defence of which he had been intrusted by the Ghibellines, open to the army of Charles of Anjou, A. D. 1265, at which the people of Cremona were so enraged that they extirpated the whole family. G. Villani.]

[11: Abbot of Vallombrosa, Pope's legate at Florence, beheaded for his intrigues with the Ghibellines.]

[12: "Gianni Soldanieri," says Villani, Hist. lib. vii. c. xiv., "put himself at the head of the people, in the hopes of rising into power, not aware that the result would be mischief to the Ghibelline party, and his own ruin." - A. D. 1266.]

[13: The betrayer of Charlemain, mentioned by Archbishop Turpin. He is a type of treachery with the poets of the Middle Ages.]

[14: Tribaldello de' Manfredi, bribed to betray the city of Faenza, 1282.]

We now had left him, passing on our way,
When I beheld two spirits by the ice
Pent in one hollow, that the head of one

Was cowl unto the other; and as bread
Is raven'd up through hunger, the uppermost
Did so apply his fangs to the other's brain,
Where the spine joins it. Not more furiously
On Menalippus' temples Tydeus gnaw'd,
Than on that skull and on its garbage he.

"O thou! who show'st so beastly sign of hate
'Gainst him thou prey'st on, let me hear," said I,
"The cause, on such condition, that if right
Warrant thy grievance, knowing who ye are,
And what the color of his sinning was,
I may repay thee in the world above,
If that, wherewith I speak, be moist so long."