

# Inferno Canto 7

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## Canto VII

### Argument

In the present Canto, Dante describes his descent into the fourth circle, at the beginning of which he sees Plutus stationed. Here one like doom awaits the prodigal and thenavaricious; which is, to meet in direful conflict, rolling great weights against each other with mutual upbraidings. From hence Virgil takes occasion to show how vain the goods that are committed into the charge of Fortune; and this moves our author to inquire what being that Fortune is, of whom he speaks: which question being resolved, they go down into the fifth circle, where they find the wrathful and gloomy tormented in the Stygian lake. Having made a compass round great part of this lake, they come at last to the base of a lofty tower.

"Ah me! O Satan! Satan!"[1] loud exclaim'd  
Plutus, in accent hoarse of wild alarm:  
And the kind sage, whom no event surprised,  
To comfort me thus spake: "Let not thy fear  
Harm thee, for power in him, be sure, is none

[1: "Pape Satan, Pape Satan, aleppe;" words without meaning.]

To hinder down this rock thy safe descent."  
Then to that swoln lip turning, "Peace!" he cried,  
"Curst wolf! thy fury inward on thyself  
Prey, and consume thee! Through the dark profound,  
Not without cause, he passes. So 'tis will'd  
On high, there where the great Archangel pour'd  
Heaven's vengeance on the first adulterer proud."

As sails, full spread and bellying with the wind,  
Drop suddenly collapsed, if the mast split;  
So to the ground down dropp'd the cruel fiend.

Thus we, descending to the fourth steep ledge,  
Gain'd on the dismal shore, that all the woe  
Hems in of all the universe. Ah me!  
Almighty Justice! in what store thou heap'st  
New pains, new troubles, as I here beheld.  
Wherefore doth fault of ours bring us to this?

E'en as a billow, on Charybdis rising,  
Against encounter'd billow dashing breaks;

Such is the dance this wretched race must lead,  
Whom more than elsewhere numerous here I found.  
From one side and the other, with loud voice,  
Both roll'd on weights, by main force of their breasts,  
Then smote together, and each one forthwith  
Roll'd them back voluble, turning again;  
Exclaiming these, "Why holdest thou so fast?"  
Those answering, "And why castest thou away?"  
So, still repeating their spiteful song,  
They to the opposite point, on either hand,  
Traversed the horrid circle; then arrived,  
Both turn'd them round, and through the middle space,  
Conflicting met again. At sight whereof  
I, stung with grief, thus spake: "O say, my guide!  
What race is this. Were these, whose heads are shorn,  
On our left hand, all separate to the Church?"

He straight replied: "In their first life, these all  
In mind were so distorted, that they made,  
According to due measure, of their wealth  
No use. This clearly from their words collect,  
Which they howl forth, at each extremity  
Arriving of the circle, where their crime  
Contrary in kind disparts them. To the Church  
Were separate those, that with no hairy cowls  
Are crowned, both Popes and Cardinals, o'er whom  
Avarice dominion absolute maintains."

I then: "Mid such as these some needs must be,  
Whom I shall recognize, th t with the blot  
Of these foul sins were stain'd." He answering thus:  
"Vain thought conceivest thou. That ignoble life,  
Which made them vile before, now makes them dark,  
And to all knowledge indiscernible.  
For ever they shall meet in this rude shock:  
These from the tomb with clenched grasp shall rise,  
Those with close - shaven locks. That ill they gave,  
And ill they kept, hath of the beauteous world  
Deprived, and set them at this strife, which needs  
No labor'd phrase of mine to set it off.  
Now mayst thou see, my son! how brief, how vain,  
The goods committed into Fortune's hands,  
For which the human race keep such a coil!  
Not all the gold that is beneath the moon,  
Or ever hath been, of these toil - worn souls  
Might purchase rest for one." I thus rejoin'd:  
"My guide! of these this also would I learn;  
This Fortune, that thou speak'st of, what it is,

Whose talons grasp the blessings of the world."

He thus: "O beings blind! what ignorance  
Besets you! Now my judgment hear and mark.  
He, whose transcendent wisdom passes all,  
The heavens creating, gave them ruling powers  
To guide them; so that each part shines to each,  
Their light in equal distribution pour'd.  
By similar appointment he ordain'd,  
Over the world's bright images to rule,  
Superintendence of a guiding hand  
And general minister, which, at due time,  
May change the empty vantages of life  
From race to race, from one to other's blood,  
Beyond prevention of man's wisest care:  
Wherefore one nation rises into sway,  
Another languishes, e'en as her will  
Decreases, from us conceal'd, as in the grass  
The serpent train. Against her nought avails  
Your utmost wisdom. She with foresight plans,  
Judges, and carries on her reign, as theirs  
The other powers divine. Her changes know  
None intermission: by necessity  
She is made swift, so frequent come who claim  
Succession in her favors. This is she,  
So execrated e'en by those whose debt  
To her is rather praise: they wrongfully  
With blame requite her, and with evil word;  
But she is blessed, and for that reckes not:  
Amidst the other primal beings glad  
Rolls on her sphere, and in her bliss exults.  
Now on our way pass we, to heavier woe  
Descending: for each star is falling now,  
That mounted at our entrance, and forbids  
Too long our tarrying." We the circle cross'd  
To the next steep, arriving at a well,  
That boiling pours itself down to a foss  
Sluiced from its source. Far murkier was the wave  
Than sablest grain: and we in company  
Of the inky waters, journeying by their side,  
Enter'd, though by a different track, beneath.  
Into a lake, the Stygian named, expands  
The dismal stream, when it hath reach'd the foot  
Of the gray wither'd cliffs. Intent I stood  
To gaze, and in the marish sunk descried  
A miry tribe, all naked, and with looks  
Betokening rage. They with their hands alone

Struck not, but with the head, the breast, the feet,  
Cutting each other piecemeal with their fangs.

The good instructor spake: "Now seest thou, son!  
The souls of those, whom anger overcame.  
This too for certain know, that underneath  
The water dwells a multitude, whose sighs  
Into these bubbles make the surface heave,  
As thine eye tells thee wheresoe'er it turn.  
Fix'd in the slime, they say: 'Sad once were we,  
In the sweet air made gladsome by the sun,  
Carrying a foul and lazy mist within:  
Now in these murky settlings are we sad.'  
Such dolorous strain they gurgle in their throats,  
But word distinct can utter none." Our route  
Thus compass'd we, a segment widely stretch'd  
Between the dry embankment, and the core  
Of the loath'd pool, turning meanwhile our eyes  
Downward on those who gulp'd its muddy lees;  
Nor stopp'd, till to a tower's low base we came.