

Purgatory Canto 5

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Canto V

Argument

They meet with others, who had deferred their repentance till overtaken by a violent death, when sufficient space being allowed them, they were then saved; and among these, Giacompo del Cassero, Buonconte da Montefeltro, and Pia, a lady of Siena.

Now had I left those spirits, and pursued
The steps of my conductor; when behind,
Pointing the finger at me, one exclaim'd:
"See, how it seems as if the light not shone
From the left hand[1] of him beneath,[2] and he,
As living, seems to be led on." Mine eyes,
I at that sound reverting, saw them gaze,
Through wonder, first at me; and then at me
And the light broken underneath, by turns.
"Why are thy thoughts thus riveted," my guide
Exclaim'd, "that thou hast slack'd thy pace? or how
Imports it thee, what thing is whisper'd here?
Come after me, and to their babblings leave

[1: The sun was, therefore, on the right of our travellers. For, as before, when seated and looking to the east whence they had ascended, the sun was on their left; so now that they are again going forward, it must be on the opposite side of them.]

[2: Of Dante, following Virgil.]

The crowd. Be as a tower, that, firmly set,
Shakes not its top for any blast that blows.
He, in whose bosom thought on thought shoots out,
Still of his aim is wide, in that the one
Sicklies and wastes to naught the other's strength."

What other could I answer, save "I come"?
I said it, somewhat with that color tinged,
Which oft - times pardon meriteth for man.

Meanwhile traverse along the hill there came,
A little way before us, some who sang
The "Miserere" in responsive strains.
When they perceived that through my body I

Gave way not for the rays to pass, their song
Straight to a long and hoarse exclaim they changed;
And two of them, in guise of messengers,
Ran on to meet us, and inquiring ask'd:
"Of your condition we would gladly learn."

To them my guide: "Ye may return, and bear
Tidings to them who sent you, that his frame
Is real flesh. If, as I deem, to view
His shade they paused, enough is answer'd them:
Him let them honor: they may prize him well."

Ne'er saw I fiery vapors with such speed
Cut through the serene air at fall of night,
Nor August's clouds athwart the setting sun,
That upward these did not in shorter space
Return; and, there arriving, with the rest
Wheel back on us, as with loose rein a troop.

"Many," exclaim'd the bard, "are these, who throng
Around us: to petition thee, they come.
Go therefore on, and listen as thou go'st."

"O spirit! who go'st on to blessedness,
With the same limbs that clad thee at thy birth,"
Shouting they came: "a little rest thy step.
Look, if thou any one amongst our tribe
Hast e'er beheld, that tidings of him there[3]
Thou mayst report. Ah, wherefore go'st thou on?
Ah, wherefore tarriest thou not? We all
By violence died, and to our latest hour

[3: "There." Upon the earth.]

Were sinners, but then warn'd by light from Heaven;
So that, repenting and forgiving, we
Did issue out of life at peace with God,
Who, with desire to see Him, fills our heart."

Then I: "The visages of all I scan,
Yet none of ye remember. But if aught
That I can do may please you, gentle spirits!
Speak, and I will perform it; by that peace,
Which, on the steps of guide so excellent
Following, from world to world, intent I seek."

In answer he began: "None here distrusts
Thy kindness, though not promised with an oath;
So as the will fail not for want of power.
Whence I, who sole before the other speak,
Entreat thee, if thou ever see that land[4]

Which lies between Romagna and the realm
Of Charles, that of thy courtesy thou pray
Those who inhabit Fano, that for me
Their adorations duly be put up,
By which I may purge off my grievous sins.
From thence I came.[5] But the deep passages,
Whence issued out the blood[6] wherein I dwelt,
Upon my bosom in Antenor's land[7]
Were made, where to be more secure I thought.
The author of the deed was Este's prince,
Who, more than right could warrant, with his wrath
Pursued me. Had I toward Mira fled,
When overta'en at Oriaco, still
Might I have breathed. But to the marsh I sped;
And in the mire and rushes tangled there
Fell, and beheld my life - blood float the plain."

[4: The Marca d' Ancona, between Romagna and Apulia, the kingdom of Charles of Anjou.]

[5: Giacomo del Cassero, a citizen of Fano, who having spoken ill of Azzo da Este, Marquis of Ferrara, was by his orders put to death. Giacomo was overtaken by the assassins at Oriaco, near the Brenta, whence, if he had fled toward Mira, higher up on that river, instead of making for the marsh on the sea - shore, he might have escaped.]

[6: Supposed to be the seat of life.]

[7: Padua, said to be founded by Antenor. This implies a reflection on the Paduans. See Hell, xxxii. 89.]

Then said another: "Ah! so may the wish,
That takes thee o'er the mountain, be fulfill'd,
As thou shalt graciously give aid to mine.

Of Montefeltro I;[8] Buonconte I:
Giovanna[9] nor none else have care for me;
Sorrowing with these I therefore go." I thus:
"From Campaldino's field what force or chance
Drew thee, that ne'er thy sepulture was known?"

[8: Buonconte, son of Guido da Montefeltro (see also the twenty - seventh canto of Hell), fell in the battle of Campaldino (1289), fighting on the side of the Aretini. In this engagement our Poet took a distinguished part.]

[9: Wife or kinswoman of Buonconte.]

"Oh!" answer'd he, "at Casentino's foot
A stream there courseth, named Archiano, sprung
In Apennine above the hermit's seat.[10]

E'en where its name is cancel'd,[11] there came I,
Pierced in the throat, fleeing away on foot,
And bloodying the plain. Here sight and speech
Fail'd me; and, finishing with Mary's name,
I fell, and tenantless my flesh remain'd.
I will report the truth; which thou again
Tell to the living. Me God's angel took,
Whilst he of Hell exclaim'd: 'O thou from Heaven!
Say wherefore hast thou robb'd me? Thou of him
The eternal portion bear'st with thee away,
For one poor tear that he deprives me of.
But of the other, other rule I make.'

[10: The hermitage of Camaldoli.]

[11: Between Bibbiena and Poppi, where the Archiano joins the Arno.]

"Thou know'st how in the atmosphere collects
That vapour dank, returning into water
Soon as it mounts where cold condenses it.
That evil will,[12] which in his intellect
Still follows evil, came; and raised the wind
And smoky mist, by virtue of the power
Given by his nature. Thence the valley, soon
As day was spent, he cover'd o'er with cloud,
From Pratomagno to the mountain range;[13]
And stretch'd the sky above; so that the air
Impregnate changed to water. Fell the rain;
And to the fosses came all that the land

[12: The Devil. This notion of the Evil Spirit having power over the elements, appears to have arisen from his being termed the "prince of the air," in the New Testament.]

[13: From Pratomagno, now called Prato Vecchio (which divides the Valdarno from Casentino), as far as to the Apennines.]

Contain'd not; and, as mightiest streams are wont,
To the great river, with such headlong sweep,
Rush'd, that naught stay'd its course. My stiffen'd frame
Laid at his mouth, the fell Archiano found,
And dashed it into Arno; from my breast
Loosening the cross, that of myself I made
When overcome with pain. He hurl'd me on,
Along the banks and bottom of his course;
Then in his muddy spoils encircling wrapt."

"Ah! when thou to the world shalt be return'd,
And rested after thy long road," so spake
Next the third spirit; "then remember me.

I once was Pia.[14] Sienna gave me life;
Maremma took it from me. That he knows,
Who me with jewel'd ring had first espoused."

[14: "Pia" She is said to have been a Siennese lady, of the family of Tolommei, secretly made away with by her husband, Nello della Pietra, of the same city, in Maremma, where he had some possessions.]

— Purgatory Canto 5