Inferno: Canto VII

(Lines 1-96 omitted)

97 Let us descend now unto greater woe;

 Already sinks each star that was ascending

 When I set out, and loitering is forbidden."

We crossed the circle to the other bank,

 Near to a fount that boils, and pours itself

 Along a gully that runs out of it.

The water was more sombre far than perse;

 And we, in company with the dusky waves,

 Made entrance downward by a path uncouth.

A marsh it makes, which has the name of Styx,

 This tristful brooklet, when it has descended

 Down to the foot of the malign gray shores.

And I, who stood intent upon beholding,

 Saw people mud-besprent in that lagoon,

 All of them naked and with angry look.

They smote each other not alone with hands,

 But with the head and with the breast and feet,

 Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.

Said the good Master: "Son, thou now beholdest

 The souls of those whom anger overcame;

 And likewise I would have thee know for certain

Beneath the water people are who sigh

 And make this water bubble at the surface,

 As the eye tells thee wheresoe'er it turns.

Fixed in the mire they say, 'We sullen were

 In the sweet air, which by the sun is gladdened,

 Bearing within ourselves the sluggish reek;

Now we are sullen in this sable mire.'

 This hymn do they keep gurgling in their throats,

 For with unbroken words they cannot say it."

Thus we went circling round the filthy fen

 A great arc 'twixt the dry bank and the swamp,

 With eyes turned unto those who gorge the mire;

Unto the foot of a tower we came at last.

Inferno: Canto VIII

I say, continuing, that long before

 We to the foot of that high tower had come,

 Our eyes went upward to the summit of it,

By reason of two flamelets we saw placed there,

 And from afar another answer them,

 So far, that hardly could the eye attain it.

And, to the sea of all discernment turned,

 I said: "What sayeth this, and what respondeth

 That other fire? and who are they that made it?"

And he to me: "Across the turbid waves

 What is expected thou canst now discern,

 If reek of the morass conceal it not."

Cord never shot an arrow from itself

 That sped away athwart the air so swift,

 As I beheld a very little boat

Come o'er the water tow'rds us at that moment,

 Under the guidance of a single pilot,

 Who shouted, "Now art thou arrived, fell soul?"

"Phlegyas, Phlegyas, thou criest out in vain

 For this once," said my Lord; "thou shalt not have us

 Longer than in the passing of the slough."

As he who listens to some great deceit

 That has been done to him, and then resents it,

 Such became Phlegyas, in his gathered wrath.

My Guide descended down into the boat,

 And then he made me enter after him,

 And only when I entered seemed it laden.

Soon as the Guide and I were in the boat,

 The antique prow goes on its way, dividing

 More of the water than 'tis wont with others.

While we were running through the dead canal,

 Uprose in front of me one full of mire,

 And said, "Who 'rt thou that comest ere the hour?"

And I to him: "Although I come, I stay not;

 But who art thou that hast become so squalid?"

 "Thou seest that I am one who weeps," he answered.

And I to him: "With weeping and with wailing,

 Thou spirit maledict, do thou remain;

 For thee I know, though thou art all defiled."

Then stretched he both his hands unto the boat;

 Whereat my wary Master thrust him back,

 Saying, "Away there with the other dogs!"

Thereafter with his arms he clasped my neck;

 He kissed my face, and said: "Disdainful soul,

 Blessed be she who bore thee in her bosom.

That was an arrogant person in the world;

 Goodness is none, that decks his memory;

 So likewise here his shade is furious.

How many are esteemed great kings up there,

 Who here shall be like unto swine in mire,

 Leaving behind them horrible dispraises!"

And I: "My Master, much should I be pleased,

 If I could see him soused into this broth,

 Before we issue forth out of the lake."

And he to me: "Ere unto thee the shore

 Reveal itself, thou shalt be satisfied;

 Such a desire 'tis meet thou shouldst enjoy."

A little after that, I saw such havoc

 Made of him by the people of the mire,

 That still I praise and thank my God for it.

They all were shouting, "At Philippo Argenti!"

 And that exasperate spirit Florentine

 Turned round upon himself with his own teeth.

We left him there, and more of him I tell not;

 But on mine ears there smote a lamentation,

 Whence forward I intent unbar mine eyes.

And the good Master said: "Even now, my Son,

 The city draweth near whose name is Dis,

 With the grave citizens, with the great throng."

And I: "Its mosques already, Master, clearly

 Within there in the valley I discern

 Vermilion, as if issuing from the fire

They were." And he to me: "The fire eternal

 That kindles them within makes them look red,

 As thou beholdest in this nether Hell."

Then we arrived within the moats profound,

 That circumvallate that disconsolate city;

 The walls appeared to me to be of iron.

Not without making first a circuit wide,

 We came unto a place where loud the pilot

 Cried out to us, "Debark, here is the entrance."

More than a thousand at the gates I saw

 Out of the Heavens rained down, who angrily

 Were saying, "Who is this that without death

Goes through the kingdom of the people dead?"

 And my sagacious Master made a sign

 Of wishing secretly to speak with them.

A little then they quelled their great disdain,

 And said: "Come thou alone, and he begone

 Who has so boldly entered these dominions.

Let him return alone by his mad road;

 Try, if he can; for thou shalt here remain,

 Who hast escorted him through such dark regions."

Think, Reader, if I was discomforted

 At utterance of the accursed words;

 For never to return here I believed.

"O my dear Guide, who more than seven times

 Hast rendered me security, and drawn me

 From imminent peril that before me stood,

Do not desert me," said I, "thus undone;

 And if the going farther be denied us,

 Let us retrace our steps together swiftly."

And that Lord, who had led me thitherward,

 Said unto me: "Fear not; because our passage

 None can take from us, it by Such is given.

But here await me, and thy weary spirit

 Comfort and nourish with a better hope;

 For in this nether world I will not leave thee."

So onward goes and there abandons me

 My Father sweet, and I remain in doubt,

 For No and Yes within my head contend.

I could not hear what he proposed to them;

 But with them there he did not linger long,

 Ere each within in rivalry ran back.

They closed the portals, those our adversaries,

 On my Lord's breast, who had remained without

 And turned to me with footsteps far between.

His eyes cast down, his forehead shorn had he

 Of all its boldness, and he said, with sighs,

 "Who has denied to me the dolesome houses?"

And unto me: "Thou, because I am angry,

 Fear not, for I will conquer in the trial,

 Whatever for defence within be planned.

This arrogance of theirs is nothing new;

 For once they used it at less secret gate,

 Which finds itself without a fastening still.

O'er it didst thou behold the dead inscription;

 And now this side of it descends the steep,

 Passing across the circles without escort,

One by whose means the city shall be opened."

Inferno: Canto IX

That hue which cowardice brought out on me,

 Beholding my Conductor backward turn,

 Sooner repressed within him his new colour.

He stopped attentive, like a man who listens,

 Because the eye could not conduct him far

 Through the black air, and through the heavy fog.

"Still it behoveth us to win the fight,"

 Began he; "Else. . .Such offered us herself. . .

 O how I long that some one here arrive!"

Well I perceived, as soon as the beginning

 He covered up with what came afterward,

 That they were words quite different from the first;

But none the less his saying gave me fear,

 Because I carried out the broken phrase,

 Perhaps to a worse meaning than he had.

"Into this bottom of the doleful conch

 Doth any e'er descend from the first grade,

 Which for its pain has only hope cut off?"

This question put I; and he answered me:

 "Seldom it comes to pass that one of us

 Maketh the journey upon which I go.

True is it, once before I here below

 Was conjured by that pitiless Erictho,

 Who summoned back the shades unto their bodies.

Naked of me short while the flesh had been,

 Before within that wall she made me enter,

 To bring a spirit from the circle of Judas;

That is the lowest region and the darkest,

 And farthest from the heaven which circles all.

 Well know I the way; therefore be reassured.

This fen, which a prodigious stench exhales,

 Encompasses about the city dolent,

 Where now we cannot enter without anger."

And more he said, but not in mind I have it;

 Because mine eye had altogether drawn me

 Tow'rds the high tower with the red-flaming summit,

Where in a moment saw I swift uprisen

 The three infernal Furies stained with blood,

 Who had the limbs of women and their mien,

And with the greenest hydras were begirt;

 Small serpents and cerastes were their tresses,

 Wherewith their horrid temples were entwined.

And he who well the handmaids of the Queen

 Of everlasting lamentation knew,

 Said unto me: "Behold the fierce Erinnys.

This is Megaera, on the left-hand side;

 She who is weeping on the right, Alecto;

 Tisiphone is between;" and then was silent.

Each one her breast was rending with her nails;

 They beat them with their palms, and cried so loud,

 That I for dread pressed close unto the Poet.

"Medusa come, so we to stone will change him!"

 All shouted looking down; "in evil hour

 Avenged we not on Theseus his assault!"

"Turn thyself round, and keep thine eyes close shut,

 For if the Gorgon appear, and thou shouldst see it,

 No more returning upward would there be."

Thus said the Master; and he turned me round

 Himself, and trusted not unto my hands

 So far as not to blind me with his own.

O ye who have undistempered intellects,

 Observe the doctrine that conceals itself

 Beneath the veil of the mysterious verses!

And now there came across the turbid waves

 The clangour of a sound with terror fraught,

 Because of which both of the margins trembled;

Not otherwise it was than of a wind

 Impetuous on account of adverse heats,

 That smites the forest, and, without restraint,

The branches rends, beats down, and bears away;

 Right onward, laden with dust, it goes superb,

 And puts to flight the wild beasts and the shepherds.

Mine eyes he loosed, and said: "Direct the nerve

 Of vision now along that ancient foam,

 There yonder where that smoke is most intense."

Even as the frogs before the hostile serpent

 Across the water scatter all abroad,

 Until each one is huddled in the earth.

More than a thousand ruined souls I saw,

 Thus fleeing from before one who on foot

 Was passing o'er the Styx with soles unwet.

From off his face he fanned that unctuous air,

 Waving his left hand oft in front of him,

 And only with that anguish seemed he weary.

Well I perceived one sent from Heaven was he,

 And to the Master turned; and he made sign

 That I should quiet stand, and bow before him.

Ah! how disdainful he appeared to me!

 He reached the gate, and with a little rod

 He opened it, for there was no resistance.

"O banished out of Heaven, people despised!"

 Thus he began upon the horrid threshold;

 "Whence is this arrogance within you couched?

Wherefore recalcitrate against that will,

 From which the end can never be cut off,

 And which has many times increased your pain?

What helpeth it to butt against the fates?

 Your Cerberus, if you remember well,

 For that still bears his chin and gullet peeled."

Then he returned along the miry road,

 And spake no word to us, but had the look

 Of one whom other care constrains and goads

Than that of him who in his presence is;

 And we our feet directed tow'rds the city,

 After those holy words all confident.

Within we entered without any contest;

 And I, who inclination had to see

 What the condition such a fortress holds,

Soon as I was within, cast round mine eye,

 And see on every hand an ample plain,

 Full of distress and torment terrible.

Even as at Arles, where stagnant grows the Rhone,

 Even as at Pola near to the Quarnaro,

 That shuts in Italy and bathes its borders,

The sepulchres make all the place uneven;

 So likewise did they there on every side,

 Saving that there the manner was more bitter;

For flames between the sepulchres were scattered,

 By which they so intensely heated were,

 That iron more so asks not any art.

All of their coverings uplifted were,

 And from them issued forth such dire laments,

 Sooth seemed they of the wretched and tormented.

And I: "My Master, what are all those people

 Who, having sepulture within those tombs,

 Make themselves audible by doleful sighs?"

And he to me: "Here are the Heresiarchs,

 With their disciples of all sects, and much

 More than thou thinkest laden are the tombs.

Here like together with its like is buried;

 And more and less the monuments are heated."

 And when he to the right had turned, we passed

Between the torments and high parapets.