

occurs in *Inf.* xxvi. 141, where the submission is involuntary, whereas here it is embraced by the will (*John* xxi. 18).

Canto II



THE STORY. *THE Ship of Souls arrives at the Island, steered by an Angel, and bringing a boat-load of the newly-dead from the mouth of Tiber to Purgatory. One of the souls is Dante's friend, Casella the Musician. He recognizes the Poet, and delights him and the other spirits by singing one of Dante's own songs. The party is broken up by Cato, who chides them for lingering and sends them about their business.*

The sun by now o'er that horizon's rim ¹
Was sinking, whose meridian circle stands
With its mid-arch above Jerusalem,

While night, who wheels opposed to him, from sands ⁴
Of Ganges mounted with the Scales, whose weight
Drops in her hour of victory from her hands;

So that, where we were, fair Aurora, late ⁷
Flushing from white to rose-vermilion,
Grew sallow with ripe age and matron state.

And still we stood beside the sea alone, ¹⁰
Like travellers uncertain of their way,
Whose bodies linger while the heart hies on.

And lo! as sometimes at the approach of day ¹³
Mars in the West across the ocean floor
Glow through thick vapour with a dim, red ray,

Even so — God send I see that sight once more! — 16
I saw a light come speeding o'er the sea,
So swift, flight knows no simile therefor.

For a brief space I turned inquiringly 19
Back to my guide; then looked again, and lo!
Bigger and brighter far it seemed to me.

Then, from each side of it, there seemed to grow 22
A white I-knew-not-what; and there appeared
Another whiteness, bit by bit, below.

Now all this time my master spoke no word, as 25
Till plain we saw, those first two whitenesses
Were wings; and knowing then what helmsman steered,

“Down, down!” he cried, “fold hands and bow thy knees; 28
Behold the angel of the Lord! Henceforth
Thou shalt see many of these great emissaries.

See how he scorns all instruments of earth, 31
Needing no oar, no sail but his own wings, ‘
Twixt shores that span so vast an ocean’s girth.

See how each soaring pinion heavenward springs, 34
Beating the air with pens imperishable
That are not mewed like mortal coverings.”

And near and nearer as he came full sail 37
The bird of God shone momentarily more bright,
So that mine eyes endured him not, but fell.

And hard on toward the shore he steered his flight, 40
Borne forward in a ship that skimmed apace,
Drawing no water, ’twas so swift and light.

Freehold of bliss apparent in his face, 43
The heavenly pilot on the poop stood tiptoe,
And with him full an hundred souls had place.

“In exitu Israel de Aegypto” 46
From end to end they sang their holy lay
In unison; and so he brought the ship to.

He signed them with the blessed cross, and they, 49
All with one motion, leapt upon the strand;
Then, swiftly as he came, he went his way.

Those left behind seemed strangers in the land, 52
Gazing about like men who test and try
Some unknown thing they seek to understand.

The sun with his sure arrows had made fly 55
The Goat from out mid-heaven, and far and wide
Was shooting shafts of day all round the sky,

When those new folk caught sight of us, and cried: 58
“Tell us, we beg, if you are able to,
Which way will bring us to the mountain-side.”

Virgil replied: “Belike you think us two 61
Familiar with the place; it is not thus,
For we are strangers here as much as you;

We've just arrived, a short while previous 64
To you, but by so steep and rough a road
That this new climb will seem child's play to us."

Then, when they looked at me, whose breathing showed 67
That I was still alive, each spirit's brow
Grew pallid with surprise; and in like mode

As, when a courier with an olive-bough 70
Comes, bringing news, the townsfolk throng to hear,
Jostling each other unabashed, so now

Did all those souls, so happy as they were, 73
Rivet inquiring eyes upon my face,
Well-nigh forgetting to go make them fair;

And one I saw advance, all eagerness 76
To clasp me in its arms, whose looks expressed
Such love as moved me to a like embrace.

Shades! vain visual shows no touch can test! 79
Three times I felt my hands behind it meet,
Three times they came back empty to my breast.

I think amazement in my face was writ 82
In changing colours, for the shade withdrew
Smiling, and I plunged forward after it.

Gently it bade me cease; at once I knew 85
What man it was, and begged him to bestow
One moment on me, and a word or two.

"As in my mortal bonds I loved thee, so 88
I love thee free; and therefore I will stay;
I stay," said he; "but wherefore dost thou go?"

"O my Casella, in the hope some day 91
To come back here, I journey now," I cried;
"But thou? What's caused thee all this long delay?"

"I am not wronged, if he who may decide 94
Both when to lade his vessel, and with whom,
Hath oft refused me waftage," he replied.

"For the just will shapes his. But now, for some 97
Three months he hath received without demur
Any and all of us who wish to come.

So, when I sought that shore where first the stir 100
Of the salt wave meets Tiber, he anon
Graciously took me as his passenger.

Thither again his pinions bear him on, 103
For to that spot all souls come presently,
So be they sink not down to Acheron."

Then I: "If no new law prohibit thee 106
Skill or remembrance of those songs of love
Which once could charm all fevers out of me,

Beseech thee, sing; and comfortingly move 109
My spirit, which in this dull body taking
The long road here, faints with the toil thereof."

“Love in my mind his conversation making,” 112

Thus he began, so sweetly that I find
Within me still the dulcet echoes waking.

My master and I and all that spirit-kind 115
That came to him, hung on those notes of his
Entranced, as bearing nothing else in mind.

Stock-still we stood, intent no word to miss, 118
When lo! that reverend elder, all at once
Crying: “How now, you laggard souls! what’s this?”

Why all this dawdling? why this negligence? 121
Run to the mountains, slough away the filth
That will not let you see God’s countenance.”

Like as, when pigeons gather on the tilth 124
To make a goodly feast of wheat or tares,
Their pouting pride put by, a commonwealth

Of peaceful industry, if aught appears 127
To scare them, off they go and quit their feeding,
Driven by pressure of more urgent cares:

So, breaking from the song, I saw them heading 130
Towards the slope, that new-found company,
Like men who speed, nor know to what they’re speeding;

And we went too, and no less hastily. 136

The Images.

The Ship of Souls. The imagery of this canto hardly needs elucidation, but it is interesting to note the parallels and contrasts with the corresponding imagery in *Inf.* iii. The souls of the damned assemble on the bank of the River Acheron, and are ferried to Hell by the Demon Charon: the souls of the saved assemble at the mouth of the River Tiber, and are ferried by an Angelic Pilot across the whole width of the world to Purgatory. In each case, the ferryman selects his own boat-load. Charon plies an oar (which he uses, incidentally, to thump his passengers into submission): the Angel needs “no oar, no sail but his own wings”. The damned, wailing and blaspheming, embark one by one (fellowship is lost); the saved sing their hymn in unison and disembark all together (fellowship is recovered),

Notes.

ll. 1-9: *The sun by now*, etc.: It is sunset at Jerusalem (in the Northern Hemisphere) and consequently sunrise in Purgatory (at the Antipodes). The Ganges, in India, is taken as lying on the eastern horizon of Jerusalem, and the Pillars of Hercules on the western. Since (as we know from *Inf.* i. 37) the Sun is in Aries (the Ram), Night is located in the opposite sign from him — that of Libra (the Scales). The Scales “fall from the hand of Night” when the Sun enters the sign, i.e. at the autumn equinox, when the nights become longer than the days (Night’s “hour of victory”).

l. 7: *fair Aurora*: the goddess of dawn. The white glimmer and the rosy flush of early daybreak are giving place to the yellow light of the rising sun.

ll. 17-24: *a light ... from each side of it ... a white I knew-not-what ... another whiteness bit by bit below*: Dante sees the ship coming up over the curve of the earth. The “light” is the glory about the head of the angel standing on the poop; the two white appearances which follow are the angel’s wings; the “other whiteness” rising gradually into sight “below” is the body of the standing angel and, finally, the hull of the boat.

l. 42: *so swift and light*: This is the “lighter skiff” to which Charon referred in *Inf.* iii. 91-3, when he said that Dante should pass by “another road and other ferries”.

l. 43 — *freehold of bliss*: reading *per iscritto*, and rendering “as though a charter of bliss had been conferred upon him” (the text is disputed).

l. 46: *in exitu Israel de Aegypto*: “When Israel came out of Egypt”, the opening verse of *Ps.* cxiv (*Vulg.* cxiii). In his *Letter to Can Grande*, Dante gives the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical (mystical) interpretations of this verse (see Introduction to *Inf.* p-15).

l. 56: *the Goat*: When Aries is on the eastern horizon the constellation of Capricornus (the Goat) is on the meridian. The rays of the rising sun have blotted out the starlight as far as mid-heaven, and are extending their brightness all over the sky.

l. 61: *Virgil replied, etc.*: It lends a homely touch to Purgatory to know that persons asking the way are liable, there as here, to receive the answer, “I’m a stranger here myself”.

l. 67: *whose breathing showed*: in the diffused dawnlight of Purgatory, as in the gloom of Hell, the spirits know Dante to be alive by seeing him breathe (cf. *Inf.* xxiii. 88-9). Later, the poet’s ingenuity — will devise various other means of recognition.

l. 70: *an olive-bough*: traditionally carried by the bearer of good tidings.

ll. 80-1: *three times, etc.*: Dante is here imitating Virgil (*Aen.* vi. 700-2), who in his turn is imitating Homer (*Od.* xi. 204-8). In hell, Dante represents the shades as weightless (*Inf.* viii. 26-7, xxiv. 32) but palpable (*Inf.* xxxii. 76 *sqq.* etc.). In Purgatory, the shade of Casella is here represented as impalpable to Dante’s grasp, though Dante can grasp Virgil (viii. 41), and the great spirits appointed to guide him can grasp and lift him (e.g. Lucy, ix. 59 and Matilda, xxxi, 100-101). The aery bodies (see *Purg.* xxv. 88-105) supplied to the shades are, in the Divine economy, made adequate to their

necessary functions (iii. 31-2); here it is not necessary that Dante should embrace Casella, but rather desirable that he should be reminded of the difference in their conditions.

l. 90: *wherefore dost thou* (i.e. a living man) *go*: (i.e. by the way of the dead?).

l. 91: *Casella*: little is known of him, but the old commentators all agree that he was a musician, born either in Florence or Pistoia, who had set some of Dante’s songs to music. Milton refers to the present passage in his *Sonnet to Mr H. Lawes*.

l. 92: *to come back here*: i.e. after death.

l. 93: *this long delay*: Casella had apparently died some little time previously, and Dante is surprised to find him only just arriving in Purgatory.

l. 97: *the just will*: i.e. God’s will, to which the angel’s will conforms.

l. 98: *for some three months*: The benefits of the papal indulgences granted to pilgrims in the Jubilee Year of 1300 were extended to the souls of those dying in that year. The Bull of Jubilee, though not promulgated till 22 Feb. 1300, was made retrospective to Christmas 1299 (the end of the year according to the style of the Roman Curia), so that by the date of Dante’s vision it has been operative in Purgatory for “some three months”.

l. 101: *Tiber*: The angel’s vessel sets out from the port of Rome, the City of St Peter and central see of Christendom.

l. 106: *new law*: “the conditions of your new life”.

l. 112: “*Love in my mind*”, etc.: Casella sings Dante’s own *canzone*, *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*, one of those included in the *Convivio*, for which he had presumably composed the setting.