

Purgatory.

l. 84: *the implications*: Dante grasps that (as we see later) any soul that has already (in life) made full satisfaction, both as to guilt and stain, for the sin purged on any particular Cornice, is not detained on that Cornice, but passes straight on to the next.

l. 89: *that being*: this is the spirit of Pope Adrian V (Ottobuono dei Fieschi); elected Pope July 1276; died in August of the same year (l. 103). He was papal legate to England in 1268.

l. 99: *Quod ego Petri fui successor scias*: “Thou must know that I was the successor of Peter”: i.e. that I was Pope. Adrian uses Latin as the official language of the Church.

l. 100: *twixt Chiaveri and Sestri*: the Fieschi, who were Counts of Lavagne, derived their title from a little river of that name, which enters the Gulf of Genoa between these two towns.

l. 104: *the Great Mantle*: i.e. of the Pope.

l. 134: *a fellow-servant* I: cf. *Rev.* xxii. 9.

l. 137: *Neque nubent* = “They neither marry [nor are given in marriage]” (*Matt.* xxii. 23-30; *Mark* xii. 18-25; *Luke* xx. 27-35): Every bishop, including the Pope, is ceremonially wedded to his see (which is why he wears a ring and changes his name to that of his diocese). But this marriage, like any earthly marriage, is dissolved in Heaven, together with all legal and official ties and all earthly rank and privilege (cf. v. 88 and note). This holds good, despite the sacramental nature of the ties of marriage, orders, and unction: for in Heaven there is no longer any need of sacraments.

l. 142: *Alagia*: she was the wife of Moroello Malaspina II (see Canto vii. 118, note).

Canto XX



THE STORY. *As they pass along the Fifth Cornice, the Poets hear the spirit of Hugh Capet proclaiming the Whip of Covetousness. Hugh utters a great lamentation over the crimes of the Capetian House and recites to Dante the examples of the Bridle. Proceeding on their way, the travellers are startled by feeling the whole Mountain shake from top to bottom, while all the prostrate penitents join in a great shout of Gloria in excelsis Deo. Dante is consumed with curiosity.*

Ill fares the will that fights a better will; 1
So, to content him, I, though discontent,
Withdrew the sponge ere it had drunk its fill.

I moved; my guide moved too, and on he went 4
Where space allowed, hugging the rock, like him
Who, on a rampart, hugs the battlement;

For those who, drop by drop from eyes a-brim, 7
Distil the drug that sets the whole world raving,
Lie, on the outer side, too near the rim.

Cursed be thou, thou ancient wolf, that having 10
More victims than all other beasts of prey,
Canst find no bottom to thine endless craving!

O Heaven, whose circling motions, some folk say, 13
Govern the fortunes of this world below,
When shall he come who'll hunt the brute away?

Thus we proceeded with few steps and slow, 16
Nor could I give my mind to anything
Except those shades who wept and sorrowed so.

Then, just ahead, by hap I heard one fling 19
A cry out: “Ah, sweet Mary!” — such a moan
As of a woman in her travailing.

“How poor thou wast we know,” the voice went on, 22
“Seeing to what hostel thou didst bring thy precious
And blissful burden, there to lay it down.”

And after that I heard: “O good Fabricius! 25
Thou didst prefer to live thy whole life long
Virtuous and poor, rather than rich and vicious!”

These words so pleased me that I sped along, 28
Eager to make acquaintance with the shade
Who, as it seemed to me, had given them tongue;

While he, continuing, praised the bounty paid 31
To the poor girls by Nicholas, whereby
To lead to honour their young maidenhead.

“Spirit that speakest such good things,” said I, 34
“Tell me, who wast thou, and why none with thee
Reiterate lifts these noble lauds on high.

Not without recompense thy words shall be, 37
If I return to walk the dwindling ways
Of life that fleets to death so rapidly.”

And he: “I’ll tell thee — not as toward yon place 40
Looking for succour, but as to salute
One, not yet dead, in whom shines such great grace.

Of that malignant tree was I the root 43
Whose shade so blights all Christian lands that small
Their harvest is of any wholesome fruit;

But if Douay, Lille, Ghent, and Bruges could call 46
Power enough up, vengeance should smite it — yea,
I pray it may, to Him that judgeth all.

On yonder side they called me Hugh Capet; 49
Of me those Philips and those Lewises
Were born, that have ruled France this many a day.

A Paris butcher sired me. When the lease 52
Of all the ancient kings ran out, except
For one, who’d donned the habit of grey frieze,

I found I held within my hand fast-gripped 55
The reins that sway the realm, and was at once
So strong in new possessions, so equipped

With friends, that to the widowed crown my son’s 58
Head was promoted; and from him first came
The dynasty of their anointed bones.

So long as till from every sense of shame 61
The great dower of Provence had set them free,
My race, though not worth much, earned little blame;

Then they began their course of robbery 64
By force and fraud; and next, to make amends,
Seized Normandy, Ponthieu, and Gascony.

Charles came to Italy; to make amends 67
He slaughtered Conradin; and after this
Packed Thomas off to Heaven, to make amends.

I see the day, and not long hence it is, 70
Another Charles shall out of France appear
To give the world more news of him and his.

Alone he comes, unarmed but for the spear 73
That Judas jousted with, and smites it clean
Through Florence, till the guts burst out of her.

No land he'll get of it, but shame and sin — 76
Ay, and for him the evil's the more grave
That he can work such harm and care no pin.

Another, once shipped captive o'er the wave, 79
I see sell his own daughter, haggling, too,
Like any corsair with a woman-slave.

What more to us, O Avarice, canst thou do, 82
Having so thrall'd our blood that it's mislaid
Even the kindness to its own flesh due?

8s To put crimes past and future in the shade, 85
I see the Lily storm Alagna's paling,
And in Christ's Vicar, Christ a captive made.

I see once more the mockery and the railing, 88
I see renewed the vinegar and gall,
'Twixt two live thieves I see his deadly nailing,

See the new Pilate so tyrannical 91
That, all unchartered and insatiate still,
He flaunts his plundering sails into Temple and all.

When shall I thrill, my God, when shall I thrill 94
To see the vengeance that, unseen, makes sweet
Thy wrath, within the secret of Thy will?

What of the sole Bride of the Paraclete 97
I said but now — the cry which turned thy course
Hither to me, to seek a gloss on it —

That's the response to every prayer of ours 100
While daylight lasts, but when night's curtains fold,
We use instead a contrary discourse;

Then we proclaim Pygmalion, that of old 103
Turned traitor, thief, and parricide, possessed
Wholly by his insatiate lust for gold;

Then avaricious Midas, whose request 106
Brought by its greed a retribution grim,
Fitly provides us with an endless jest;

Next, Achan's frenzy is our common theme, 109
Who stole the spoils; when here we tell the news
Joshua's wrath seems still to bite at him;

Sapphira and her spouse we then accuse, 112
And praise the hoofs that battered Heliodorus,
And all around the mountain rings abuse

Of Polymnestor murdering Polydorus; 115
And lastly: 'Tell us, Crassus — thou dost know —
What is the taste of gold?' we cry in chorus.

One will at times cry loud, another low, 118
For as the impulse moves us, shrill or soft
To make our utterance, we rehearse it so;

Nor was I lonely in that praise we waft 121
By daylight; but just then no urge was driving
Any one near to raise his voice aloft."

We had already left him, and were striving 124
To pick our arduous way along the rock
As best we might with all our powers' contriving,

When sudden I felt the whole mount shake with shock, 127
Like as to fall, and dullness gripped me, even
As it grips one who's going to the block.

No more stupendous thrust, for sure, was given 130
To Delos, ere Latona nested there
For to give birth to the twin eyes of heaven.

Then all around a shout went through the air, 133
Such that my master drew him to my side
And said, "Fear nothing; thou art in my care."

"*Gloria in excelsis*," far and wide — 136
As I perceived by hearing those near me —
All "*in excelsis Deo!*" called and cried.

Quite motionless and stupefied stood we, 139
Just like the shepherds who first heard that strain,
Till the strain closed and earthquake ceased to be.

Then we took up our holy way again, 142
Our eyes upon the prostrate shades, returning
Already to their wonted sad refrain.

Never with such a frantic lust for learning 145
Did any ignorance in my life assail me
As now, perpending mysteries past discerning —

Never in my life, if memory does not fail me. 148
I dared not waste time asking what this meant,
And my own eyes saw nothing there to tell me,

So I trudged on, perplexed and diffident. 151

The Images.

Hugh Capet: after the lust of spiritual power, the lust of temporal power: Pope and Emperor are alike victims of the "ancient wolf". Worldly ambition is accompanied by a more literal covetousness for wealth and possessions, with the inevitable manifestations of cruelty, callousness, and meanness, as exemplified in the history of the House of Capet.

Notes.

l. 10: *thou ancient wolf*: avarice (cf. *Inf.* i. 94-111 and *Images Inf.* vii. 8; and note to *Inf.* vi. 115).

l. 15: *when shall he come*: i.e. the “Greyhound” (cf. *Inf.* i. 101 *sqq.* and Images).

l. 20-33: “*Ah, sweet Mary!*” etc.: the spirits themselves cry out the “Whip” of the Covetous — examples of holy poverty and generosity. The first exemplar is, as always, the Blessed Virgin (ll. 19-24), with reference to the birth of Our Lord in the humble inn at Bethlehem. The second, from classical history, is Caius Fabricius, Roman Consul (282 b. c.) and Censor (275), who refused bribes when negotiating with the Samnites and with Pyrrhus, King of Epirus. He is mentioned by Virgil (*Aen.* vi. 844) as a man “great with little means”, and by Lucan (*Phars.* x. 151) as an example of simplicity of life. The third, from Christian history, is Nicholas, the fourth-century Bishop of Myra in Lycia (better known to many of us as “Santa Claus”). In order to save the three daughters of a poverty-stricken neighbour from having to go on the streets for their livelihood, he secretly threw into their window at night bags of gold, as dowries to enable them to marry respectably. (Hence his connexion with the nocturnal filling of stockings; his sledge and reindeer are the adventitious results of his being the patron saint of Russia; and the popular form of the name “Claus” comes from America by way of the old Dutch settlers who kept a holiday on his feast-day, 6 December).

l. 43: *of that malignant tree was I the root*: The speaker is Hugh Capet (l. 49), founder of the Capetian dynasty of the kings of France, which, by alliance, inheritance, or conquest, exercised a dominating influence throughout Europe for some two and a half centuries. Many of Dante’s most virulent hatreds attach to members of this family, though one of them (Charles Martel) was his personal friend, and is placed by him in the Heaven of Venus (*Para.* viii. 31 *sqq.*).

l. 46: *Douai, Lille, Ghent, and Bruges*: the four chief cities of Flanders, The allusion is to the Flemish wars of Philip the Fair, and in particular to the

treachery of Charles of Valois in 1299, when, having by a promise of liberal terms and honourable treatment of his person induced Count Guy of Flanders to surrender Ghent, he subjected Flanders to all the indignities of a conquered country, and sent the Count and his sons as prisoners to Paris, “the which”, says Villani (*Chron.* viii. 32), “was held throughout the universal world as a great disloyalty to so noble a gentleman.” The looked-for vengeance (ll. 47-8) was executed in 1302, when — the Flemings having made a great rally under Pierre König and Jean Beide — the French were beaten at the Battle of Courtrai, losing 6000 horse, including the Constable of France and the flower of their chivalry.

l. 49: *Hugh Capet*: This is certainly Hugh Capet the Great, Duke of France, Burgundy, and Aquitaine, and Count of Paris and Orleans (*d.* 956), and not his son Hugh Capet, King of France 987-96; but Dante has so “telescoped” dates and events as to appear to have confused the two. The Carolingian line did not in fact dwindle away to one representative in Duke Hugh’s time — nor even in that of his son. When Louis IV died in 954, he was succeeded by his 14-year-old son, Lothair, who was, however, king only in name, the reins of government being actually held by the powerful Duke Hugh (ll. 55-7), and, after the latter’s death in 956, by Hugh Capet the Younger. In 986 Lothair was succeeded by his son Louis V, surnamed *le Fainiant* (Do-nothing), who died fifteen months later without issue. With him, the direct Carolingian line came to an end; there remained his uncle, Charles of Lorraine, who was so highly unpopular that Hugh Capet the Younger was able to secure his own election to the throne, and was consecrated in 987, thus becoming founder of the “dynasty of their [the Capets’] anointed bones” (l. 60). Charles of Lorraine spent the rest of his days as King Hugh’s prisoner, and, after an attempt by his son Otto to claim the crown, his branch of the family fled to Germany and extinguished itself in obscurity at the beginning of the eleventh century.

l. 50: *those Philips and those Lewises*: From 1060 to 1322, when the Capetian line became extinct with Philip V, every king of France was called either Philip or Louis.

l. 52: *a Paris butcher sired me*: Hugh Capet the Elder derived in fact from the noble line of the Counts of Paris, but legends accumulated about his name. He was said to be descended (a) from St Arnoul; (b) from Charlemagne; (c) from a butcher or other plebeian stock. This last was the popular tradition, widely current in Italy in Dante's time.

l. 54: *one who'd donned the habit*: This is the fundamental error which has given rise to all the confusion. No member of the Carolingian royal house took the habit; Dante is probably mixing up the Carolingians with the Merovingians, whose last member, Chilperic III, did become a monk after his deposition in 752. Or he may have been following (regardless of chronology) a legend which had popularly attached itself to Charles of Lorraine (Godfrey of Viterbo, *Memoria Saeculorum*, xii-xiii).

l. 62: *the great dower of Provence*: the wealth brought to the House of Capet through the marriages of Louis DC (St Louis) and his brother Charles of Anjou respectively with Margaret and Beatrice, the two daughters of Raymond Berenger, Count of Provence (cf. *Purg.* vii. 124-9 and note).

l. 66: *Normandy, Ponthieu, and Gascony*: Normandy had actually been taken from King John of England in 1202, but the title remained in dispute. In 1259, by a treaty with Louis DC, Henry III renounced his claims to Normandy, Anjou, Touraine, and Poitou, and did homage for Aquitaine, in return for the recognition of his rights in Perigord, Limousin, and other provinces. Gascony was ceded by Edward I to Philip the Fair in 1295, but (it was claimed) only as a formality, his rights being secured by a secret clause which was later repudiated.

l. 67: *Charles came to Italy*: this was the expedition of Charles I of Anjou (son of Louis VIII) against Manfred (cf. Canto ii. 112 and note), which

culminated in the Battle of Benevento (1266); later, in 1268, Charles defeated Conradin at Tagliacozzo (cf. *Inf.* xxviii. 17 and note) and had him beheaded. (See Glossary.)

l. 69: *packed Thomas off to heaven*: according to a popular legend, St Thomas Aquinas was poisoned by the orders of Charles of Anjou while on his way to the Council of Lyons in 1274. There is no reason to believe that his death was not in fact perfectly natural.

l. 69: *to make amends (per ammenda)*: this ironic phrase is given savage emphasis by its repetition at each rhyme of the *terzain*. Some MSS. and editors, however, read *per vicenda* ("for a change") at the end of l. 67.

l. 71-5: *another Charles, etc.*: Charles of Valois, brother of Philip the Fair. His "peace-making" intervention in Florence (1301) delivered the city over to the Black party, and brought about the expulsion of all the Whites, including Dante himself (see *Inf.* Introduction, p-6). *No land he'll get of it* — an allusion to his nickname "Lackland" (*Sansterre*).

l. 73: *the spear that Judas jousted with*: i.e. treachery.

l. 79: *another [Charles]*: this is Charles II of Anjou ("the Lame"), son of Charles I, and father of Dante's friend Charles Martel. He was taken prisoner by the Spanish Admiral in a naval action against Pedro of Aragon (1284). He accepted a large sum of money from the elderly and disreputable Azzo d'Este as payment for his daughter's hand in marriage.

l. 86-90: *I see the Lily, etc.*: In 1303 the long struggle between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair ("the Lily" of France) terminated in a notorious scandal and tragedy. Philip, who found the Papal claims thwarting to his own ambitions, had demanded a general council to examine charges of heresy and profligacy against Boniface; the Pope retorted by excommunicating Philip and releasing his subjects from their allegiance. On the eve of the publication of the Bull of Excommunication in the Cathedral of Alagna (now Anagni) where Boniface was residing, Sciarra di Colonna —

whose family had many grievances to avenge — aided by William de Nogaret, the emissary of the King of France, broke in upon the Pope, laid violent hands upon him, and held him prisoner for three days, sacking his palace, and subjecting him to many indignities. The old man (he was then about 86) was eventually rescued by the people of Alagna, but died at Rome within a month, of shock and mortification.

Nothing in Dante is more paradoxical or more magnificent than his treatment of Boniface VIII. Of all his enemies, personal and political, none is so hateful to him as Boniface. Yet, stained with simony, with murder, with treason, with the rape and robbery of the Church and the ruin of the Empire, his see usurped, so that it now stands “vacant in God’s Son’s sight” (*Para.* xxvii. 23-4); the tomb of Peter made by his means a sewer of filth and blood, a scandal to all Heaven, and a delight to the Great Apostate (*ibid.*), nevertheless, Christ’s Vicar is Christ’s Vicar still, identified with Him in the sacrament of his anointing; and to lay hand on him is to crucify Christ afresh. This balance of two equal and opposed indignations, both blazing, and mutually unmitigated, is a triumph of the passionate intellect unsurpassed in literature and scarcely paralleled.

l. 88-90: *I see once more ... I see*, etc.: The distinction between the man and his function which lies at the base of all Dante’s ambivalences (see *Inf.* xxxiv. Images: *Judas, Brutus, and Cassius*), is here not quite clear-cut. This *terzain*, with its repeated “I saw ... I saw ...” echoes verses written by Boniface himself upon the Blessed Virgin standing at the foot of the cross and seeing the sufferings of her Son, and the “vinegar mingled with gall”. It is Dante’s tribute to the personal qualities of his enemy. And indeed the old man met his persecutors with great courage and dignity. “Seeing himself abandoned by all his cardinals ... even by most of his own household, he ... said valiantly: ‘Since like Jesus Christ I am to be taken by treachery and needs must die, at least I will die as Pope.’ And immediately he caused

himself to be arrayed in the mantle of St Peter, with the crown of Constantine on his head, and the Keys in his hand, and set himself in the Papal Chair.” (*Villani, Chron.* viii. 63.)

l. 90: *two live thieves*: Colonna and Nogaret, “living robbers”, as contrasted with the dying robbers between whom Christ was nailed.

l. 91: *the new Pilate*: Philip the Fair.

l. 93: *into Temple and all*: The rich and powerful order of the Knights Templars was suppressed in 1312 by Pope Clement V at Philip’s instigation. The pretext was an accusation of heresy, which may or may not have been founded on fact.

l. 95: *the vengeance that makes sweet Thy wrath*: God’s wrath, being pure of fear or passion or impatience, is without the haste, bitterness, and violence which we associate with human anger.

l. 97: *the sole Bride of the Paraclete*: the Blessed Virgin (*Luke* i. 35). Hugh, having answered the first part of Dante’s question (“who wast thou?”), now proceeds to the second (ll. 35-6) showing in what manner the penitents of the Fifth Cornice pursue their allotted Meditation.

ll. 103-17: *then we proclaim*: Having explained that the Whip is recited by day, Hugh now enumerates the examples composing the Bridle. The first, taken from the *Aeneid* (i. 350 *sqq.*), is Dido’s brother Pygmalion, who for love of gold murdered her husband Sichaeus before the very altar of the gods. The second, from classical Mythology, is Midas, king of Phrygia, who, being granted one wish by Bacchus, whom he had obliged, avariciously desired that everything he touched might be turned to gold. Finding that as a result all his food became uneatable, he was obliged to ask to have the gift taken away again (*Ovid, Metam.* xi. 100 *sqq.*). The third, from the O.T., is Achan. At the capture of Jericho, Joshua ordered all the captured treasure to be consecrated to the Lord; but Achan seized part of it for himself, and he and his family were stoned to death by Joshua’s orders and their *bodies*

burned (*Josh.* vi. and vii). The fourth, from the N.T., is Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who, when the first Christian converts had all their possessions in common, sold some property for the use of the community, but brought the Apostles only part of the price, saying that it was the whole. Peter rebuked them for this gratuitous hypocrisy, and they fell dead at his feet. (*Acts* iv. 32-7, v. 1-11.) The fifth, from the O.T. Apocrypha, is Heliiodorus, chancellor to King Seleucus, who went in arms to rob the Temple treasury at Jerusalem so that the king might get the money. But “the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused a great apparition ... a horse with a terrible rider upon him and adorned with beautiful trappings, and he ran fiercely and smote at Heliiodorus with his forefeet, and it seemed that he that sat upon the horse had complete harness of gold” (2 *Mace.* iii. 1-40). The sixth, from the *Aeneid* (iii. 49 *sqq.*) is Polymnestor, King of Thrace, to whom Priam of Troy had entrusted a great reserve of gold by the hands of his son Polydorus. When Troy fell, Polymnestor killed Polydorus and took the gold for himself (*cf. Inf.* xxx. 13-21). The seventh, from classical history, is Marcus Licinius Crassus, surnamed “the Rich”, triumvir with Caesar and Pompey, 60 B.C. He was killed in battle against the Parthians, whose king, Hyrodes, knowing his notorious cupidity, had molten gold poured down his throat.

l. 131: *Delos, ere Latona nested there*: Delos, in the Greek Archipelago, was originally a floating island; but when Latona came to it, fleeing from the jealousy of Juno, Jupiter made it fast; and there Latona gave birth to the divine twins Apollo and Diana.

l. 136-8: *Gloria in excelsis ... Deo*: “Glory to God in the highest”: the angels’ hymn when announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds. (*Luke* ii. 8-14.)

Canto XXI



THE STORY. *WHILE* passing along the Fifth Cornice, Dante and Virgil are overtaken by the shade of the poet Statius, who tells them that the shouts and the shaking of the Mountain celebrate the release of a soul from Purgatory, and explains how that release is effected. It is he himself who has just risen up from over 500 years of prostration among the Covetous. In answer to Virgil’s question, he names himself saying how much he wishes he could have seen the author of the *Aeneid*, to whose example his own poetry owes so much. Despite Virgil’s warning, Dante betrays himself by an irrepressible smile and, on being desired to explain this apparent breach of good manners, has to admit that his companion is Virgil himself. Only Virgil’s own earnest dissuasions prevent Statius from falling at his feet.

The natural thirst which nothing quenches, bar 1
That water which was begged, a bounty free,
By the poor woman of Samaria,

Distressed me still, while haste was urging me 4
Behind my guide along the cluttered way,
Where the just vengeance moved my sympathy;

When lo, now! like the tale in Luke — how they, 7
Those two wayfaring men, saw Christ appear,
New-risen from the rocky tomb that day —

A shade appeared to us, who from the rear 10
O’ertook us, while, with eyes downcast to view
The prostrate throngs, we knew not he was near