

neglected capital was at this period impoverished, squalid, and disorderly, comparing very unfavourably with that of other Italian cities.

l. 118: *most high Jove*: the name “Jove” (possibly on account of its resemblance to “Jehovah”) is used more than once by Petrarch to designate “God the Father”, or “God” in general. Its use here with special reference to God the Son is more unusual: but Dante, being an accurate theologian, never hesitates to call the Second Person of the Trinity “God”, without qualification, in whatever connexion.

l. 125: *Marcellus*: a Roman consul, who supported Pompey against Julius Caesar, and was a violent opponent of the Empire. Dante means that any demagogue who defies the constitution is hailed by the populace as a hero.

l. 127-51: *Florence, my Florence*, etc.: the eulogy is, of course, ironical from start to finish (*cf.* the parallel passage in *Inf.* xxvi. 1-3).

l. 139: *Athens*: the cradle of Greek art and culture; *Lacedaemon*, chief city of Sparta, renowned for its laws and administration.

l. 147: *changed thy every member*: an allusion to the perpetual shift of parties, banished and recalled in turn (see *Inf.* Introduction, p-30). We need not suppose that Dante was altogether fair to Florence, whose institutions had all the qualities, as well as all the defects, of elasticity.

Canto VII



THE STORY. *AFTER repeatedly embracing his fellow-Mantuan, Sordello asks who the travellers are, and Virgil names himself Sordello at once drops down to clasp his knees, inquiring anxiously about Virgil's fate in the after-life, and is answered. In reply to Virgil's question, he then explains the Rule of the Mountain, which prevents any climbing after sunset. He then leads the Poets to a beautiful Valley, where they see a group of highly distinguished persons, representing the Third Class of the Late-Repentant — the Preoccupied — many of whom Sordello points out and names.*

When with a glad and solemn courtesy ¹
Greetings had been exchanged three times or four,
Sordel drew back: “Who are you, though?” said he,

“Ere to this mount those spirits fit to soar ⁴
Upward to God were brought first to be shriven,
Octavian to my bones gave sepulture.

Virgil am I; and I came short of Heaven ⁷
For no default, save that I had not faith.”
In such wise was my leader's answer given.

Like one who sees what takes away his breath, ¹⁰
Who half-believes, and then must hesitate
And doubt: “It is — it cannot be,” he saith;

So seemed that shade; and then, returning straight, ¹³
He stooped before him, and with bended head

Embraced him where the humble clasp the great.

“O glory of the Latins! thou,” he said, ¹⁶

“In whom our tongue showed powers beyond compare!

O deathless fame of the land where I was bred,

What merit or grace has let me see thee here? ¹⁹

If of thy words I am but worthy, say,

Art thou from Hell, and from what cloister there?”

The other answered: “I have made my way ²²

Through every circle of the realm of woe,

Moved by Heaven’s power, which brings me here to-day.

Not what I did, but what I did not do, as ²⁵

Lost me the sight of that high Sun, the prize

Thou seekest, whom too late I learned to know.

Below there in the deep, a region lies ²⁸

Made sad by darkness only, not by pain,

And where no shrieks resound, but only sighs;

And there dwell I, with guiltless infants, ta’en ³¹

By nipping fangs of death, untimely soon,

Ere they were washed from sinful human stain;

And there dwell I, with those who ne’er put on ³⁴

The three celestial virtues, yet, unsinning,

Knew all the rest and practised every one.

But now, point out how we may best be winning ³⁷

Our way — if thou dost know it and canst tell —

Upward to Purgatory’s true beginning.”

“There’s no set place,” said he, “where we must dwell; ⁴⁰

I may go up and round, and at thy side

I’ll guide thee on as far as possible.

But see how it draws on to eventide; ⁴³

‘Twere well to think — since none can climb by night —

Of some good lodging where we may abide.

There are some souls apart here on the right; ⁴⁶

I’ll bring thee to them, if thou wilt permit,

For meeting them will give thee true delight.”

“How’s this?” was the reply; “if one thought fit ⁴⁹

To go up in the dark, would one be stopped

By somebody? or merely fail at it?”

“Look!” said the good Sordello, and he stooped ⁵²

And drew upon the ground; “thou couldst not cross

Even this line when once the sun had dropped.

Not that there’s any hindrance, save the loss ⁵⁵

Of light, to going up; it is night’s gloom

Makes impotent the will and thwarts it thus.

We might indeed go down again, and roam ⁵⁸

All round the hill, while the horizon’s ring

Seals down the day, until the morning come.”

“Nay,” said my lord, as it were marvelling, ⁶¹

“Lead on then; bring us where thy speech conveys

Such pleasant promise of fair harbouring.”

We’d not gone far when I perceived a place ⁶⁴
Scooped, so to call it, from that sloping lawn,
As valleys here scoop out a mountain’s face.

“That’s where we’ll go, to yonder spot withdrawn,” ⁶⁷
The spirit said, “at which the ridges dip
To make a fold, and there await the dawn.”

A winding path, not level but not steep, ⁷⁰
Led us to where the rising hill-spurs lose
Half of their height along the valley’s lip.

Gold and fine silver, crimson and ceruse, ⁷³
Wood yellow-lustrous, clear cerulean dye,
Indigo, fresh-cracked emerald’s brilliant hues,

Matched with the foliage and the flowers that lie ⁷⁶
Heaped in that lap, would faint, as minor faints
Beneath its major, and show dim thereby.

Here nature had not only plied her paints, ⁷⁹
But had distilled, unnameable, unknown,
The mingled sweetness of a thousand scents.

Salve Regina singing on and on, ⁸²
Close-hid till then beneath the valley’s lee,
On flowers and grass I there saw spirits strown.

Our Mantuan guide began: “Ask not of me ⁸⁵
That I should lead you down to them before

This last thin rim of sun nests in the sea.

You’ll con their looks and all their actions o’er ⁸⁸
Far better from this terrace than among
Their company, upon the dell’s low floor.

He that sits yonder, highest of the throng, ⁹¹
Who looks a do-naught and a task-neglecter,
And does not move his lips to join their song,

Is Emperor Rudolph, Italy’s protector ⁹⁴
By rights, who might have staunch’d her mortal wound;
There’s one shall come — too late to resurrect her.

And he who seems to comfort him was crowned ⁹⁷
King of that realm whose waters Moldau sends
Down to the Elbe, and Elbe to ocean’s bound;

His name was Ottocar — in swaddling bands ¹⁰⁰
A better man than bearded Wenceslas
His son, who lolls at ease and folds his hands,

The snub-nose there, who’s talking of some case ¹⁰³
In conclave with that lord of kindly mien,
Fled, died, and brought the lilies to disgrace;

Behold him beat his breast, the other lean ¹⁰⁶
His bedded cheek upon his palm, and glance
Mournfully down, with bitter sighs and keen;

These are the father of the Pest of France, ¹⁰⁹
And father-in-law; they know his crimes and vices;

And hence the grief that stabs them like a lance.

The burly form, whose voice in concert rises 112
With that of Hook-nose yonder, was a lord
Girt with all praise of knightly enterprises;

And had that lad lived longer afterward 115
Who sits behind him, he'd have shown this age
The wine of worth from cup to cup outpoured.

Not so with the remaining lineage; 118
Unto the realms Frederick and James are heirs.
But none now holds the nobler heritage.

The root of human virtue seldom bears 121
Like branches; and the Giver wills it so,
That men may know it is His gift, not theirs.

These words hold good no less for Hook-nose, too. 124
Than Pedro who sings near him, as lamenting
Apulia and Provence already know;

For high as Constance, of her lord still vaunting. 127
Can crow o'er Beatrice and Margaret,
So far beneath his seed the plant shows wanting.

Look! there the king of simple life is set 130
Alone — Harry of England, far more blest
In those fair branches that he did beget.

And modestly below these others placed, 133
And gazing up, is William the Marchese,

Whose war with Alessandria left distressed

The men of Montferrat and Canavese. 136

The Images.

The Rule of the Mountain: Throughout the *Purgatory*, the Sun is frequently taken as the symbol of God (e.g. in l. 26 of this canto). *Allegorically* therefore, the meaning of the Rule of the Mountain, which prevents all ascent between sunset and sunrise, is that no progress can be made in the penitent life without the illumination of Divine Grace. When this is withheld, the soul can only mark time, if it does not lose ground, while waiting patiently for the renewal of the light. Nights in *Purgatory* thus correspond to those periods of spiritual darkness or “dryness” which so often perplex and distress the newly-converted. (Cf. *John* xi. 9-10.)

The Late-Repentant: (3) The Preoccupied. The third class of the Late-Repentant is composed of those who neglected their spiritual duties through too much preoccupation with worldly cares. They occupy the highest and most beautiful place upon the Second Terrace, because their concern was, after all, for others rather than for themselves. As with the other inhabitants of Ante-*Purgatory*, the taint or habit of their former sin still clings to them: they continue to discuss and worry about the affairs of the family or the nation. As we learn from *Para.* xvii. 136-42, Dante in his vision is shown only the most striking and illustrious representatives in each category; but we need not doubt that he would place in this class not only kings and statesmen, but also humbler examples of the Preoccupied, such as anxious parents, overburdened housewives and breadwinners, social workers, busy organizers, and others who are so “rushed off their feet” that they forget to say their prayers. In his *Convivio* (see *Inf.* Introduction, p-2) Dante speaks with sympathy of “the domestic and civic cares by which the greater number of

people are quite properly absorbed, so that they have no leisure for speculation.”

Notes.

l. 3: *who are you, though?*: the “you” is here plural; but Sor-dello’s excitement at hearing Virgil’s name makes him forget to ask about Dante: and since the sun is behind the mountain (vi. 56-7), there is no betraying shadow to arouse his curiosity. Note how carefully and cunningly the poet prepares his effects over some 290 lines so that he may keep Virgil in the foreground at this point and reserve the revelation that Dante is alive (which would here be an anticlimax) for viii. 59, where he can make good dramatic use of it.

l. 4: *ere to this mount*, etc.: i.e., before Christ’s Harrowing of Hell. Previous to that, “no human soul had ever seen salvation” (*Inf.* iv. 63); the souls of the elect had gone, not to Purgatory, but to Limbo, from which Christ released them.

l. 6: *Octavian*: Caesar Augustus (see Glossary). *Cf.* iii. 27.

l. 8: *I had not faith*: see *Inf.* iv. Images.

l. 26: *that high Sun*: i.e. God.

l. 35: *the three celestial virtues*: the theological (Christian) graces of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which the good pagans did not know, though perfect in their practice of the four cardinal (natural) virtues of Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude (cf. L 37-8 and note).

l. 40: *there’s no set place*: an echo of *Aen.* vi. 673-5, where the Sibyl asks: “What region [of Hades], what place is the abode of Anchises?” and is answered: “*Nulli certa domus* — none has any fixed abode: we inhabit the shady groves, the river-banks are our bed, the freshly-watered meadows our dwelling.”

l. 82: *Salve Regina*: the compline hymn to the Blessed Virgin, beginning: “Hail, O Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope, hail!”

To thee we cry, the exiled children of Eve, to thee we sigh, weeping and lamenting in this valley of tears.”

l. 94: *Emperor Rudolph*: Rudolph of Hapsburg (see Glossary) mentioned in vi. 103 in connexion with his son Albert I. He is placed in this section of Ante-Purgatory probably on account of having been so preoccupied with affairs at home that he neglected the Empire to which he had been divinely called (vi. 103-6).

l. 96: *there’s one shall come*: i.e. Henry VII of Luxemburg (see *Inf.* Introduction, p-7).

ll. 100-1: *Ottocar* [II] and *Wenceslas* [IV] of Bohemia: See Glossary.

l. 103: *the snub-nose*: Philip III of France, called “the Bold”, defeated and killed in 1285 when fighting against Peter III of Aragon. (See Glossary.)

l. 104: *that lord of kindly mien*: Henry the Fat of Navarre, brother of Tibbald the Good (*Inf.* xxii. 52 and note); and see Glossary.

l. 109: *The Pest of France*: Philip IV of France, called “the Fair”, for whom Dante never has a good word (see *Inf.* xix. 87: *Purg.* xx. 91, xxxii. 152: *Para.* xix. 118-20). He was the son of Philip the Bold, and married Joan, the daughter of Henry the Fat. (See Glossary.)

l. 112-13: *the burly form* is that of Peter III of Aragon, called “the Great”, who married Manfred’s daughter Constance (iii, 143). *Hook-nose* is Charles I of Anjou, whom Peter drove from the throne of Sicily. The two former enemies now “sing in concert”. (See Glossary.)

l. 115-20: *that lad*, etc.: Alfonso III, King of Aragon, son of Peter III, died in 1291; his brothers James II (King of Sicily and later of Aragon) and Frederick II (King of Sicily), survived to 1327 and 1337 respectively. Dante is saying that Frederick and James inherited only their father’s possessions, whereas Alfonso, if he had lived, would have inherited also his “praise of knightly enterprise” (“the nobler heritage”).

l. 124-9: *These words hold good ... shows wanting*: All this is merely an involved way of saying that Charles I's offspring is as degenerate as Peter III's. Charles II, the son of Charles I ("Hook-nose") was king of Naples (Apulia) and Provence; Charles I married successively Beatrix of Provence and Margaret of Burgundy; Peter II married Constance. Consequently: "The plant (Charles II) is as *inferior* to the seed (Charles I) from which it sprang as Constance may boast her husband (Peter III) *superior* to the husband of Beatrix and Margaret (Charles I), as Apulia and Provence know only too well." (Not, perhaps, one of Dante's best efforts.)

l. 130-1: *the king of simple life ... Harry of England*: Henry III. Dante's estimate of him seems to be derived from Villani's *Chronicle*: "Of Richard [I, Coeur-de-Lion] was born Henry his son who reigned after him, but was a simple man and of good faith and of little worth. Of the said Henry was born the good King Edward [I], still reigning at the present time, who did great things" (v. 4): and in another passage: "Henry, father of the good Edward, was a man of simple life, so that the barons held him for naught" (vii. 39). Dante can scarcely have thought that Henry neglected his soul in his care for his subjects, since he died, after 56 years of incompetent misgovernment, with a great reputation for piety: "In proportion as the king was held to be lacking in prudence in worldly actions, so he was the more distinguished for devotion to Our Lord; for it was his custom to hear three sung masses daily and, since this was not enough for him he assiduously attended private masses" (Matthew Paris). In his case, therefore, the fault which he is expiating in Ante-Purgatory may be the neglect of his kingly, through preoccupation with his religious, duties (since to pray when one ought to be working is as much a sin as to work when one ought to be praying). This may be the reason why he sits apart from the others, though the reason usually given is that England was outside the Empire. Henry is one of the rulers blamed by Sordello for sloth and cowardice in *The Lament for Blacatz*.

l. 134: *William the Marchese*: William, Marquis of Montferrat (Monferrato) and Canavese (1254-92), headed a league of important towns against Charles of Anjou. In 1290, one of these, Alessandria in Piedmont, rebelled against him, and he was captured by the citizens and kept on show in an iron cage for seventeen months until he died. An attempt by his son to avenge him ended in the invasion of Montferrat by the Alessandrines.