

executed, but was rebuked by Pisistratus in the words quoted. The story is told by Valerius Maximus.

l. 97-9: *that high city*, etc.: Athens, the centre of ancient Greek culture and civilization. Neptune and Minerva (*Gk.* Poseidon and Athene) competed as to which of them should give the city its name. Neptune produced a salt spring out of the earth, and Minerva an olive tree; the tree was adjudged by the gods to be the better gift, and the city was named for Athene.

l. 106-14: *then I beheld a mob*, etc.: the third vision, of the stoning of Stephen (*Acts* vii. 54-60), is an example of meekness towards human foes.

l. 117: *error not untrue*: i.e. Dante realized that the things he had seen were only visions, but nevertheless visions of real events.

l. 129: *nor could thy least thought hide*: we are meant, I think, to understand that Virgil has not seen the visions directly, but read Dante's mind (as he did, for example, in *Inf.* xvi. 118-20). He explains that he asked Dante about them, not for information, but to remind him of the purpose of such visions, i.e. that a man should not lose himself in dreaming but be stimulated to fresh endeavour.

Canto XVI



THE STORY. *As they stagger blindly through the Smoke, the Poets hear the prayer of the penitent Wrathful rising about them on all sides. Dante is addressed by the spirit of Marco Lombardo, who discourses with him on Determinism and Free Will, and on the misdirection of the Temporal Power. A thinning of the Smoke announces the imminent approach of the Angel of the Third Cornice.*

Darkness of hell, or midnight disendowed 1
Of every planet, under a poor shred
Of starveling sky hung thick as thick with cloud,

Never had wrapped a veil about my head 4
So gross in grain and gritty to the touch
As was that smoke which held us blanketed;

One's eyes could not keep open, insomuch 7
That my good escort came up close beside,
Offering a trusty shoulder to my clutch.

Even as a blind man goes behind his guide, 10
Lest he should stray or, to the jeopardy
Of life and limb, should stumble or collide,

So through that foul and acrid air went I, 13
Harkening to him who led me: "Take good care
We don't get parted!" was his constant cry.

Then I heard voices speak, entreating there ¹⁶
The Lamb of God who takes our sins away
For peace and mercy; this was all their prayer,

For *Agnus Dei* did they still begin, ¹⁹
So that one speech, one measure kept they all,
And perfect concord seemed to fold them in.

“Master,” said I, “these voices I hear call ²²
Are spirits?” “Thou art right,” said he, “they go
Loosening the knot of wrath that held them thrall.”

“Say, who and what art thou that cleavest through ²⁵
Our smoke, and speak’st like one who reckons still
The time by kalends as the living do?”

Thus from their midst a voice was audible: ²⁸
“Answer.” my master said, “then ask, and see
If this is the right way to mount the hill.”

“Creature of God,” said I, “now cleansing thee ³¹
To come home beauteous to thy Maker’s house,
Wouldst thou hear wonders, walk along with me.”

“As far,” he answered, “as our rule allows ³⁴
I’ll follow; though the smoke has made us blind,
Hearing instead of sight shall neighbour us.”

Then: “In those bands death shall at last unbind,” ³⁷
Thus I began, “I scale the heavenly ways;
Hell and its woes I’ve passed and left behind.

Now, as God deigns admit me to His grace ⁴⁰
Thus far, and bids me to behold His court
After this fashion, strange in modern days,

Hide not whose life it was thy death cut short, ⁴³
But tell me; and tell if a true course I frame
Stairward; thy words shall guide us to our port.”

“Lombard was I and Marco was my name; ⁴⁶
I knew the world and loved that worth upright
Whereat no man will now bend bow to aim;

Rightly thou steerest for the stairs’ next flight.” ⁴⁹
Thus he replied, and added: “Pray consent
To pray for me when thou hast gained the height.”

“Now by my faith I bind me to content ⁵²
Thy will,” said I; “but all my mind’s so vext
With doubt, I’ll burst if I don’t give it vent.

Singly at first, now doubly I’m perplext ⁵⁵
By these thy words, confirming, as they do,
Here and elsewhere, my problem’s theme and text.

The world indeed is barren through and through, ⁵⁸
As thou hast said, of virtue and of worth,
Sin-laden and sin-clouded — that’s most true;

But show me, pray, the cause of all this dearth, ⁶¹
That I may see it and make others see,
For some in heaven locate it, some on earth.”

A deep sigh, wrung by grief to an *Ay me!* 64
Came first, and then: "Brother, the world is blind,
And thou art of it, sure enough." said he.

"By you who live, causation's all assigned 67
To the sole stars, as though they could compel
Into their own fixt paths all things combined.

If that were so, it would destroy free will 70
Within you, and it were unjust indeed
You should have joy for good or grief for ill.

Promptings of motion from your stars proceed — 73
I say not all, but if I did, what then?
Light's given you to know right from wrong at need.

And free will, so its stuff can stand the strain 76
Of its first tussles with the stars, will fight,
If nourished well, to win the whole campaign;

For of a nobler nature, mightier might, 79
You're the free subjects — might which doth create
A mind in you that's no star's perquisite.

So, if the world now goes with crooked gait 82
The cause is in yourselves for you to trace;
I'll be thy scout therein to set thee straight.

Forth of His hands whose brooding tenderness 85
Loves her or ere she comes to be, is brought,
Laughing and weeping, like a babe that plays,

The simple, infant soul, that, all untaught, 88
But moved by a glad Maker, turns with pleasure
To this or that by which her fancy's caught.

First she's attracted by some trifling treasure, 91
Then runs, beguiled, in hot pursuit to scour,
Save manage sway her love with the curb's pressure.

Hence did we need the curb of legal power, 94
And need a ruler, one that could, and should,
Glimpse the true city, or at least the tower.

The laws are there, but what hand makes them good? 97
None; for the shepherd that goes on before
Parts not the hoof, though he can chew the cud.

Therefore the flock, seeing their guide set store 100
By such goods only as themselves have craved,
Batten on these, and look for nothing more.

Clear cause, then, why the world's so ill-behaved 103
Is that it's governed after an ill mode,
Not that the nature in you is depraved.

Of old, when Rome reformed the world, she showed 106
Two suns to lighten the twin ways that went
One with the other: world's road and God's road;

But one has quenched the other; the sword's blent 109
Now with the crook; when one and other meet
Their fusion must produce bad government;

For one fears not the other when one seat 112
Holds both; believ'st thou not that this is so?
The plant's known by its fruit — look to the wheat!

On soil that's fed by Adige and Po 115
Once, ere the strife with Frederick's rule began,
Worth and high courtesy were wont to grow;

Now there's free travel; every ruffian 118
Goes safe there that for shame hath long forsook
Commerce or speech with any decent man.

Three greybeards still, in whom old times rebuke 121
The new, live on and find time tedious
Till on a better world God bid them look:

Conrad Palazzo, the good Gerard — those, 124
And Guy Castel, whom fitter 'twere to call
'The simple Lombard' as the French phrase goes.

Henceforth say this: the Church of Rome doth fall 127
Into the mire, and striving to combine
Two powers in one, fouls self and load and all."

"O," then said I, "well argued, Marco mine! 130
Clearly I see now why the heritage
Was barred to all the sons of Levi's line.

But who's this sample of a lineage 133
Now lost, this Gerard who is left awhile,
Thou sayest, to reprove a barbarous age?"

"Is this a test?" said he, "or is it guile? 136
Not know Good Gerard? That sounds strange, if true,
Upon a Tuscan tongue! How else to style

The man I know not, unless this will do — 139
The style his daughter Gaia still displays.
God keep you both! I can't go on with you.

See how beyond the smoke the gathering rays 142
Brighten to whiteness now! The angel's near,
And ere he sees me I must go on my ways."

Then he turned back, and more he would not hear. 145

The Images.

The Penance of the Wrathful: the Smoke: the effect of Wrath is to blind the judgement and to suffocate the natural feelings and responses, so that a man does not know what he is doing. The penance of the Wrathful is therefore, once again, the endurance of the sin itself. Dante habitually connects Wrath with images of smoke and suffocation — cf. the Sullen Wrathful in the fifth circle of Hell (*Inf.* vii. 118-26), whose "hearts smouldered with a sulky smoke", and whose punishment is to lie gurgling and choking in the muddy bed of Styx.

Marco Lombardo: Dante here shows us only one image of the Wrathful — probably because he has already given sufficient space in the ferocious and sullen types in the *Inferno*. In Marco he offers a third, and more pleasing, variation: the open-hearted, generous man with a hot temper.

Notes.

l. 16: *voices:* these are the voices of the wrathful.

l. 19: *Agnus Dei [qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, dona nobis pacem]:* "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy

upon us; grant us Thy peace”: this is the Prayer of the Third Cornice. It is taken from the Canon of the Mass, and derives from *John* i. 29.

ll. 25-6: *that cleavest through our smoke and speak'st*: the spirit cannot see Dante, but he notices the disturbance of the smoke by the passage of Dante's solid body, and the wheezing and choking of his mortal lungs when speaking in this Purgatorial “London Particular”.

l. 26-7: *who reckons still the time by kalends*: This is another of Dante's indications that the time and space of Purgatory do not correspond with ours (cf. ii. 68 and note); *Kalends*: the first day of any Roman month: hence, the system of reckoning time by the *calendar*.

l. 42: *strange in modern days*: cf. *Inf.* ii. 13-30.

l. 46: *Marco*: of Marco Lombardo (i.e. of Lombardy, or of the Lombard family) not much is certainly known. Most of the old commentators agree that he lived at Venice in the thirteenth century, and was a man of great courtesy, generosity, and nobility of mind, though of a peppery temper.

l. 55: *singly at first, now doubly*: Dante has been worrying all this time over Guido del Ducas's words (in Canto xiv) about the wickedness and degeneracy of the world. Marco's remarks, confirming Guido's opinion, encourage him to ask whether this wickedness is determined by destiny (the influence of the stars) or due to the corruption of man's will.

l. 63: *in heaven*: i.e. in astral influences.

ll. 67 *sqq.*: *by you who live*, etc.: Here begins the first great Discourse on Free Will — a subject with which Dante is always deeply concerned. It may not be immediately obvious why the discussion is initiated on the Cornice of Wrath and occupies the whole of the time spent there; but there is in fact a quite rational connexion of ideas. If everything that happens is the result of a rigid determinism, Wrath can no longer be called either sinful or righteous — it becomes simply meaningless. It is useless, on the one hand, to be angry with anyone for doing what he could not help doing; and on the other, the

anger itself is merely a mechanical gesture, as much determined as the behaviour which appears to provoke it.

l. 67-8: *causation's all assigned to the sole stars*: Here and elsewhere it has to be borne in mind that Dante's talk about the stars should not be summarily dismissed as “mere astrology” or “medieval superstition”. When he speaks of the stars as the sole origin of causation he means by that exactly what the modern determinist means by saying that all events in the universe, including human behaviour, follow each other in inevitable sequence as the result of the physical interaction of the atoms composing it. A man is what he is and does what he does because the course of nature threw him up at such and such a time and under such and such conditions; in this context the “disposition of the heavens” is simply a shorthand way of indicating “environment”. We shall see that Dante rejects mechanical determinism. The idea that the heavens themselves, by means of their movers the Intelligences, are partially responsible for creating or modifying these conditions is a different matter, and in this hypothesis Dante is disposed to believe. The further idea that by observing and calculating the positions and movements of the planets one can predict and control the future *is yet* a third thing — astrology in its more debased manifestations; Dante consigns the practitioners of this art to the Bowge of the Sorcerers (see *Inf.* xx).

l. 73-8: *promptings of motion*, etc.: i.e. every man is born with certain tendencies, due to inheritance, environment, and so forth. Even if his disposition were thus wholly determined by exterior causes (which Marco says he does not assert), even so he has judgement (“light to know right from wrong”) and free will, which can be strengthened by exercise to make him victorious over his “conditions”. The whole argument is taken up again in more detail in Canto xviii.

l. *So: free subjects*: the will that is truly free seeks God, the natural object of its desire; therefore true freedom consists in willing subjection to God,

“whose service is perfect freedom” (cf. *Book of Common Prayer*, 2nd Collect for Morning Prayer).

ll. 82 *sqq.*: *so, if the world*, etc.: Having rejected determinism, Marco now goes on to show the political reasons for the present social disorders, viz. that the world is ill-governed, owing to the Emperor’s failure to do his duty, and the Church’s usurpation of the temporal power. (For Dante’s political theory, see *Inf.* Introduction, p-7, *Purg.* Introduction, p *sqq.*)

l. 85: *forth of His hands*: the rational soul is the direct creation of God, breathed into the embryo when the body is sufficiently formed to receive it. (See below, Canto xxv.)

l. 95: *a ruler*: i.e. an active and virtuous Emperor.

l. 97: *the laws are there, but what hand makes them good?*: cf. vi. 88-90 and note.

l. 98: *the shepherd*: the Pope.

l. 99: *parts not the hoof, though he can chew the cud*: “as the camel, because he cheweth the cud but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you” — *Lev.* xi. 4. As this passage is allegorically interpreted by Aquinas and others, the chewing of the cud signifies meditation; the parting of the hoof, the power of discrimination (as e.g. between the Old and New Covenants or between the two natures of Christ, or between good and evil). Dante here means discrimination between the spiritual and temporal powers.

The picture of a “shepherd” with these odd physical characteristics is either one of Dante’s wildest mixed metaphors, or an intentional grotesque (quite in contemporary satirical taste) which would grace any carved capital or miserere seat.

l. 106: *of old, when Rome reformed the world*: Dante is probably thinking chiefly of the great days of the Byzantine Empire, particularly, perhaps, under Justinian. The empire envisaged by Dante in his political writings “is not the Holy Roman Empire of Western feudalism, nor is it the pagan empire of

Augustus or Trajan. It is the empire of Constantine, Theodosius, and Justinian, whose splendours were recorded at San Vitale and Sant’ Apollinare in Classe [in Ravenna].” Geo. Every: in *An Essay on Charles Williams*.

l. 115: *soil that’s fed by Adige and Po*: i.e. Lombardy, or N. Italy in general, plunged into continual strife by the struggle between Pope and Emperor that broke out under Frederick II (for whom see *Inf.* Introduction,).

l. 124: *Conrad Palazzo* (Cunrado di Palazzo): a Guelf from Brescia who held various offices in Tuscany towards the end of the thirteenth century; *the good Gerard*: Gherardo da Cammino (*d.* 1306), captain-general of Treviso from 1283. Dante uses him as an example of nobility in *Conv.* IV. xiv: his son Riccardo, who is mentioned in *Para.* ix. 49-50, was the husband of Judge Nino’s daughter Giovanna (*Purg.* viii. 71).

l. 125: *Guy Castel* (Guido da Castello): a Trevisan gentleman of the Roberti family, much honoured for his prudence, virtue, and liberality. He was from time to time a guest of Can Grande della Scala, and dined at his table, where he may have met Dante. The expression “the Simple Lombard” is variously interpreted. The French tended to call all Italians “Lombards”; but since Guido actually *was* a Lombard, there would seem little point in calling him so *à la française*. The best explanation seems to be that the French also used the word “Lombard” to designate a usurer, and that Guido was jestingly called “the Simple Lombard” in the sense of the “honest” or “guileless” usurer, because of his generous readiness to lend money without interest. (The charging of interest was, in fact, forbidden by the Church, although by this time the prohibition was largely a dead letter.)

l. 132: *the sons of Levi’s line*: the Levites, the priestly house, were debarred from inheriting property, because of their spiritual calling: “the Lord is their inheritance” (*Deut.* xviii. 2); they were to be supported by the offerings of the people. Marco, by showing Dante the evils resulting from a

rich and worldly church, has shown him the reason for this prohibition. (Cf. *Inf.* xix. 88-117; and also *De Mon.* III. xiii, last paragraph.)

l. 133-40: *who's this sample ... still displays*: since Marco has not mentioned Gerard's family name, Dante asks for more precision. Marco thinks Dante must be joking: everybody in Tuscany surely knows "the Good Gerard" without further definition; but if not, the family name has been made notorious by Gerard's daughter Gaia, a lady, apparently of more beauty than virtue, who still bears that name, having married another member of the da Cammino family.

l. 143: *the angel's near*: the brightness of the approaching Angel indicates that they are nearing the end of the smoke-cloud, from which Marco must not emerge until his purgation is complete.

Canto XVII



THE STORY. *ON* issuing from the Smoke-cloud, Dante sees in a vision examples of the sin of Wrath. The Angel of the Cornice meets the Poets, erases the third P from Dante's forehead, and, having pronounced the Benediction, directs them to the next stairway. Night falls as they reach the top step, and, since the Law of the Mountain prevents them from ascending further, Virgil beguiles the time by explaining the arrangement of the Cornices and the nature of the sins purged on each of them.

Remember, Reader, if you've ever been ¹
Caught in the mountains when a mist came on
Through which you peered as moles peer through the skin,

How, when the thick damp vapours have begun ⁴
To lift, there steals upon you, faintly winking
Through thin-drawn veils, the pale disc of the sun;

And little trouble then you'll have in thinking ⁷
Just how things looked to me when first I spied
The sun again, which now was near to sinking.

Thus with my leader, stride for trusty stride, ¹⁰
Forth from such clouds I came to the bright ray,
Though from the shore below all light had died.

O fantasy, that reav'st us off away ¹³
So from ourselves that we remain distraught,
Deaf though a thousand trumpets round us bray,