

Canto V



THE STORY. *ON their way up the Second Terrace, the Poets meet with a company of the Unshriven, and speak with the souls of Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte da Montefeltro, and the lady known as La Pia (Piety), who tell their stories and ask for Dante's help and prayers.*

Already, parting from the shades, I'd passed 1
On at my leader's heels, when one of those
Behind me cried, pointing at me, aghast:

"Look on the left! meseems a darkness flows 4
From him that climbs up last toward the height;
And see how like a living man he goes!"

Hearing the words I paused and turned my sight 7
Backward on them, and saw them stand and stare
At me, me only, and the broken light.

Then said the master: "Why should this ensnare xo 10
Thy wits, to slack thy speed? What does it matter
To thee what they are whispering over there?"

Follow thou me, and let the people chatter; 13
Stand as a tower stands firm in time of trouble,
Nor bends its head, though winds may bawl and batter.

He aims beside the mark whose fancies bubble 16
One on another, driving back and drumming
Each other out, so that his eye sees double."

What could I say to that, except: "I'm coming"? 19
I said it — flushing somewhat to that hue
Which may show cause why grace should be forthcoming.

Meanwhile, athwart the slope ahead, a crew 22
Of souls passed over, singing, verse by verse
Antiphonal, the *Miserere* through.

But when they saw that sunlight could not pierce 25
My form, they changed their tune into an "Oo!"
Long-drawn and breathless; then, like messengers

Deputed from their number, there came two 28
Running towards us, crying: "Be so good,
Pray, as to tell us who and what are you!"

"You may go back," my guide with promptitude 31
Replied, "to those that sent you; and proclaim
That this man's body is true flesh and blood.

If 'twas his shadow stayed you, as I deem, 34
That answer will suffice them; let them pay
Honour to one who can do much for them."

I ne'er saw vapours cleave their fiery way 37
So swift through some young night undimmed of rain,
Or clouds at setting of an August day,

But swifter still those two sped up again, 40
And, when they got there, they with all that host
Wheeled like a troop that rides and draws not rein.

“Right many are these who rush on us, disposed 43
To beg a boon of thee,” the poet said;
“Do thou keep going; hearken as thou go’st.”

“O soul, that with the limbs thy mother made 46
Passest to joy,” they cried as they came up,
“Stay! just a moment bear to be delayed!

See if thou know but one of all our troop, 49
To bear back news of him to yonder side —
O why this haste? O why wilt thou not stop?

All we are sinners who by violence died, 52
Sinners to our last hour; and then Heaven’s grace
Enlightened us and opened our eyes wide;

So, penitent and pardoning and at peace 55
With God, we passed from that life into this,
Heart-pierced with longing to behold His face.”

“Look as I may, not one of you there is 58
I recognize; but if I can do aught,”
Said I, “to please you, spirits born for bliss,

Speak; I’ll perform it, by that peace which brought 61
Me here, thus greatly guided, to pursue it
From world to world, where’er it may be sought.”

“We need no oath,” said one, “to bind thee to it; 64
All count on thee for help — unless, indeed,
The lack of power frustrate the will to do it;

So, speaking for myself now, I will plead: €7 67
If e’er thou see the land which lies aligned
Twixt Charles’s and Romagna, intercede

With those of Fano — since thou art so kind — 70
To give me much good prayer, that I may look
To purge my guilt, and leave the load behind

There was I born; but the wide wounds whose stroke 73
Spilled out the blood wherein my life held seat
Were dealt me deep among Antenor’s folk,

Where I had thought my safety most complete, 76
’Twas he of Este did it — he being then
More wroth against me than was just or meet,

Had I but fled towards La Mira, when 79
Ambushed at Oriago, I’d be found
Still in the company of breathing men.

But ’twas the marsh I made for; there, bogged round to 82
With mire, and tangled in the reeds, I fell,
And saw my veins make pools upon the ground.”

“Pray,” said the next, “so Heav’n thy hope fulfil 85
Which draws thee up the height, look pitying thou
Upon these hopes of mine and aid me well.

Da Montefeltro once, Buonconte now, 88
None cares for me — not Joan, nor any one;
So among these I walk with downcast brow.”

And I: "What evil chance, or violence done 91
Drove thee away so far from Campaldino
That thy last resting-place was never known?"

"O, at the foot," said he, "of Casentino, 94
The stream called Archian runs, whose springs well out
Above the convent in the Apennino.

There where its name is lost, I came on foot, 97
Stabbed in the throat and fleeing; and as I fled
My life-blood dabbled all the plain about.

There my sight failed me, and my last word sped 100
Forth in the name of Mary; there headlong
I fell; there left only my body dead.

'Tis truth I speak: proclaim that truth among 103
Live men. God's angel took me, and Hell's fiend
Shrieked out: 'O thief of Heaven, why do me wrong?

He's thine — one tear, one little tear could rend 106
His deathless part away from me! the other —
That's quite another thing, trust me, my friend,

Thou knowest well the way damp vapours gather 109
In air, and turn to water again, and spill,
When, rising, they're condensed by colder weather.

He wedded intellect to the wicked will 112
Which still loves harm; and moved the mist and wind
By what his nature gave of power and skill,

Till the whole valley, when that day declined, 115
From Pratomagno to the mountain chain
Lay reeking, and the skies hung heavy and blind

So that the air teemed water, and the rain 118
Fell, till earth could not hold it; every source
And streamlet gushed full spate, and joined again

Into great torrents, driving their swift course 121
Down to the royal river, tumultuous
So in their rage, nothing could stay their force.

Then, at its mouth, the Archian's roaring sluice 124
Found my stiff frozen body, and it swept me
Into the Arno, and from my breast shook loose

The cross I made of me when the death-pangs gripped me; 127
And rolling me down on its bed, over boulder and brae,
At length with its booty it girded and shrouded and heaped me."

The third soul followed on the second: "Pray, 130
When thou returnest to the world," said she,
"And art well rested from the weary way,

Remember me, that am called Piety; 133
Siena made me and Maremma undid me,
As well he knows who plighted troth to me,

And set his ring upon my hand to wed me." 136

The Images.

The Late-Repentant: (2) The Unshriven. This second group consists of those who were cut off in their sins by battle or murder, and so died unshriven. Since circumstances are partly responsible for their death, they occupy a slightly higher position than the Indolent, and have a prayer of their own; but they are still surrounded by the atmosphere of haste and agitation which attended their last moments.

Notes.

l. 24: *the Miserere*: this is the special Prayer of the Unshriven: *Ps.* li (*Vulg.* 1), *Miserere mei, Domine* (Have mercy upon me, O Lord): one of the Seven Penitential Psalms.

l. 37: *vapours*: falling stars (l. 37) and summer lightning (l. 39) were attributed by medieval science to the presence of “fiery vapours” in the atmosphere.

l. 55: *penitent and pardoning*: in their dying moments they have made an act of (a) contrition for their own sins, (b) forgiveness of the sins of others, and are therefore at peace both with God and man.

l. 64: *said one*: This is Jacopo del Cassero, a Guelf of Fano, who offended Azzo VIII of Este and was murdered by his orders at Oriago, between Venice and Padua, when travelling from Bologna to Milan.

l. 69: *the land 'twixt Charles's and Romagna*: Fano is situated between Romagna and the Kingdom of Naples, whose ruler was Charles of Anjou.

l. 75: *Antenor's folk*: the Paduans, so called from Antenor (for whom see *Inf.* xxxii. 88 and Images), the reputed founder of Padua. (See *Aen.* i. 242 *sqq*)

l. 77: *he of Este*: Azzo VIII.

l. 79: *La Mira*: a town lying between Oriago and Padua, and belonging at that time to the Paduans.

l. 80: *Oriago*: In Dante's time the main road between Venice and Padua passed through La Mira, near Oriago, to the N.W. of the marshy tract known

to-day as the *laguna morta* (the dead lagoon). Jacopo, either through losing his bearings or through fearing to trust himself to a Paduan town, left the high road and fled into the lagoon, where the reedy swamp trapped him and he was overtaken and stabbed.

l. 88: *da Montefeltro once, Buonconte now*: In Purgatory and Paradise, earthly titles no longer mean anything; the speaker *was* Lord of Montefeltro, but calls himself now only by his personal name (*cf.* the emperor in *Para.* vi. 10, “Caesar I was, and am Justinian”). Buonconte da Montefeltro, like his father Guido whose story Dante tells in *Inf.* xxvii (see *Inf.* Glossary and note on *Inf.* xxvii. 29), was a Ghibelline leader. He commanded the Aretines when they defeated the Sieneese in 1288 at Pieve del Toppo (see *Inf.* xiii. 115 and note), and in 1289 led them against the Florentines at Campaldino, where they were defeated and he himself was killed. In the *Comedy*, the deaths of the two lords of Montefeltro form, as it were, companion-pieces: the father being damned and the son saved at the last moment, the one by a false and the other by a true act of contrition.

l. 89: *Joan (Giovanna)*: Buonconte's wife.

ll. 91-3: *what evil chance*, etc.: Dante naturally displays particular interest at this point, since he himself had fought at Campaldino on the Guelf side (see *Inf.* Introduction, p-1). Buonconte was known to have been killed in the battle, but his body was never identified, and the story he tells is presumably of Dante's own invention.

l. 94-6: *Casentino*, etc.: The district of Casentino (*cf.* *Inf.* xxx. 65) or Valley of the Upper Arno, is bounded on the W. by the mountains of Pratomagno (l. 116) and on the E. by the principal chain of the Apennines. The river Archian (Archiano) rises at the monastery of Camaldoli and flows into the Arno, dividing the Casentino from the neighbouring district of Bibbiena.

l. 97: *where its name is lost*: i.e. where it joins the Arno and so ceases to be called the Archiano.

ll. 109-11: *the way damp vapours gather*, etc.: medieval, based on classical, meteorological theory understood fairly well the phenomena of evaporation and condensation by cold.

l. 112: *he wedded intellect to the wicked will*: Angels are *intelligences* who have control over the elements, and this devil (or fallen angel) retains some part of the power native to his angelic nature. On the calamitous alliance of intellect and evil will see *Inf.* xxiii. 16 and *Inf.* xxxi. 55-7.

l. 122: *the royal river*: the Arno; the epithet denotes a river which flows into the sea, as distinguished from a tributary.

ll. 126-7: *shook loose the cross I made of me*: i.e. threw apart Buonconte's arms, which he had devoutly crossed upon his breast in the moment of death.

l. 132: *well rested from the weary way*: Characteristically, Dante depicts this solitary lady (for the other spirits mentioned are all male) as being the only inhabitant of Ante-Purgatory to show this self-effacing consideration for his health and convenience. She appears to have had no friend or relation left on earth who could be asked to pray for her.

l. 133: *that am called Piety: (La Pia)*: Pia dei Tolomei, daughter of a Sienese family, is said to have married Nello, or Paganello, dei Pannocchieschi, a Guelf leader, lord (among other castles) of the Castello della Pietra in the Maremma. Whether through jealousy or because he wanted to marry a richer heiress, Nello took her away to Pietra and there (in 1295) murdered her — some say by exposing her to the unhealthy air of the place (see *Inf.* xxix. 48 and Glossary); others, by throwing her from the castle window down a precipice; others say simply, “so secretly that nobody ever knew how.” Since Dante classes her among the victims of sudden and unprepared death, he probably discounts the first of these theories.

l. 135: *who plighted troth to me*: she emphasizes the solemnity of the bonds uniting her to her murderous husband: she was first troth-plight and afterwards married to him. (Betrothal was a contract binding in law and in religion, which pledged the parties to one another and could not be dissolved without a formal dispensation. After a longer or shorter period, during which neither party was free to marry elsewhere, the marriage was celebrated and could be consummated.)