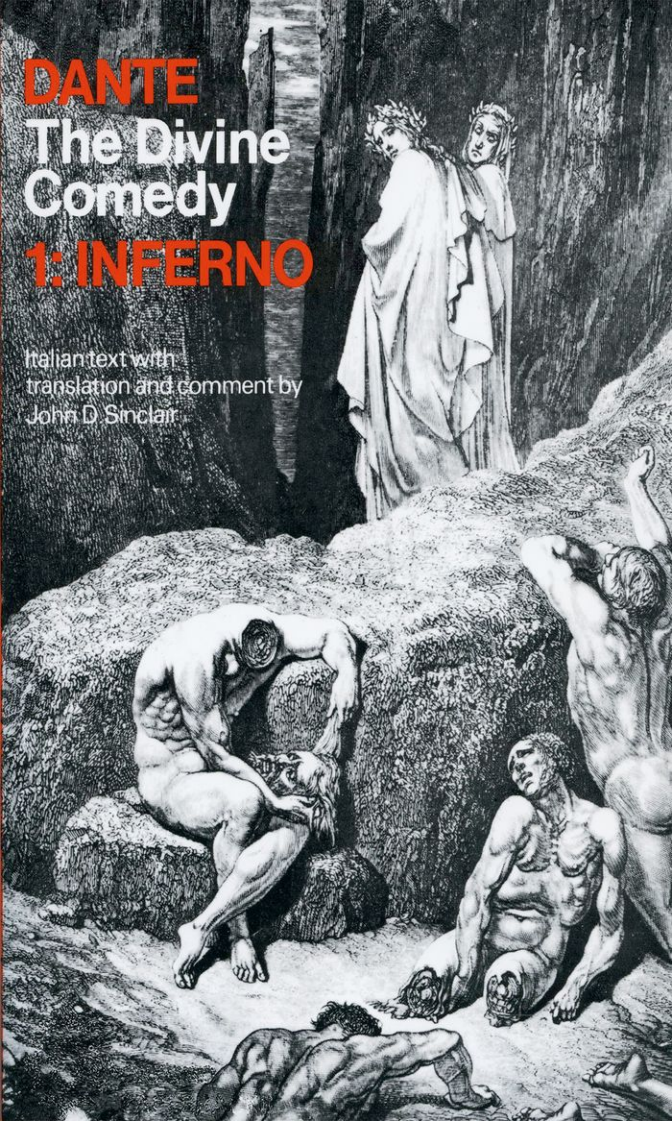


DANTE **The Divine** **Comedy** **1: INFERNO**

Italian text with
translation and comment by
John D. Sinclair



THE DIVINE
COMEDY OF
DANTE ALIGHIERI

I INFERNO

uniform with this volume

PURGATORIO

PARADISO

THE DIVINE
COMEDY OF
DANTE ALIGHIERI

WITH

TRANSLATION AND

COMMENT BY

JOHN D. SINCLAIR

INFERNO

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW YORK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford London Glasgow

New York Toronto Melbourne Wellington

Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town

Kuala Lumpur Singapore Jakarta Hong Kong Tokyo

Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi

First published by Oxford University Press, New York, 1939

First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback by special
arrangement with THE BODLEY HEAD, 1961

printing, last digit: 49 48

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
M. O. S.

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PREFACE

THE translation of the *Divine Comedy* into English prose seems, on the face of it, a singularly gratuitous form of failure, and how far, if at all, I have succeeded in my aim of combining a close rendering of the Italian with the requirements of a credible English, it is not for me to estimate. I am so far qualified that I know something of the magnitude of the task and of how limited a portion of Dante's substance and quality it is possible, at the best, to convey. I have tried to serve readers who have little or no knowledge of Italian and who wish to know the matter of Dante's poem. The requirements of some to whom the whole medieval outlook is strange and many of the classical references unfamiliar may excuse the number and the simplicity of the annotations, which are intended merely to make the narrative intelligible. In these I have erred, like the warder of the gate of Purgatory, 'rather in opening than in keeping locked'.

I have used the critical text of the *Società Dantesca Italiana* as revised by the late Professor Giuseppe Vandelli, and for their courteous consent to this I have to thank the publishers, Messrs Ulrico Hoepli, of Milan. The few departures I have made from that text are limited to readings adopted either in Moore's or Casella's texts. I have found suggestions for interpretation in some of the current English versions and have borrowed an occasional phrase from one or other of them. In passages where Dante seems to have had the language of the Vulgate in mind I have adopted, as far as possible, that of the Authorized Version.

In the comments on the cantos I have gone on the view, confirmed all through with closer knowledge of the poem, that Dante is constantly and closely concerned with the moral and

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spiritual system and consistency of the whole, his imagination working habitually *within* that system; that one of his most distinguishing qualities—in his imagery, his epithets, his choice of *dramatis personae*, his mythological and historical illustrations, his astronomical way of telling the time of day or night, his frequent harping on words, phrases, and ideas, his curious verbal devices, his varying moods as a pilgrim—is the quality of *relevancy*, relevancy, that is, to the moral and spiritual matter in hand, and that these features as they come are not merely decorative, they are integral and are to be so interpreted. Their relevancy is their meaning. The elaborateness and the obscurity of much of Dante's symbolism have given rise, on the one hand, to volumes of forced and fantastic interpretation and to the valuation of mere ingenuity of invention as itself the product and the proof of his imagination and, on the other hand, to a critical reaction which tends to limit the value of the poem to its 'poetic' qualities and even to its outstanding passages of lyrical and dramatic beauty, and to regard the general scheme as little more than a framework for these. The one bias seems to me as mistaken as the other. The famous passages, the great lines, would be great even if they were isolated and anonymous, but they are far greater and more significant because they are part of the whole and because they are Dante's. In nothing is Dante more 'classical' and in nothing does he tower more above his medieval predecessors than in this high quality of sustained relevancy, and in commenting on the text I have tried to keep it in view as the main criterion and guidance. The question is always, What does this passage mean, not merely in itself as a form of words, but concretely as an occurrence in the mind of Dante as it comes to him and comes from him in this situation and context?—a question, plainly, which it is not always possible to answer, but, for interpretation, the only question that matters. Dante did not merely inherit the theology and cosmology of the Middle Ages along with his generation and then take them for granted; he re-imagined them and peopled them and made them the matter of his thought and of his song. He was not, indeed, an original and authoritative thinker, that is not his greatness. He was a great interpreter and a supreme imaginer, bodying forth the

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abstractions of scholastic thinking, turning them to shapes and giving them a local habitation and a name, and it is only as we provisionally accept the ethical and theological system and standards of the thirteenth century and hold in mind its conceptions of the world and life and eternity that we can enter into the mind and imagination of its poet. 'But Dante is not the man to accept submissively the thoughts and convictions of other men, above all in his poetic constructions and imageries; everything may help to an understanding of his writings, but the key of real comprehension is to be sought, not so much in Saint Augustine or the Abbot Joachim or Saint Thomas—or Ubertino da Casale—as in the inner life and the work of the poet himself' (*M. Barbi*). In some passages any interpretation is fairly open to debate, but it is by that standard of relevancy that it must be judged, and a poet is to be known from within or not at all.

I should perhaps note that although in debatable cases I have given my own view dogmatically and without discussion, it has not been without consideration of the alternatives and of the reasons given in support of them, nor always with as much assurance as may appear; and also that in such comments as I make on the work of some of Dante's literary predecessors and contemporaries I do not mean to pretend, as I may seem to do, to an independent judgment of my own.

I have not thought it necessary to offer any general introduction to the subject in futile competition with the masterly essays of Church (the best) and Lowell and Symonds. Along with one or all of these the English reader who is new to the subject should have Gardner's *Dante in the Temple Primers* and either Rossetti's or Norton's version of the *Vita Nuova*. So much being assumed, I have tried to make the comments on the cantos sufficiently explanatory as they come. In the brief notes dates are mentioned, as a rule, only when they fall within or near Dante's lifetime (1265-1321).

I have to acknowledge my large indebtedness to the commentaries of Scartazzini (revised and largely replaced, in the latest editions, by Vandelli), Casini (revised by S. A. Barbi and quoted as '*Casini-Barbi*'), Torraca, Grabher, and, in the *Inferno*, Rossi; to many of the *Lecturae Dantis* delivered in

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Florence, Genoa, and Rome (quoted here as 'L.D.');

and to the writings of De Sanctis, D'Ovidio, Zingarelli, Parodi, M. Barbi, Torraca, Rossi, and Croce, and I have quoted these the more freely because they are not generally available in English. Every English student of Dante must be indebted to Moore's three volumes of *Studies in Dante* and his *Textual Criticism of the Divine Comedy*, and to Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*, and I have made use of Carroll's three volumes on the *Comedy*, Gardner's *Dante's Ten Heavens*, Vossler's *Die Göttliche Komödie—Mediæval Culture* in the English version—and the annotations by Vernon, Plumptre, Butler, Tozer, Grandgent, and the *Temple* editors.

The version of the *Inferno* is published along with that of the *Purgatorio*. Too many of Dante's readers know him only as 'their Dante of the dread Inferno', and therefore do not know him; for all the essential, larger meaning of the *Inferno* lies in its relations with the rest of the poem, and primarily with the *Purgatorio*. The result of Dante's experience in Hell was that he was able 'to see again the stars' and prepared 'to course over better waters', and the experience without the end in view would have been, for him, meaningless melodrama.

I hope the version of the *Paradiso* may follow later.

J. D. S.

Edinburgh

March, 1939

My version of the *Paradiso* was published, uniform in format, during 1946. I have now been given the opportunity of making some emendations in all three versions and in the notes for this new printing.

J. D. S.

Edinburgh

April, 1948

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DANTE'S HELL

IN Dante's cosmology the earth is at the centre of the universe and Hell a vast funnel-shaped cavity or reversed cone reaching from near the earth's surface to the centre, which is the centre of the universe, the farthest point from God. The sides of the cavity form a succession of concentric levels in diminishing circles as they approach the central depth, and on these levels the successive classes of the impenitent are punished, each lower circle punishing more severely a worse offence. Jerusalem, as the place of the Crucifixion, is the centre of the land hemisphere, in the line of the central axis of Hell. The other hemisphere is all water except for the island-mountain of Purgatory, at the antipodes of Jerusalem. Dante's journey is from the edge of the pit—we are not told where or how he enters it—down to the centre, and then, continuing in the same direction, up the bed of a subterranean stream to the shore of Purgatory.

It should be noted that in Dante's narrative 'here' means this present world, in which he tells his story, and 'there' the world of the dead. In dialogue, of course, this usage is reversed.

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THE SYSTEM OF DANTE'S HELL

Neutrals

Circle 1. Virtuous Heathen

Incontinent	{	„ 2. Lascivious	
		„ 3. Gluttons	
		„ 4. Avaricious and Prodigal	
		„ 5. Wrathful	
		„ 6. Heretics	
Violent	„ 7. {	(1) Violent against others	
		(2) „ „ self	
		(3) „ „ God, nature, and art	
Fraudulent	{	„ 8. Simply Fraudulent	(1) Panders and Seducers
			(2) Flatterers
			(3) Simonists
			(4) Diviners
			(5) Barrators
			(6) Hypocrites
			(7) Thieves
			(8) Fraudulent counselors
			(9) Makers of discord
			(10) Falsifiers
	{	„ 9. Treacherous	(1) to kindred
			(2) to country and cause
			(3) to guests
			(4) to lords and benefactors

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INFERNO

INFERNO

NEL mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.

Ah quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant' è amara che poco è piu morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'io vi trovai,
dirò dell'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com' io v'entrai, 10
tant'era pieno di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

Ma poi ch' i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
là dove terminava quella valle
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,
guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.

Allor fu la paura un poco queta 20
che nel lago del cor m'era durata
la notte ch' i' passai con tanta pièta.

E come quei che con lena affannata
uscito fuor del pelago alla riva
si volge all'acqua perigliosa e guata,
così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

CANTO I

*The dark wood; the sunny hill; the three beasts;
Virgil*

IN the middle of the journey of our life¹ I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood, savage and harsh and dense, the thought of which renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is hardly more. But to give account of the good which I found there I will tell of the other things I noted there.

I cannot rightly tell how I entered there, I was so full of sleep at that moment when I left the true way; but when I had reached the foot of a hill at the end of that valley which had pierced my heart with fear I looked up and saw its shoulders already clothed with the beams of the planet that leads men straight on every road.² Then the fear was quieted a little which had continued in the lake of my heart during the night I had spent so piteously; and as he who with labouring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore turns to the perilous waters and gazes, so my mind, which was still in flight, turned back to look again at the pass which never yet let any go alive.

INFERNO

Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso,
 ripresi via per la piaggia diserta,
 sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso. 30
 Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar dell'erta,
 una lonza leggiere e presta molto,
 che di pel maculato era coverta;
 e non mi si partia d' innanzi al volto,
 anzi impediva tanto il mio cammino,
 ch' i' fui per ritornar più volte volto.
 Temp'era dal principio del mattino,
 e 'l sol montava 'n su con quelle stelle
 ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino
 mosse di prima quelle cose belle; 40
 sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
 di quella fera alla gaetta pelle
 l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
 ma non sì che paura non mi desse
 la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.
 Questi pareva che contra me venesse
 con la test'alta e con rabbiosa fame,
 sì che pareva che l'aere ne temesse:
 ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
 sembiava carca nella sua magrezza, 50
 e molte genti fè già viver grame.
 Questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
 con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista,
 ch' io perdei la speranza dell'altezza.
 E qual è quei che volontieri acquista,
 e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
 che 'n tutt' i suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;
 tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
 che, venendomi incontro, a poco a poco
 mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace. 60
 Mentre ch' i' ruvinava in basso loco,
 dinanzi alli occhi mi si fu offerto
 chi per lungo silenzio pareva fioco.
 Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,
 'Miserere di me' gridai a lui
 'qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!'

CANTO I

After I had rested my wearied frame for a little I took my way again over the desert slope, keeping always the lower foot firm; and lo, almost at the beginning of the steep, a leopard light and very swift, covered with a spotted hide, and it did not go from before my face but so impeded my way that I turned many times to go back.

The time was the beginning of the morning and the sun was mounting with those stars which were with it when Divine Love first set in motion those fair things,³ so that the hour of the day and the sweet season moved me to good hope of escape from that beast with the gay skin; but, even so, I was put in fear by the sight of a lion which appeared to me and seemed to be coming against me holding its head high and furious with hunger so that the air seemed in dread of it, and of a she-wolf which appeared in its leanness to be charged with all cravings and which has already made many live in wretchedness. This last put such heaviness on me by the terror which came forth from its looks that I lost hope of the ascent; and like one who rejoices in his gains and when the time comes that makes him a loser has all his thoughts turned to sadness and lamentation, such did the restless beast make me, coming against me and driving me back step by step to where the sun is silent.

When I was rushing down to the place below there appeared before my eyes one whose voice seemed weak from long silence, and when I saw him in the great waste, 'Have pity on me, whoever thou art,' I cried to him 'shade or real man!'

Rispuosemi: 'Non omo, omo già fui,
 e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
 mantovani per patria ambedui.
 Nacqui *sub Julio*, ancor che fosse tardi, 70
 e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
 al tempo delli dei falsi e bugiardi.
 Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
 figliuol d'Anchise che venne da Troia,
 poi che 'l superbo Iliòn fu combusto.
 Ma tu, perchè ritorni a tanta noia?
 perchè non sali il diletto monte
 ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?'
 'Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte 80
 che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?'
 rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.
 'O delli altri poeti onore e lume,
 vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
 che m' ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
 Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore;
 tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
 lo bello stilo che m' ha fatto onore.
 Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi:
 aiutami da lei, famoso saggio,
 ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi.' 90
 'A te convien tenere altro viaggjo'
 rispuose poi che lagrimar mi vide
 'se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio:
 chè questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
 non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
 ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;
 e ha natura sì malvagia e ria,
 che mai non empie la bramosa voglia,
 e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.
 Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia, 100
 e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l Veltro
 verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.
 Questi non ciberà terra nè peltro,
 ma sapienza, amore e virtute,
 e sua nazione sarà tra Feltro e Feltro.

He answered me: 'Not man; once I was man, and my parents were Lombards, both Mantuan by birth. I was born *sub Julio*,⁴ though late in his time, and I lived at Rome under the good Augustus, in the time of the false and lying gods. I was a poet and sang of that just son of Anchises⁵ who came from Troy after proud Ilium⁶ was burned. But thou, why art thou returning to such misery? Why dost thou not climb the delectable mountain which is the beginning and cause of all happiness?'

'Art thou then that Virgil, that fountain which pours forth so rich a stream of speech?' I answered him, my brow covered with shame. 'O glory and light of other poets, let the long study and the great love that has made me search thy volume avail me. Thou art my master and my author. Thou art he from whom alone I took the style whose beauty has brought me honour. See the beast for which I turned; save me from her, famous sage, for she sets the pulses trembling in my veins.'

'Thou must take another road' he replied when he saw me weeping 'if thou wouldst escape from this savage place; for this beast on account of which thou criest lets no man pass her way, but hinders them till she takes their life, and she has a nature so vicious and malignant that her greedy appetite is never satisfied and after food she is hungrier than before. Many are the creatures with which she mates and there will yet be more, until the hound comes that shall bring her to miserable death.'⁷ He shall not feed on land or pelf but on wisdom and love and valour, and his country shall

INFERNO

Di quella umile Italia fia salute
 per cui morì la vergine Cammilla,
 Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.
 Questi la caccerà per ogni villa,
 fin che l'avrà rimessa nello 'nferno, 110
 là onde invidia prima dipartilla.
 Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno
 che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida,
 e trarrotti di qui per luogo eterno,
 ove udirai le disperate strida,
 vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti,
 che la seconda morte ciascun grida;
 e vederai color che son contenti
 nel foco, perchè speran di venire 120
 quando che sia alle beate genti.
 Alle qua' poi se tu vorrai salire,
 anima fia a ciò piu di me degna;
 con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire:
 chè quello imperador che là su regna,
 perch' io fu' ribellante alla sua legge,
 non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.
 In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;
 quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio:
 oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!
 E io a lui: 'Poeta, io ti richeggio 130
 per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,
 acciò ch' io fugga questo male e peggio,
 che tu mi meni là dove or dicesti,
 sì ch' io veggia la porta di san Pietro
 e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti.'
 Allor si mosse, e io li tenni retro.

1. Dante's 35th year, A.D. 1300. 'The days of our years are three score years and ten' (*Ps.* xc. 10).

2. The sun, the symbol of God.

3. Creation was supposed to have taken place and the stars to have been 'set in motion' in spring, when the sun was in the Ram, on the same date as the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. It was the morning of Good Friday.

'Of all things the beginning
 Was on an April morn;
 In spring the earth remembereth
 The day that she was born.'

(From a medieval song translated by Helen Waddell)

CANTO I

be between Feltro and Feltro;⁸ he shall be salvation to that low-lying Italy for which the virgin Camilla and Euryalus and Turnus and Nisus died of their wounds;⁹ he shall hunt her through every city till he has sent her back to Hell whence envy first let her loose.¹⁰ Therefore, considering what is best for thee, I judge that thou shouldst follow me, and I shall be thy guide and lead thee hence through an eternal place where thou shalt hear the despairing shrieks of the ancient spirits in pain who each bewail the second death.¹¹ Then thou shalt see those who are contented in the fire¹² because they hope to come, whensoever it may be, to the tribes of the blest, to whom if thou wouldst then ascend there shall be a spirit fitter for that than I; with her I shall leave thee at my parting. For the Emperor who holds sway there above wills not, because I was a rebel to His law, that I come into His city. In every part He reigns and there He rules. There is His city and His lofty seat. O happy the man He chooses to be there!

And I answered him: 'Poet, I entreat thee by that God whom thou knewest not, in order that I may escape this evil and worse lead me where thou hast said, that I may see Saint Peter's gate¹³ and those thou makest so sorrowful.'

Then he set out and I came on behind him.

4. Under Julius Caesar; Virgil was born in 70 B.C.

5. Aeneas.

6. The citadel of Troy.

7. Probably Can Grande della Scala, afterwards Lord of Verona.

8. Probably Verona, between the towns of Feltro and Montefeltro.

9. Four who fell in the Trojan-Latin War.

10. 'Through envy of the devil came death into the world' (*Wisd.* ii. 24).

11. 'The lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death' (*Rev.* xxi. 8).

12. The pains of Purgatory.

13. The gate of penitence admitting to Purgatory proper.

NOTE

The directness, speed, and energy of the narrative in the opening canto are eminently characteristic of Dante and seize and hold us from the first words. We are at once in the midst of things and follow the quick succession of his moods—distress, bewilderment, relief, fear, astonishment, confidence,—a tumult of experience marking a crisis in the soul, an end and a beginning. ‘It was characteristic of Dante’s thought—rather of medieval thought in general—to proceed from the reality to the symbolical meaning, and not to sing in his lines of simple abstractions’ (*F. Pellegrini, L.D.*), and it is as impossible to ignore the autobiographical elements in the *Divine Comedy* as it is easy to over-stress them. Dante in the poem is at once Dante Alighieri of Florence and Everyman, reporting at once his own inner experience and the way of man’s salvation. When he dates his story expressly from ‘the middle of the journey of our life’ we must recall his leading place during part of the year 1300 in the civic life of Florence, the outbreak there of civil strife, and eighteen months later his exile, which broke his life in two. In Dante, being such as we come to know him, these events were the setting and the occasion of a moral turmoil, a losing and finding of himself, which is pictured in the dark wood, the sunny hill, the threatening beasts, and Virgil’s summons.

The first step in Dante’s salvation was his discovery that he was lost, when he came to himself in a dark wood. He recovered so far as to realize the condition of sin and ignorance into which he had fallen as if in his sleep, by lethargy and acquiescence. His attempt to climb the hill with the morning sunshine on it represents his hopeful aspirations after a better way of life, possibly in the serene consolations of philosophy, possibly in an honourable and successful earthly career, for the symbolism of the sunny hill is one of the debated problems of this canto.

Perhaps it may be taken for the pagan conception of the earthly life. It is, at any rate, his attempt to escape from evil by reforming his way, the good which he would but does not, because of 'another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity'.

He is foiled by three beasts, by the main forces of evil in the world,—the leopard, or lust, the lion, or pride, and the wolf, or covetousness. They were doubtless suggested by the same three beasts in *Jer.* v. 6, and the ideas correspond with those in 1 *John* ii. 16,—'all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'. These forces of evil are not conceived merely as personal to Dante himself, but also, if not chiefly, as forces in the world about him, but pressing in on him and claiming the mastery of him. In his poem he confesses both to lust and pride, and though he would have repudiated the charge of covetousness it was on that charge—specifically the charge of corruption in public office—that he was banished from Florence.

If there is ambiguity and perplexity in the imagery here it is because Dante is recalling at once his outer and inner experience, both his term of high office in the government of Florence in 1300, when the forces were gathering which were soon to defeat all his personal hopes and to drive him into exile, on the one hand, and, on the other, the turmoil and bewilderment belonging, in such a soul as his, to spiritual conversion. For Dante it was one experience and the conflict and confusion of motives are an essential part of it.

In the moment, it seemed, of his final defeat he was confronted with Virgil, historically his ideal poet, the model and inspiration of his verse, and symbolically his reason and conscience, the primal authority for man's earthly life. Virgil's 'voice seemed weak from long silence', for both the world and Dante himself had long given little hearing or heed to the voice of the higher reason and it seemed at first as if reason could hardly get utterance at all either in the world or in Dante's own soul. His re-discovery to the world of Virgil's poetic greatness is wholly in accord with this representation of him.

It is Virgil, at once the prophet of the Roman Empire and the supposed foreteller of Christ, who foretells the coming of a

deliverer of the world from the power of covetousness, the wolf that came so persistently against Dante. The identity of 'the hound' that is to hunt the wolf to Hell has been the subject of much debate and many guesses, but Can Grande—the name means Great Dog—is the commonest interpretation. He was a boy of nine at the assumed date of the poem—perhaps ten years older when this was written—and later the chief representative in Italy of the Imperial cause, that is, for Dante, the cause of all social order and civic righteousness. In his exile Dante found a home in Can Grande's court at Verona for a time and he held him always in the highest honour and dedicated the *Paradiso* to him. He appears to have hoped that Can Grande would effectively establish the Imperial authority in Italy and deliver the country from the fierce party strife which was rending the life of the cities and especially from the greed and worldliness of the Papacy. The passage is an instance, thoroughly characteristic, of the crossing and mingling in Dante's story of the personal and the public spiritual interest; for him they were essentially one. It is also one of various utterances, all intentionally cryptic, in the course of the poem of his undying hope for the advent of a heroic deliverer of the world from the present powers of evil.

But as things are, and as Dante is, there is no deliverance for himself by the mere study of philosophy or by the way of an honourable and successful public career; he 'must take another road' and there must be shown to him by Virgil 'the eternal roots of misery and of joy' (*J. A. Carlyle*). Virgil is to be his guide through Hell and Purgatory, which are, so to speak, within the range of reason, and for Paradise there will be the higher guidance of Beatrice. Nothing else will serve to liberate him wholly from the forces of evil about him and from the fear of them but to see their final issues, what ultimately they mean for the human soul. And for that understanding he must follow where his reason will lead him; that inner obedience is the first condition of his salvation.

There is a curious example of Dante's fondness for verbal device in the 'there—there—there' at the beginning of the canto, in reference to the dark wood, and again at the end 'there—there—there', with the Italian adverb in its fuller, more

CANTO I

emphatic form, in reference to the divine city which is his goal. The end of the journey is set before him by Virgil at the very beginning.

These are some of the leading ideas of the canto; but, like all the other cantos, it is greater than its ideas. It is the passionately imagined record of a great experience.

It is usual to regard this canto rather as an introduction to the whole poem than as a part of the *Inferno* proper, a reckoning which suits the studied symmetry of the *Comedy*, making thirty-three cantos in each of its three parts and completing the whole in a hundred.

INFERNO

Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aere bruno
toglieva li animai che sono in terra
dalle fatiche loro; e io sol uno
m'apparecchiava a sostener la guerra
sì del cammino e sì della pietate,
che ritrarrà la mente che non erra.
O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate;
o mente che scrivesti ciò ch' io vidi,
qui si parrà la tua nobilitate.
Io cominciai: 'Poeta che mi guidi, 10
guarda la mia virtù s'ell' è possente,
prima ch'all'alto passo tu mi fidi.
Tu dici che di Silvïo il parente,
corruttibile ancora, ad immortale
secolo andò, e fu sensibilmente.
Però, se l'avversario d'ogni male
cortese i fu, pensando l'alto effetto
ch'uscir dovea di lui e 'l chi e 'l quale.
non pare indegno ad omo d' intelletto;
ch'e' fu dell'alma Roma e di suo impero 20
nell'empireo ciel per padre eletto:
la quale e 'l quale, a voler dir lo vero,
fu stabilita per lo loco santo
u' siede il successor del maggior Piero.
Per questa andata onde li dai tu vanto,
intese cose che furon cagione
di sua vittoria e del papale ammanto.

CANTO II

Discouragement; Virgil and Beatrice; the start

THE day was departing and the darkened air releasing the creatures on the earth from their labours, and I, alone, was preparing to endure the conflict both of the way and of the pity of it, which memory that does not err shall recount. O Muses, O lofty genius, aid me now! O memory that noted what I saw, here shall be shown thy worth!

I began: 'Poet, who guidest me, consider my strength, if it is sufficient, before thou commit me to the hard passage. Thou tellest of the father of Sylvius that he went, still subject to corruption, to the eternal world and was there in the flesh.¹ But if the Adversary of all evil showed him this favour, taking account of the high consequence and who and what he was that should spring from him,² it does not seem unfitting to one that understands; for in the heaven of the Empyrean³ he was chosen to be father of glorious Rome and of her Empire, and both of these were established—if we would speak rightly of them—to be the holy place where sits the successor of the great Peter. By this journey for which thou honourest him he heard things which fitted him for his victory and prepared for

Andovvi poi lo Vas d'elezione,
 per recarne conforto a quella fede
 ch' è principio alla via di salvazione. 30
 Ma io perchè venirvi? o chi 'l concede?
 Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono:
 me degno a ciò nè io nè altri crede.
 Per che, se del venire io m'abbandono,
 temo che la venuta non sia folle:
 se' savio; intendi me' ch' i' non ragiono.'
 E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle
 e per novi pensier cangia proposta,
 sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle,
 tal mi fec' io in quella oscura costa, 40
 perchè, pensando, consumai la 'mpresa
 che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta.
 'S' i' ho ben la parola tua intesa'
 rispuose del magnanimo quell'ombra
 'l'anima tua è da viltate offesa;
 la qual molte fiate l'omo ingombra
 sì che d'onrata impresa lo rivolve,
 come falso veder bestia quand'ombra.
 Da questa tema acciò che tu ti solve,
 dirotti perch' io venni e quel ch' io 'ntesi 50
 nel primo punto che di te mi dolve.
 Io era tra color che son sospesi,
 e donna mi chiamò beata e bella,
 tal che di comandare io la richiesi.
 Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella;
 e cominciommi a dir soave e piana,
 con angelica voce, in sua favella:
 "O anima cortese mantovana,
 di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,
 e durerà quanto 'l mondo lontana, 60
 l'amico mio, e non della ventura,
 nella diserta spiaggia è impedito
 sì nel cammin, che volt' è per paura;
 e temo che non sia già sì smarrito,
 ch' io mi sia tardi al soccorso levata,
 per quel ch' i' ho di lui nel cielo udito.

the Papal mantle.⁴ Later, the Chosen Vessel went there,⁵ that he might bring thence confirmation of that faith which is the beginning of the way of salvation.

'But I, why should I go there, and who grants it? I am not Aeneas; I am not Paul. Neither I nor any man thinks me fit for this, so that if I commit myself to go I fear lest my going be folly. Thou art wise; thou understandest better than I speak.'

And as one who unwilld what he willed and with new thoughts changes his purpose so that he quite withdraws from what he has begun, such I became on that dark slope; for by thinking of it I brought to naught the enterprise that was so hasty in its beginning.

'If I have rightly understood thy words,' replied the shade of that great soul 'thy spirit is smitten with cowardice, which many a time encumbers a man so that it turns him back from honourable enterprise, as a mistaken sight a shying beast. That I may deliver thee from this fear, I shall tell thee why I came and what I heard at the time when I first took pity on thee. I was among those who are in suspense,⁶ and a lady called me, so blessed and so fair that I begged her to command me. Her eyes shone brighter than the stars, and she began to speak to me with angelic voice in sweet, low tones: "O courteous Mantuan soul, whose fame still endures in the world and shall endure as long as the world lasts, my friend, who is no friend of fortune, is so hindered on his way on the desert slope that he has turned back for fear, and from what I have heard of him in Heaven I fear he may already be so far astray that I have risen too late

Or movi, e con la tua parola ornata
 e con ciò c' ha mestieri al suo campare
 l'aiuta, sì ch' i' ne sia consolata.
 I' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare; 70
 vegno del loco ove tornar disio;
 amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.
 Quando savò dinanzi al signor mio,
 di te mi loderò sovente a lui."
 Tacette allora, e poi comincia' io:
 "O donna di virtù, sola per cui
 l'umana spezie eccede ogni contento
 di quel ciel c' ha minor li cerchi sui,
 tanto m'aggrada il tuo comandamento,
 che l'ubidir, se già fosse, m' è tardi; 80
 più non t' è uo' ch'aprirmi il tuo talento.
 Ma dimmi la cagion che non ti guardi
 dello scender qua giuso in questo centro
 dell'ampio loco ove tornar tu ardi."
 "Da che tu vuo' saper cotanto a dentro,
 dirotti brevemente" mi rispose
 "perch' io non temo di venir qua entro.
 Temer si dee di sole quelle cose
 c' hanno potenza di fare altrui male;
 dell'altre no, chè non son paurose. 90
 Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale
 che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
 nè fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale.
 Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiangi
 di questo impedimento ov' io ti mando,
 sì che duro giudicio là su frange.
 Questa chiese Lucia in suo dimando
 e disse: 'Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele
 di te, ed io a te lo raccomando.'
 Lucia, nimica di ciascun crudele, 100
 sì mosse, e venne al loco dov' i' era,
 che mi sedea con l'antica Rachele.
 Disse: 'Beatrice, loda di Dio vera,
 chè non soccorri quei che t'amò tanto
 ch'uscì per te della volgare schiera?

CANTO II

to succour him. Haste then, and with the beauty of thy speech and whatever is needful for his deliverance give him such help that I shall be comforted. I am Beatrice who bid thee go. I come from the place where I desire to return. Love moved me and makes me speak. When I am before my Lord I will often speak to Him in praise of thee."

"Then she was silent, and I began: "O lady of virtue, through whom alone the human kind surpasses everything within the smallest circle of the heavens,⁷ so grateful to me is thy command that my obedience, were it given already, is late; there is no need for more than to declare thy will to me. But tell me the reason why thou dost not shrink from descending into this central depth from the spacious place where thou burnest to return."

"Since thou wouldst know so deeply," she answered me "I shall tell thee shortly why I do not fear to enter here. Only those things should be feared that have power to do us ill, nothing else, for nothing else is fearful, and I am made such by God of His grace that your misery does not touch me nor a flame of the fires here assail me. There is a gentle lady in Heaven who is so moved with pity of that hindrance for which I send thee that she breaks the stern judgement there on high;⁸ she called Lucy⁹ and gave her her behest: 'Thy faithful one is now in need of thee and I commend him to thee.' Lucy, enemy of all cruelty, rose and came to the place where I was seated beside the ancient Rachel and said: 'Beatrice, true praise of God, why dost thou not succour him who so loved thee that for thy sake he left the vulgar herd? Hearest thou

non odi tu la pièta del suo pianto?
 non vedi tu la morte che 'l combatte
 su la fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto?'
 Al mondo non fur mai persone ratte
 a far lor pro o a fuggir lor danno, 110
 com' io, dopo cotai parole fatte,
 venni qua giù del mio beato scanno,
 fidandomi nel tuo parlare onesto,
 ch'onora te e quei ch'udito l' hanno."
 Poscia che m'ebbe ragionato questo,
 li occhi lucenti lacrimando volse,
 per che mi fece del venir più presto
 e venni a te così com'ella volse;
 d' innanzi a quella fiera ti levai
 che del bel monte il corto andar ti tolse. 120
 Dunque che è? perchè, perchè restai?
 perchè tanta viltà nel cuore allette?
 perchè ardire e franchezza non hai?
 poscia che tai tre donne benedette
 curan di te ne la corte del cielo,
 'l mio parlar tanto ben t' impromette?'
 Quali i fioretti, dal notturno gelo
 chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol li 'mbianca
 si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo, 130
 tal mi fec' io di mia virtute stanca,
 e tanto buono ardire al cor mi corse,
 ch' i' cominciai come persona franca:
 'Oh pietosa colei che mi soccorse!
 e te cortese ch'ubidisti tosto
 alle vere parole che ti porse!
 Tu m' hai con disiderio il cor disposto
 sì al venir con le parole tue,
 ch' i' son tornato nel primo proposto.
 Or va, ch'un sol volere è d'ambidue:
 tu duca, tu signore, e tu maestro.' 140
 Così li dissi; e poi che mosso fue,
 intrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro.

not his pitiful weeping? Seest thou not the death which combats him on the flood that is not less terrible than the sea?' Never were men on earth so swift to seek their good or to escape their hurt as I, after these words were spoken, to descend here from my blessed seat, trusting to thy noble speech which honours thyself and them that have heard it."

'When she had talked with me thus she turned away, with tears, her shining eyes; which made me haste the more to come, and so I came to thee as she wished. I delivered thee from that beast which deprived thee of the short way to the beautiful mountain. What then? Why, why dost thou delay? Why harbourst such cowardice in thy heart? Why art thou not bold and free, when three such blessed ladies care for thee in the court of Heaven and my words promise thee so much good?'

As little flowers, bent down and closed with the chill of night, when the sun brightens them stand all open on their stems, such I became with my failing strength, and so much good courage ran into my heart that I began as one set free: 'O she compassionate that succoured me, and thou who of thy courtesy wast quick to obey the true words she spoke to thee! Thou hast so disposed my heart with desire for the journey by thy words that I have returned to my first intent. Now go, for but one will is in us both, thou leader, thou lord and master.'

Thus I spoke to him, and when he set out I entered on the deep and savage way.

INFERNO

1. Aeneas's visit to the dead (*Aeneid* vi).
2. Aeneas, ancestor of the Emperors.
3. The highest of the heavens, the immediate presence of God.
4. The founding of Rome prepared for the Papacy.
5. St Paul. 'He is a chosen vessel unto me' (*Acts* ix. 15). 'He was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter' (2 *Cor.* xii. 4).
6. The virtuous heathen in Limbo (Canto iv), suspended, as it were, between torment and bliss.
7. Within the circuit of the moon.
8. The Virgin, through whom 'mercy rejoiceth against judgment' (*Jas.* ii. 13).
9. St Lucy of Syracuse, 3rd century martyr.

NOTE

Dante spent the night before Good Friday in the dark wood; he attempted the sunny hill on Good Friday morning and in the course of the day was driven back by the three beasts; it was only on the evening of Good Friday, after his talk with Virgil, that he was ready to start on the great journey, the first part of which is to end on Easter morning,—for so we learn from a later canto to date his story. The whole story of the *Inferno* passes, so to speak, in the time between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. It was during these days and nights of sin's apparent victory—when Christ Himself, in the language of the creed, 'descended into Hell'—that Dante was led to search out sin and to know the worst of it; and the canto begins with the solemn and testing isolation of his soul when darkness fell and 'he, alone, was preparing to endure the conflict' of the way.

Before setting out Dante puts himself expressly, critically, into comparison with Aeneas and Paul, with the representatives, that is to say, of the Empire and the Church, who have their high historical place in relation to the divine counsel and the eternal world of spiritual things. For him, a mere man among men, only a baffled human soul, 'why should he go there, and who grants it?' What was his warrant? Only the grace and the calling of God. For all the great place given to Church and Empire and their institutions in human order and fellowship and intercession, the essential and primary operations of grace are always, for Dante, unofficial, inward, personal, in principle prior and superior to all institutions.

And yet, along with that personal humbleness, there is in Dante—and it is an essential factor in the *Divine Comedy*—the pride of a great calling. 'Three blessed ladies care for him in the court of heaven, protecting him in the fearful enterprise

which the wise leader holds to be necessary for his deliverance. The poet thus places himself third alongside of the father of the Roman line and the convert of Tarsus. A representation of cowardice is resolved into an affirmation of great-hearted pride; it is the first instance of the heroic poetry of that moral and civil apostolate which is the *Divine Comedy* (V. Rossi).

The linking together of the names of Aeneas and St Paul is the first of many instances in the poem of Dante's practice of balancing examples from Scripture with others from classical paganism, scriptural and pagan history being taken as complementary elements of divine providence. As the mystic journey of Aeneas prepared for the Empire and thus for the Papacy, so Paul's made plainer the way of salvation for men, and together they served one end.

A small instance of Dante's habitual relevancy to the matter in hand in his language is his naming of Aeneas 'the son of Anchises' in the first canto, when the reference is back to Troy, and here 'the father of Sylvius', when it is forward to the royal line and Rome.

When Dante shrank from the journey Virgil's rebuke was not sufficient to change him. It needed a deeper appeal and assurance than that of reason itself to make him obedient to reason, and Virgil had to show Dante a warrant higher than his own, that he had been sent by her who was for Dante the embodied revelation of the truth of God, her 'through whom alone the human kind surpasses everything within the smallest circle of the heavens'. Reason or conscience—the two are one in Virgil—is but the messenger and the vicegerent of revelation and only in so far as it is that, and more than a mere private prompting, has it authority.

Beatrice, the personal embodiment of heavenly truth, is in a sense the representative of the ideal Church, as Virgil of the ideal world-Empire, so that her prompting of Virgil here for Dante's deliverance suggests that co-operation of Church and Empire to which Dante looked for all human well-being. It is at the bidding, so to speak, of the true Church and Empire that he sets out on his pilgrimage.

To Virgil it was a wonder that Beatrice should come so low as Limbo for Dante's help, for such reasons as moved Beatrice

are strange to natural reason and even Beatrice gave a reason that was beyond herself. The Virgin was the fount of grace, and grace works by reasons which are in itself, not waiting for the desert or the petition of the soul; that is grace by definition. St Lucy seems to have been in some sense Dante's patron saint, perhaps as the saint of enlightenment (*luce*, light), helpful to one troubled with his eyes. At any rate this spirit of enlightenment is the medium between grace and revelation; Lucy brings the message of the Virgin to Beatrice. The symbolism of the 'three blessed ladies' is in itself arid and formal, but the late Professor Rossi rightly noted 'the serenity and sweet intimacy of all this scene in Paradise'. That fragrant breath, as if from the pages of the *Vita Nuova*, brings to Dante the sense of a precedent grace which takes and keeps the initiative with him, the assurance of a love beyond reason, all that was meant for him by the revived memory of Beatrice, and it renews his purpose and makes him obedient to his reason and ready now to follow Virgil, 'leader, lord, and master', through the gates of Hell.