

DANTE'S INFERNO

Dante Alighieri

Broke the deep lethargy within my head
A heavy thunder, so that I upstarted,
Like to a person who by force is wakened;

And round about I moved my rested eyes,
Uprisen erect, and steadfastly I gazed,
To recognise the place wherein I was.

True is it, that upon the verge I found me
Of the abysmal valley dolorous
That gathers thunder of infinite ululations.

Obscure, profound it was, and nebulous,
So that by fixing on its depth my sight
Nothing whatever I discerned therein

"Let us descend now into the blind world,"
Began the poet, pallid utterly;
"I will be first, and thou shalt second be."

And I, who of his colour was aware,
Said: "How shall I come, if thou art afraid
Who'rt wont to be a comfort to my fears?"

And he to me: "The anguish of the people
Who are below here in my face depicts
That pity which for terror thou hast taken.

Let us go, for the long way impels us"
Thus he went in, and thus he made me enter
The foremost circle that surrounds the abyss.

There, as it seemed to me from listening,
Were lamentations none, but only sighs,
That tremble made the everlasting air.

And this arose from sorrow without torment,
Which the crowd had, that many were and great,
Of infants and of women and of men.

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To me the Master good: Thou dost not ask
What spirits these, which thou beholdest, are?
Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,

That they sinned not: and if they merit had,
'Tis not enough, because they had not baptism
Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest;

And if they were before Christianity,
In the right manner they adorned not God;
And among such as these am I myself

For such defects, and not for other guilt,
Lost are we and are only so far punished
That without hope we live on in desire."

Great grief seized on my heart when this I heard,
Because some people of much worthiness
I knew, who in the limbo were suspended.

"Tell me, my master, tell me, thou my Lord,"
Began I, with desire of being certain
Of that faith which o'ercometh every error,

"Came any one by his own merit hence,
Or by another's, who was blessed thereafter?"
And he, who understood my covert speech,

Replied: "I was a novice in this state,
When I saw hither come a Mighty One,
With sign of victory incoronate.

Hence he drew forth the shade of the first parent,
And that of his son Abel, and of Noah
Of Moses the lawgiver, and the obedient

Abraham, patriarch, and David, king,
Israel with his father and his children,
And Rachel, for whose sake he did so much,

And others many, and he made them blessed;
And thou must know, that earlier than these
Never were any human spirits saved."