

Everywhere the clear spiritual vision of Dante is remarkable. This is shown in his making the circles of hell narrow as the sins which are represented increase in intensity. The upper circles which contain those who have sinned through weakness are the largest. As we pass downwards to sins of a more spiritual character the circles contract. Another point remarkable in his classification of sins is the fact that whilst in sins of frailty there is simply one great class, in the more heinous sins there are many subdivisions. It may be as well here to give an outline of the whole book. The first circle, as has been said, is Limbus. The next four contain successively those who have sinned through frailty: 1. The incontinent. 2. Gluttons. 3. Avaricious and prodigal. 4. Wrathful.

The sixth circle contains the heretics, a class which seems to lie between the weak and the malicious and to partake of the character of both. The malicious again are divided into two great classes, the violent and the fraudulent, the latter exceeding in malignity, as being the more spiritual. The seventh circle contains the violent, who are divided into three classes—those who are violent against their neighbors: 1. Against their person, namely, murderers and tyrants. 2. Against property robbers. Secondly, those who are violent against themselves: 1. Suicides. 2. Gamblers. Lastly, those violent against God. 1. Blasphemers. 2. Those guilty of unnatural sins and usurers.

The second division of the malicious are the fraudulent; and fraud is exercised in two ways, (1) by destroying the natural bond of love, and (2) in opposition to the bond of love and faith. The first class of the fraudulent are contained in the eighth circle, and consist of (1) seducers, (2) flatterers, (3) simoniacs, (4) soothsayers, (5) corrupt officials, (6) hypocrites, (7) thieves, (8) evil counsellors, (9) sowers of schism and strife, (10) forgers. In the ninth and deepest circle there are the fraudulent malicious who have sinned against special ties and obligations, have been guilty of treachery and abuse of confidence, have been false to kindred and fatherland, to friends and benefactors, to the Emperor and to God. Such is a bare outline of the whole of the Inferno.

We return to the entrance of hell. The poets enter and find in the vestibule the cowardly and undecided. Here all Dante's impatient scorn breaks out. Although he "wept at entering," yet he records with satisfaction the "miserable fate" of "the wretched souls of those who lived without or praise or blame." "From his bounds heaven drove them forth Not to impair his lustre; nor the depth Of hell receives them; lest the accursed tribe Should glory thence with exultation. . . . Mercy and Justice scorn them both, Reason we not of them, but look and pass."

Among these Dante finds one who had made *il gran rifiuto*, the great refusal or repudiation, supposed to be Clement V., who refused the Papedom. Dante was too harsh here, not understanding the conscience of a man who refused to fulfil a duty imposed upon him, from a sense of deficiency. The Church seems to have been wiser. Clement was canonized in 1313, about the time that Dante was finishing the Inferno.

They now cross the Acheron in Charon's boat. The reader should here compare the description of the ferryman of hell given by Virgil in the sixth book of the *Æneid* with this of

Dante. The latter is splendid and horrible. The first circle is now entered, the Limbus of the unbaptized. These have been guilty of no wilful sin against God, but they have not been made members of the Church. They suffered no tortures, but only the grief of longing for what could not be obtained. It is a picture of the heathen world, the whole creation groaning and travailling in pain, and also, to some extent, of those who have the first fruits of the Spirit. A hint is given that the doors of Limbus are not hermetically sealed. Virgil himself had, by special permission, gone forth. Moreover, one great class had already been removed by "a puissant one," who had drawn forth "the shade of our first parent" and "others many more, whom He to bliss exalted." The reference is to 1 S. Peter iii., 19.

In this circle are found the great poets, Homer, "of all bards supreme," Horace, "in satire's vein excelling," Ovid the third and Statius the fourth. These welcome back Virgil the bard sublime, and Dante was taken as sixth among them. Beyond these, in a proud castle, they find the great ones of early times who

"In their past
Bore eminent authority; they spake
Seldom, but all their words were tuneful
sweet." (iv., 107.)

Among them were Electra, Hector, Æneas, Caesar, and others. And soon they came upon Aristotle, *il maestro di color che sanno*, the master of those who know, "the master of the sapient throng," as Cary renders it. With him were Socrates and Plato, and those great commentators on Aristotle through whose works he was made known to mediæval scholars.

In the second circle are the incontinent. Here we note the pitifulness of Dante, and yet the inexorable justice which meets out due punishment to all offenders. The occupants of the circle are represented as tossed about incessantly in the dark air and swept along by hurricanes.

"The stormy blast of hell
With restless fury drives the spirits on,
Whirled round and dashed amain with sore
annoy." (c. 5.)

Two in this circle are objects of peculiar interest, Francesca of Rimini and her lover Paolo, son of Malatesta, Lord of Rimini. No more pathetic story than theirs could be told, and few could tell it like Dante. Words and phrases from this wonderful narrative remain with us. The well-known lines:—

"Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria—"

"No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy, when misery is at hand—"

have been imitated by many poets, and among ourselves by Chaucer, in "Troilus and Creseide," and by Tennyson in "Locksley Hall."

"This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering
happier things."

The third circle contains the gluttonous, and Dante seems to have thought worse of this vice than we do in this day. People now seem so much taken up with condemning not merely excess but moderation in drinking that they have no time even to remember the evils of over-eating.

The fourth circle contains the avaricious and the prodigal, two different extremes of the same kind of action. The picture of these two

classes is very striking, both rolling weights, smiting together, hurling mutual reproaches: "Exclaiming these, 'Why holdest thou so fast?' Those answering, 'And why castest thou away?'"

The poets pass to the fifth circle by a rugged path and come to the boiling well whose murky waters expand into the Stygian lake of hatred and sadness. Here the irascible and the sullen are immersed. The former are cutting each other piecemeal with their fangs, striking not only with their hands, "but with the head, the breast, the feet," whilst the sullen, who had been sad on earth,

"In the sweet air made gladsome by the sun,
Carrying a foul and lazy mist within;
Now in these murky settlements are we sad."

In the sixth circle, which is within the city of Dis (Lucifer), we come to the heretics. Remembering the two great classes of sin—weakness and malice—we might say that this class lay between the two. Heresy partly comes of weakness, partly of pride, and so we can see how evil may pass further on and turn into malice. This circle spreads over four cantos of the poem (8 to 11). The heretics are found in fiery tombs, the coverings suspended above them, and out of them come the moans of the tortured spirits of heresiarchs and their followers. The tombs are not to be closed until the Day of Judgment.

Passing on to the seventh circle we come to the malicious, and first, to those who are so by violence. The entrance is made by a precipitous chasm, which had been formed by the earthquake which had convulsed hell at the descent of our Lord thither, when He came to carry off "from Dis the mighty spoil." They come to the river of blood in which those are punished who have injured others by violence. The violent are divided into three classes (cantos 12 to 16): (1) those who have done violence to their neighbors; (2) those who have done violence to themselves, and (3) those who have done violence to God; and each of these again is subdivided into two classes: (1) violence against the person; (2) violence against property. Thus we have (1) murderers and tyrants, and also robbers; (2) suicides and gamblers; (3) blasphemers, and also sinners against nature, and usurers. As an example of sinners against nature, Dante brings in his old friend, Brunetto Latini. There are few things more beautiful than Dante's touching remembrance of "the dear benign paternal image" of a man who had yet sinned so deeply.

Passing from the seventh to the eighth circle, (17 to 31) they reach the din of the torrent Phlegethon across which they are carried to the circle of the fraudulent by Geryon, a monster, who is the personification of Fraud. This horrible creature is half-man, half-bear, but lower than the centaur or the harpy, since he ends in the creeping snake and the deadly scorpion.

"Forthwith that image vile of Fraud appeared,
His head and upper part exposed on land,
But laid not on the shore his bestial train.
His face the semblance of a just man's bore,
So kind and gracious was its outward cheer
The rest was serpent all: Two shaggy claws
Reached to the arm pits; and the back and breast
And either side were painted o'er with nodes
And orbits. Colours variegated more
Nor Turks nor Tartars e'er on cloth of State
With interchangeable embroidery wove,