

THE STORY. From the watch-tower on the edge of the marsh a beacon signals to the garrison of the City of Dis that Dante and Virgil are approaching, and a boat is sent to fetch them. Phlegyas ferries them across Styx. On the way they encounter Filippo Argenti, one of the Wrathful, who is recognized by Dante and tries to attack him. They draw near to the red-hot walls of the City and after a long circuit disembark at the gate. Virgil parleys with the Fallen Angels who are on guard there, but they slam the gate in his face. The two poets are obliged to wait for Divine assistance.

I say, continuing, that ere we came
To that tower's foot, our eyes had long been led
To its summit, by two twinkling points of flame

Which we saw kindled there while, far ahead, 4
And almost out of eyeshot we espied
An answering beacon's flicker. So I said,

Turning to the well of wisdom at my side: 7
"What does it say? What does that other light
Wink back? Who make these signals?" He replied:

"Already across the water heaves in sight 10
What's to be looked for from the signal's waft,
So it be not veiled from thee by the blight

Of these marsh mists." I looked, and never shaft 13
So swift from bowstring sped through the thin air
As through those turbid waves a little craft

Came skimming toward us; one sole mariner 16
Guided its course, who shouted from the prow:
"Oho, thou wicked spirit! So thou art there!"

"Nay, Phlegyas, Phlegyas," said my lord, "peace now! 19
This time thou criest in vain; we are no meat
For thee — thou hast but to ferry us o'er the slough."

As one who hears of some outrageous cheat 22
Practised on him, and fumes and chokes with gall,
So Phlegyas, thwarted, fumed at his defeat.

So then my guide embarked, and at his call 25
I followed him; and not till I was in
Did the boat seem to bear a load at all.

Inferno: Canto 8

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When we were set, the ancient vessel then 28
Put forth at once, cleaving the water's grime
Deeper than her wont, our voyage to begin;

And as [we ran the channel of the dead slime](#) 31
There started up at me a mud-soaked head,
Crying: "Who art thou, come here before thy time?"

"Tho' I come," said I, "I stay not; that who art made 34
So rank and beastly, who art thou?" "Go to;
Thou seest that I am one who weep," he said.

And I: "Amid the weeping and the woe, 37
Accursed spirit, do thou remain and rot!
I know thee, filthy as thou art — I know."

Then he stretched out both hands to clutch the boat, 40
But the master was on his guard and thrust him back,
Crying: "Hence to the other dogs! Trouble him not!"

And after, laid his arms about my neck 43
And kissed my face and said: ' Indignant soul,
Blessed is the womb that bare thee! This bold jack

Was an arrogant brute in the world, nor in his whole 46
Life can remembrance find one sweetening touch;
So must his raging spirit writhe here and roll.

Many who strut like kings up there are such 49
As here shall wallow hog-like in the mud,
Leaving behind nothing but foul reproach."

"Master," said I, "I tell thee, it were good 52
If I might see this villain soused in the swill
Before we have passed the lake — Oh, that I could!"

And he made answer: "Thou shalt gaze thy fill 55
Or ever thou set eyes on the far shore;
Herein 'tis fitting thou shouldst have thy will."

And soon I saw him set upon so sore 58
By the muddy gang, with such a pulling and hauling,
That I still praise and thank my God therefor.

"Have at [Filippo Argenti!](#)" they were bawling; 61
 "Loo! loo! The shade of the fierce Florentine
 Turned on himself, biting with his teeth and mauling.

There left we him, as doth this tale of mine; 64
 For on my ears there smote a wailing cry,
 And I craned forward, eager to divine

Its meaning. "See, my son! it now draws nigh," 67
 Said my good lord, "[the city named of Dis](#),
 With its sad citizens, its great company."

And I: "Already I see its mosques arise 70
 Clear from the valley yonder — a red shell,
 As though drawn out of glowing furnaces."

And he replied: "The flames unquenchable 73
 That fire them from within thus make them burn
 Ruddy, as thou seest, in this, the nether Hell."

We now were come to the deep moats, which turn 76
 To gird that city all disconsolate,
 Whose walls appeared as they were made of iron.

A long way round we had to navigate 79
 Before we came to where the ferryman
 Roared: "Out with you now, for here's the gate!"

Thousand and more, thronging the barbican, 82
 I saw, of spirits fallen from Heaven, who cried
 Angrily: "Who goes there? why walks this man,

Undead, the kingdom of the dead?" My guide, 85
 Wary and wise, made signs to them, to show
 He sought a secret parley. Then, their pride

Abating somewhat, they called out: "Why, so! 88
 Come thou within, and bid that fellow begone —
 That rash intruder on our realm below.

Let him wend back his foolish way alone; 91
 See if he can; for thou with us shalt stay
 That through this nighted land hast led him on."

Reader, do but conceive of my dismay, 94
 Hearing these dreadful words! It seemed quite plain
 I nevermore should see the light of day.

Inferno: Canto 8

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| "O Master dear, that seven times over again Hast brought me safely through," said I, "and freed From all the perils that in my path have lain, | 97 |
| Leave me not utterly undone! Indeed, If we may not go forward, pray let's quit, And hasten back together with all good speed!" | 100 |
| Then said my lord and leader: "Fear no whit; There's none at all can stay our steps, nor make thee Forbear the pass: such Power hath granted it. | 103 |
| Wait for me here; to cheerful thoughts betake thee; Feed thy faint heart with hope, and calm the breast, For in this underworld I'll not forsake thee." | 106 |
| My gentle father's gone! I'm left distrest, Abandoned here! Horrid perhapses throng My doubtful mind, where yeas and noes contest. | 109 |
| His proffered terms I could not hear. Not long He'd stood in talk with them, when suddenly They all rushed jostling in again headlong, | 112 |
| Leaving him outside. So the enemy Slammed the gate in my master s face; who thus Turned him, and came with slow steps back to me. | 115 |
| His eyes were downcast, and his anxious brows Shorn of all boldness. Sighing he said: "What's here Who dares forbid me the Mansions Dolorous?" | 118 |
| And then aloud to me: "Have thou no fear Though I be wroth; I'll win this trial of power, Whatever hindrance they contrive in there. | 121 |
| Their truculence is no new thing; once before 'Twas tried at a less secret gate, whereon No bars remain for ever. Above that door | 124 |
| Thou saw at the dead title. And now comes one, This side already treading the steep abyss And guardless passing all the circles down, | 127 |
| That shall unbar to us the gates of Dis." | 130 |