

## CANTO XXII

When the three Poets leave the angel, Dante feels lighter on his feet again as another *P* is wiped from his brow and he hears the proclamation “Blessed are they who thirst for righteousness.” Virgil then reciprocates Statius’ display of affection by saying that from the moment Juvenal descended into Limbo with news of the warm regard in which Statius held him, he has loved him more than anyone has ever loved one unseen. When Virgil marvels that avarice could ever have taken root within the heart of one so wise (1–24), Statius explains that it was not avarice but its diametrical opposite, prodigality, punished on the same terrace, that proved his besetting sin, though Virgil’s condemnation of the former vice led him to repent of the latter (25–54). Virgil remarks that the *Thebaid* gives no evidence of Christian faith and wonders by what light Statius came to believe. Statius answers that Virgil himself had not only inspired his poetry but, by a passage interpreted as a Messianic prophecy, opened him up to the message of the Gospel preached by the apostles, whose constancy under persecution moved him to scorn for every other sect. Once baptized himself, he remained a secret Christian out of fear, an act of cowardice for which he had to spend over 400 years on the terrace of the slothful (55–93). In response to a question posed by Statius, Virgil then speaks of various Latin and Greek figures found in Limbo (94–114). As they emerge upon the sixth terrace, they turn to the right, the two Roman Poets walking in front with the Pilgrim behind listening to their conversation. Soon they are surprised by a tree planted in the middle of the road, inverted in form, laden with redolent fruits, and bathed by a cascade of limpid water. A voice from within its leaves cries out the examples of temperance: Mary concerned to help the young married couple at the wedding feast rather than to satisfy herself, the ancient Roman women who abstained from wine, Daniel who refused the unclean food of the king’s table, and the simple fare of men in the classical Golden Age and of John the Baptist in the desert (115–154).

<sup>1</sup> The angel had been left behind by now Who to that sixth high round had led  
our quest  
And had erased a stroke from off my brow.[\[356\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> He had declared to us that they are blest Who long for righteousness, his  
words complete  
With “*sitiunt*,” although without the rest.[\[357\]](#)

<sup>7</sup> And at this pass, made lighter on my feet Than otherwise, I went, not strained  
a whit,  
And followed spirits upwards who were fleet.

10 Then Virgil started: "Love by virtue lit Will always light another love's  
consent  
If but its flame appears outside a bit.

13 Thus, from the hour of Juvenal's descent<sup>[358]</sup>  
Among us into Hell at Limbo's port,  
When he made known your warm affection's bent,

16 My love for you has been of such a sort As never yet was felt for one unseen  
So that to me these stairs will now seem short.

19 But tell me (if through confidence too keen I slack the reins, forgive as  
friends do best,  
And speak with me, as with a friend, I mean)

22 Tell how, with such great wisdom once possessed As that which zeal had  
filled you with inside,  
Could avarice find place within your breast?"

25 For Statius these words first justified A little smile; "Your speech has been a  
dear  
Reminder of your love," he then replied.

28 "But, to be sure, things often will appear To give false matter for our doubts  
since they  
Have truer reasons, which are hidden here.

31 The question posed gives your belief away That I on earth lived avariciously,  
Due maybe to the circle where I lay.

34 But avarice was too removed from me, And thus this lack of measure, be  
aware,  
Found many thousand months as penalty.

37 And were it not that I set right my care, Thus understanding when you cried  
of old  
As if enraged by human nature there:

40 ‘To what extremes, O cursèd love of gold, Do you not guide our mortal  
appetite?’[\[359\]](#)

I’d feel the dismal jousts where stones are rolled.[\[360\]](#)

43 But as I learned that hands in spending might, When opened, have their  
wings too widely spread,

I rued for that and other sins, contrite.

46 How many will arise with close-cropped head Through ignorance, which  
makes them not repent

This sin in life or on their dying bed!

49 The fault rebutting any sinful bent Opposed directly to it will begin  
To wither here with it. In that event,

52 If with those mourning avarice I’ve been So long in the purgation of my  
stains,

Then this has happened for a counter-sin.”

55 “Now when you sang Jocasta’s double pains[\[361\]](#)

Caused by the cruel strife of arms at war,”

Replied that singer of bucolic strains,[\[362\]](#)

58 “The notes that Clio touched with you of yore[\[363\]](#)

Don’t show that faith had made you faithful yet;

And should it lack, good works suffice no more.

61 If that is so, what sun or candles let Your darkness be dispelled so, in their  
wake,

Your sails behind the Fisherman were set?”[\[364\]](#)

64 “You sent me first,” he told him, “to partake Of cavern streams upon  
Parnassus’ height[\[365\]](#)

And first made light upon God’s pathways break.

67 And you were like a man who goes by night, Himself unhelped, his lamp

behind him when  
He makes those wise who follow in his light,

70 Since you declared: 'The world is new again; As man's first age returns, and  
justice too,  
There falls from heaven a new race of men.'[\[366\]](#)

73 First poet, Christian then, I was through you; That to your view my sketch  
may be more plain,  
I'll set my hand to lend it color's hue.

76 Already was the world's entire domain Made big with that true faith, once  
sown the seed  
By messengers of the eternal reign.[\[367\]](#)

79 Your words, touched on above, had so agreed With those new preachers'  
words, and in such wise,  
That I would often visit them indeed.

82 As they became so saintly in my eyes, Domitian's persecutions went  
unchecked,[\[368\]](#)  
Though now my tears accompanied their cries.

85 In life on earth, I succored those elect, Whose righteous customs only made  
appear  
My great disdain for any other sect.

88 Before my verse had made the Greeks draw near To Theban streams, I was  
baptized, although  
I stayed a secret Christian out of fear

91 And as a pagan long made outward show; And thus four hundred years and  
more I went  
Round that fourth ring, for tepidness, below.[\[369\]](#)

94 Now you, by whom the veil for me was rent That hid so great a good of  
which I've told,  
Do tell. while we have time on this ascent.

97 Where's Varius, and Terrence too of old,[\[370\]](#)  
Caecilius and Plautus, if you know;  
Tell me if they are damned and in what fold."

100 "They, Persius, and I," my Leader so, "With all the rest, are with that  
Grecian wit  
Whom Muses suckle more than all down low

103 On that first circle of our jail's dark pit;[\[371\]](#)  
And oftentimes we speak about the mound  
That always has our nursemaids there with it.[\[372\]](#)

106 There Antiphon, Euripides are found;[\[373\]](#)  
Simonides and Agathon are where  
Lie other Greeks whose brows the laurel crowned.

109 And of your clan, Antigone is there,[\[374\]](#)  
Deíphyle, Argía, in that cell,  
Ismene too, with still so sad an air.

112 There she is seen who showed Langía's well, Tiresias' dear girl, and Thetis  
too;  
Deïdamía there and sisters dwell."

115 And here the Poets both grew silent, who, Attentive, had their gazes round  
them borne,  
Freed from the climb and from the walls anew.

118 Already now, four handmaids of the morn Were left behind, and at the  
carriage-pole  
The fifth directed up its flaming horn.[\[375\]](#)

121 "I think we should," then said my Guiding Soul, "Turn our right shoulders  
to the outer side  
And round the mountain make our wonted stroll."

124 Since in that place our custom was our guide, We went our way much less  
to doubt inclined,  
With the assent that worthy soul supplied.[\[376\]](#)

127 They went in front, and I alone behind; And I was listening to words they  
spoke,  
Which gave poetic keenness to my mind.

130 But soon the thread of pleasant discourse broke As in mid-road a tree was  
manifest,[\[377\]](#)  
Which fruits, sweet-smelling and good-tasting, cloak.

133 Just as fir-branches taper up, so lest A spirit should climb up it, I supposed,  
This tree was tapered downwards from the crest.

136 Where on the other side our way was closed,[\[378\]](#)  
From lofty rocks a liquid tumbled, clear,  
Which sprayed above the foliage exposed.

139 As to this tree those Poets both drew near, We heard a voice within its  
leaves cry through:[\[379\]](#)  
“You all shall want for food upon this tier!”

142 “Now Mary gave more thought,” it cried anew, “To making fair and full the  
wedding feast  
Than to her mouth, which answers yet for you.[\[380\]](#)

145 Rome’s ancient maids, content with water, ceased All other drink; as Daniel  
too once cursed  
The kingly food, his wisdom was increased.[\[381\]](#)

148 The age of man was fair as gold at first;[\[382\]](#)  
With hunger, acorns had a pleasing taste,  
And every stream was nectarlike by thirst.

151 The food that fed the Baptist in the waste Was locusts and wild honey, that  
alone,  
For which he is in glory greatly praised

for which he is in glory greatly pleased,

154 As in the Gospel you have all been shown.”[\[383\]](#)