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| **Dante Alighieri (1265–1321).  The Divine Comedy: Inferno** |
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| “THROUGH me you pass into the city of woe: |  |
| Through me you pass into eternal pain: |  |
| Through me among the people lost for aye. |  |
| Justice the founder of my fabric moved: |  |
| To rear me was the task of Power divine, | *5* |
| Supremest Wisdom, and primeval Love.   |  |
| Before me things create were none, save things |  |
| Eternal, and eternal I endure. |  |
| All hope abandon, ye who enter here.” |  |
|   Such characters, in color dim, I mark’d | *10* |
| Over a portal’s lofty arch inscribed. |  |
| Whereat I thus: “Master, these words import |  |
| Hard meaning.” He as one prepared replied: |  |
| “Here thou must all distrust behind thee leave; |  |
| Here be vile fear extinguish’d. We are come | *15* |
| Where I have told thee we shall see the souls |  |
| To misery doom’d, who intellectual good |  |
| Have lost.” And when his hand he had stretch’d forth |  |
| To mine, with pleasant looks, whence I was cheer’d, |  |
| Into that secret place he led me on. | *20* |
|   Here sighs, with lamentations and loud moans, |  |
| Resounded through the air pierced by no star, |  |
| That e’en I wept at entering. Various tongues, |  |
| Horrible languages, outcries of woe, |  |
| Accents of anger, voices deep and hoarse, | *25* |
| With hands together smote that swell’d the sounds, |  |
| Made up a tumult, that forever whirls |  |
| Round through that air with solid darkness stain’d, |  |
| Like to the sand that in the whirlwind flies. |  |
|   I then, with horror yet encompast, cried: | *30* |
| “O master! what is this I hear? what race |  |
| Are these, who seem so overcome with woe?” |  |
|   He thus to me: “This miserable fate |  |
| Suffer the wretched souls of those, who lived |  |
| Without or praise or blame, with that ill band | *35* |
| Of angels mix’d, who nor rebellious proved, |  |
| Nor yet were true to God, but for themselves |  |
| Were only. From his bounds Heaven drove them forth |  |
| Not to impair his lustre; nor the depth |  |
| Of Hell receives them, lest the accursed tribe | *40* |
| Should glory thence with exultation vain.” |  |
|   I then: “Master! what doth aggrieve them thus, |  |
| That they lament so loud?” He straight replied: |  |
| “That will I tell thee briefly. These of death |  |
| No hope may entertain: and their blind life | *45* |
| So meanly passes, that all other lots |  |
| They envy. Fame of them the world hath none, |  |
| Nor suffers; Mercy and Justice scorn them both. |  |
| Speak not of them, but look, and pass them by.” |  |
|   And I, who straightway look’d, beheld a flag, | *50* |
| Which whirling ran around so rapidly, |  |
| That it no pause obtain’d: and following came |  |
| Such a long train of spirits, I should ne’er |  |
| Have thought that death so many had despoil’d. |  |
|   When some of these I recognized, I saw | *55* |
| And knew the shade of him, who to base fear  |  |
| Yielding, abjured his high estate. Forthwith |  |
| I understood, for certain, this the tribe |  |
| Of those ill spirits both to God displeasing |  |
| And to His foes. These wretches, who ne’er lived, | *60* |
| Went on in nakedness, and sorely stung |  |
| By wasps and hornets, which bedew’d their cheeks |  |
| With blood, that, mix’d with tears, dropp’d to their feet, |  |
| And by disgustful worms was gather’d there. |  |
|   Then looking further onwards, I beheld | *65* |
| A throng upon the shore of a great stream: |  |
| Whereat I thus: “Sir! grant me now to know |  |
| Whom here we view, and whence impell’d they seem |  |
| So eager to pass o’er, as I discern |  |
| Through the blear light?” He thus to me in few: | *70* |
| “This shalt thou know, soon as our steps arrive |  |
| Beside the woful tide of Acheron.” |  |
|   Then with eyes downward cast, and fill’d with shame, |  |
| Fearing my words offensive to his ear, |  |
| Till we had reach’d the river, I from speech | *75* |
| Abstain’d. And lo! toward us in a bark |  |
| Comes on an old man, hoary white with eld, |  |
| Crying, “Woe to you, wicked spirits! hope not |  |
| Ever to see the sky again. I come |  |
| To take you to the other shore across, | *80* |
| Into eternal darkness, there to dwell |  |
| In fierce heat and in ice. And thou, who there |  |
| Standest, live spirit! get thee hence, and leave |  |
| These who are dead.” But soon as he beheld |  |
| I left them not, “By other way,” said he, | *85* |
| “By other haven shalt thou come to shore, |  |
| Not by this passage; thee a nimbler boat |  |
| Must carry.” Then to him thus spake my guide: |  |
| “Charon! thyself torment not: so ’tis will’d, |  |
| Where will and power are one: ask thou no more.” | *90* |
|   Straightway in silence fell the shaggy cheeks |  |
| Of him, the boatman o’er the livid lake, |  |
| Around whose eyes glared wheeling flames. Meanwhile |  |
| Those spirits, faint and naked, color changed, |  |
| And gnash’d their teeth, soon as the cruel words | *95* |
| They heard. God and their parents they blasphemed, |  |
| The human kind, the place, the time, and seed, |  |
| That did engender them and give them birth, |  |
|   Then all together sorely wailing drew |  |
| To the curst strand, that every man must pass | *100* |
| Who fears not God. Charon, demoniac form, |  |
| With eyes of burning coal, collects them all, |  |
| Beckoning, and each, that lingers, with his oar |  |
| Strikes. As fall off the light autumnal leaves |  |
| One still another following, till the bough | *105* |
| Strews all its honours on the earth beneath; |  |
| E’en in like manner Adam’s evil brood |  |
| Cast themselves, one by one, down from the shore, |  |
| Each at a beck, as falcon at his call.   |  |
|   Thus go they over through the umber’d wave; | *110* |
| And ever they on the opposing bank |  |
| Be landed, on this side another throng |  |
| Still gathers. “Son,” thus spake the courteous guide, |  |
| “Those who die subject to the wrath of God |  |
| All here together come from every clime | *115* |
| And to o’erpass the river are not loth: |  |
| For so Heaven’s justice goads them on, that fear |  |
| Is turn’d into desire. Hence ne’er hath past |  |
| Good spirit. If of thee Charon complain, |  |
| Now mayst thou know the import of his words.” | *120* |
|   This said, the gloomy region trembling shook |  |
| So terribly, that yet with clammy dews |  |
| Fear chills my brow. The sad earth gave a blast, |  |
| That, lightening, shot forth a vermilion flame, |  |
| Which all my senses conquer’d quite, and I | *125* |
| Down dropp’d, as one with sudden slumber seized. |  |

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