

“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 encompassed, 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.