

CANTO XXXII

Dante's vision is fully absorbed in Beatrice for the first time in ten years when one of the handmaids calls his attention away. As the Pilgrim turns, he is temporarily blinded. Then, regaining his sight, he sees the pageant wheeling around to return, at which Matelda leads Dante and Statius behind the procession to the music of angels. When it has halted before the barren tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his Lady descends from the chariot, and all praise the griffin for his obedience, which stands in contrast to Adam's sin. The griffin then binds the chariot pole, symbolizing the Cross, to the tree, which miraculously blooms with blossoms of purple, the color of Christ's passion. As the assembly bursts into an unknown song, Dante drifts off into sleep (1–69). Once Matelda has wakened him, he feels as the disciples Peter, James, and John did after Christ's Transfiguration, finding the griffin and the elders departing and Beatrice sitting at the roots of the tree, guarding the chariot, and surrounded by her seven handmaids. She commands him to watch and record what he sees (70–105). Like lightning, the eagle of the Empire swoops down, breaking the limbs of the tree of law, and strikes the chariot of the Church, leaving it reeling. A ravenous fox of heresy then leaps inside the car but is driven away by Beatrice. The eagle now descends upon it again, leaving it covered with the feathers of temporal wealth and power given to the Church by the Donation of Constantine. Next the earth opens up between its wheels, and a dragon of schism pierces its floor with its tail and rips off a part of it. Further feathers of wealth and power from the Donations of Pepin and Charlemagne then cover the rest of the chariot like grass, as seven heads of deadly sin with ten horns sprout up on it. Finally, the ungirt whore of faithless popes sits upon the car and flirts with the giant of the royal house of France, who wishes to possess her. When she casts a lewd glance upon Dante, the giant cudgels her mercilessly and drags her off through the woods (106–160).

¹ My eyes were so insistent and intent To quench the kind of thirst ten years
beget[544]

That every other sense of mine was spent.

⁴ On one side and the other there they met A wall of unconcern—so much were
they

Drawn towards that holy smile by its old net!

⁷ But soon my face was forced to turn away, And leftwards, by those goddesses
of grace:[545]

“You stare too fixedly,” I heard one say,

10 At which the state of vision that takes place In eyes just smitten by the
sunlight's source
Left me without my eyesight for a space.

13 When sight was shaped to lesser things (of course, I mean the "less"
compared to greater light,
From which I had withdrawn my eyes by force),

16 I saw the host of glory on the right Returning, now that it had wheeled about
To face the sun and seven flames, all bright.[\[546\]](#)

19 And as beneath their shields a troop in rout Turns round for safety with its
flags before
The ranks are able to face round throughout,

22 So the celestial kingdom's soldier-corps, Which went ahead, had passed
before us when
The car had still not bent its wood of yore.[\[547\]](#)

25 The maidens turned back towards the wheels again; The griffin moved his
blest load in accord[\[548\]](#)
Although no plumes of his were ruffled then.

28 The lovely maid who'd drawn me at the ford,[\[549\]](#)
With Statius and me behind that wheel
Whose orbit with a smaller arc was scored,[\[550\]](#)

31 Passed through high, empty forests, which reveal The guilt of her who once
believed the snake;[\[551\]](#)
Our steps kept time to the angelic peal.

34 An arrow shot three times perhaps might stake Out such a space as we by
now achieved
When Beatrice stepped down. And in the wake

37 Of that, all murmured, "Adam," I perceived, And then they circled round a
tree ahead,
Of leaves and fruits in every limb bereaved

Of leaves and fruits in every limb bereaved.

40 The more it rose, the more its branches spread; And Indians who saw it
would be quick
To marvel at its height in woods they've bred.[\[552\]](#)

43 "O griffin, blest are you whose beak won't pick This tree's sweet-tasting
fruit because it must
Make every stomach that it wrenches sick,"

46 Cried others round the tree, which stood robust; The double-natured animal
cried too:
"Thus is preserved the seed of all the just."

49 And turning to the shaft he'd pulled, he drew It to the widowed trunk and left
his haul
Bound to the tree from which, at first, it grew.[\[553\]](#)

52 And as our plants will burgeon at the fall Of greater light mixed with the rays
that glow
Behind the heavens' Fishes, and as all[\[554\]](#)

55 Renew their colors, every one, below Before the sun yokes up his steeds to
fare
Beneath another group of stars, just so[\[555\]](#)

58 That tree, whose boughs at first had been so bare, Renewed itself and opened
in a hue
That roses more, violas less, will wear.

61 I did not understand the hymn that crew Was singing then—it is not sung
down here— Nor did I bear to hear the music through.

64 Could I but paint how eyes of ruthless leer, On hearing tales of Syrinx,
slumbered deep,
Those eyes whose lengthy vigil cost so dear,[\[556\]](#)

67 I would depict just how I fell asleep As from a model painters paint their
folk;

But whosoever can, let him paint sleep.

70 I therefore must pass on to when I woke And say a splendor tore sleep's veil
for me;

"Rise up! What are you doing?" someone spoke.

73 As, led to blossoms of the apple tree,[\[557\]](#)
Which makes the angels crave the fruits to come
And Heaven's nuptials last eternally,

76 Once Peter, James, and John were overcome And yet revived, awakened by
the cry
That broke the even deeper sleep of some,[\[558\]](#)

79 To see their company diminished by Both Moses and Elijah, once on hand,
And all their Master's raiment changed, so I

82 Awoke to see that clement lady stand[\[559\]](#)
Above me who before had been the guide
To lead my steps along the river's strand.

85 And, all in doubt, "Where's Beatrice?" I cried.
"Behold the one who sits upon the mound
Of roots beneath new leafage," she replied.

88 "Behold the company that circles round; The others mount behind the griffin
there,
With singing both more sweet and more profound."

91 If she said any more, I'm not aware Because before my eyes there now was
found
The one who'd shut me off to every care.

94 Alone, she sat upon the very ground, Left there to guard the chariot, a thing
That, as I saw, the twin-formed beast had bound.

97 The seven nymphs enclosed her in a ring And held in hand those lamps

whose shining hue
Is safe from all that north and south winds bring.

100 “You’ll be a woodsman here awhile, but you, As citizen with me, will ever
dwell
Within that Rome where Christ is Roman too.

103 That you might aid the world not living well, Now eye this chariot, and
write what’s true
Of all you’ve seen when you return to tell.”

106 Thus Beatrice decreed; and I then, who, Devout at her commandments’ feet,
took note,
Gave mind and eyes where she had wished me to.

109 No fire with such quick motion ever smote[\[560\]](#)
From massive clouds, when raining down its doom
Out of the region that is most remote,

112 As did that bird of Jove which I saw zoom[\[561\]](#)
Down through the tree; the bark was rent, in short,
The new-grown leaves, the flowers all in bloom.

115 With all its force it struck the car athwart So that it reeled as ships do in a
squall,
Wave-battered, now to starboard, now to port.

118 I saw a fox leap up inside the wall Of that triumphal chariot; and how
It seemed quite starved, with no good food at all!

121 Rebuking it for foul offenses now, My Lady turned that fox to such a flight
As, stripped of flesh, its bones would still allow.

124 I saw the eagle from its former height Descend upon that chariot’s small ark
And leave it covered with its feather-blight.

127 As from a heart sustaining sorrow’s mark, A voice cried out and pierced the

heaven's veil:
"How ill you're laden, O my little bark!"

130 Between the wheels it seemed an earthen jail Had opened up; a dragon rose
in view,
Which through the chariot drove up its tail.

133 As wasps retract their stings, so it withdrew Its evil tail—part of the floor
was rent— And set upon its wand'ring way anew.

136 What still remained, like fertile soil that went To weeds, was topped by
plumes, though at the start
There was perhaps a pure and kind intent.

139 They covered shaft and wheels upon that cart, And both in lesser time were
overrun
Than but a sigh would hold the lips apart.

142 The holy structure's transformation done, It brought forth heads upon its
parts and set
Three on the pole, and on each corner one.

145 Those three were horned like oxen; the quartet Had single horns upon their
foreheads—I
Had never seen a monster like it yet!

148 Securely seated, like a fortress high Upon a mount, appeared an ungirt
whore,
One quick to look around with roving eye.

151 I saw a giant at her side upsoar As if to stop her being snatched from him;
And sometimes they exchanged a kiss before

154 She eyed me on a wanton, lustful whim.
Because of that her brutal lover wheeled,
And, head to foot, he beat her every limb.

157 Suspicion-filled, and by fierce anger steeled, He loosed the brute and

dragged it such a range
That of the woods themselves he made a shield

160 From me for both that whore and beast so strange.