

**A TRANSLATION OF
DANTE'S INFERNO**

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A Translation of Dante's Inferno by Dante Alighieri & David Johnston

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DANTE ALIGHIERI & DAVID JOHNSTON

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OF
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OF

DANTE'S INFERNO,

BY

DAVID JOHNSTON.



BATH:
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CANTO I

In our life's journey at its midway stage
I found myself within a wood obscure,
Where the right path which guided me was lost.
Ah! what it was how difficult to tell,
This forest solitude, so stern and wild 5
That ev'n in thought my terror is renew'd,
So grievous bitter, death seems scarcely more ;
Yet ere the good I found therein be told,
'Tis right to speak of other things I saw.
How I gain'd entrance fails me now to tell, 10
So deep my sense's slumber at the point
Where I abandon'd the clear way of truth.
But when I reach'd nigh to a mountain's foot
Where clos'd that valley up which had my heart
Pain'd and afflicted with a heavy dread ; 15
Upwards I look'd, and saw its shoulders cloth'd
With the effulgence of that planet's ray,
Which leadeth all men ev'rywhere aright.

In measure then did pass away the fear,
 Which in my heart's great depths, that night did lie, 20
 So spent by me in anguish deep and dark.
 Like unto one who with a struggling breath
 From ocean sav'd turns from the beach to gaze
 Upon the wat'ry peril he has pass'd ;
 So did my spirit fleeing onward still 25
 Look back once more that passage to behold
 Through which none pass'd and living ever left.
 When I had giv'n my weary body rest,
 Up the wild slope my journey I resum'd,
 My lowest ever still my firmest foot. 30
 And lo ! where steep and rough the ascent began,
 A leopard lithe and very swift of limb
 Before me stood cloth'd in a spotted skin ;
 Ever in front of me and full in face
 It barr'd my onward way, so that my step 35
 At times could scarce restrain its backward move.
 It was the hour of dawning, when the sun
 Rose in his upward journey with those stars
 Which roll'd their spheres with him when Love Divine
 Mov'd at the first those things most beautiful ; 40
 So I had ev'ry reason for my hope,
 Of the gay beauty of that creature's skin,
 In the sweet season and the pleasant time ;
 But not the less my terror when beneath
 My fearful gaze a lion rose to view. 45

He seem'd towards me in his rage to spring
 With rav'ning hunger and uplifted head ;
 The air itself seem'd tremulous with fear ;
 And a she-wolf which in her leanness gaunt
 Looked full of gnawing, and of fierce desire, 50
 And had ere this brought many lives to woe.
 So great the trouble pressing on my heart
 Born of the fear which sight of her awoke,
 That to attain the summit hope was dead.
 Like unto one who, gladden'd by his gains, 55
 When the hour comes which sweeps them all away,
 In ev'ry thought sadden'd and tearful mourns ;
 So did she trouble me this restless beast,
 As facing me, by small and small degrees,
 She thrust me back where silent is the sun. 60
 Whilst to the lower ground I downward sank,
 One shewed himself unto my straining eyes,
 Who seemed, from silence long continued, hoarse.
 When I beheld him in that desert vast,
 With a loud cry I cried,—“ Have pity thou, 65
 “ Whether thou art a spirit or true man.”
 “ No man,” he answered, “ but a man I was ;
 “ In Lombard land my parents drew their breath,
 “ And both their place and home in Mantua found.
 “ Born under Julius ere his pow'r supreme, 70
 “ I lived while good Augustus held the rule,
 “ And Rome was filled with false and lying Gods.

- " Poet I was, and sung of that just son
 " Lov'd of Anchises, when he passed from Troy,
 " What time by fire consum'd proud Ilion fell. 75
 " But thou ! why to such weariness return !
 " Why dost thou not the Mount Delightsome scale,
 " Of perfect joy at once the source and cause !"
 " Art thou that Virgil, thou that fount from whence
 " Eternal spreads the stream of living words !"— 80
 I ask'd, with downcast eyes and bashful front.
 " Oh of all Poets light and glory thou !
 " Aid me that study long and that great love,
 " Which made thy volume my unceasing search.
 " My Master thou and Inspiration art ; 85
 " Thou—thou art he from whom alone I took
 " That noble style which me my glory won.
 " Behold that beast from which I fearful turn ;
 " Help me—oh help me—great and famous Sage,
 " She makes me tremble both in pulse and vein." 90
 " Another way, not here thy passage lies,"—
 He answer'd me when he perceived my tears,
 " If thou wouldst save thee from this savage place ;
 " For lo ! this creature, cause of thy great cry,
 " Lets none pass by her, but so bars the way, 95
 " And with such deadly malice, that she slays.
 " So evil is her nature and so foul,
 " Her lustful appetite is never quench'd,
 " And after eating she still craves the more.

- " Beasts of all kinds her mates, and she will mate 100
 " With others many, till the hound shall come
 " And make her taste the pangs of dol'rous death.
 " Earth and earth's riches he shall not desire,
 " But wisdom love and virtue—and between
 " Feltro and Feltro shall his nation lie. 105
 " Saviour of this down-trodden Italy,
 " For which Camilla gave her virgin life,
 " Turnus, Euryalus and Nisus died ;
 " He ev'rywhere the ceaseless chace shall press
 " Until he thrust her back into that Hell, 110
 " Whence by the primal envy driven she came.
 " To thee then better counsel I commend,
 " Follow thou me and I will be thy guide,
 " And lead thee hence through the Eternal Realms ;
 " Where thou shalt hear the wail of wild despair, 115
 " And of old times the sorrowful spirits see
 " Calling in anguish for the second death ;
 " And those too shalt thou see content to lie
 " In fiery torment, for they hope to come
 " At the good time unto the blessed souls ; 120
 " To which, if afterwards thou wouldst ascend,
 " Then shall a purer spirit be thy guide ;
 " To her I leave thee when from thee I part ;
 " For lo the Ruler ! He who reigns on high,
 " For that I was a rebel to His law, 125
 " Wills none unto His gates by me shall come.