

**DANTE'S HELL: CANTOS I  
TO X: A LITERAL  
METRICAL TRANSLATION,  
WITH NOTES**

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Dante's Hell: Cantos I to X: A Literal Metrical Translation, with Notes by J. C. Peabody

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**J. C. PEABODY**

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# DANTE'S HELL.

CANTOS I TO X.

A Literal Metrical Translation---with Notes.

BY J. C. PEABODY.

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O Time, whose verdict mocks our own—  
The only righteous judge art thou—  
That poor old exile, sad and lone,  
Is Latium's other Virgil now.  
Before His throne the nations bow—  
His words are parcel of mankind;  
Deep on whose hearts, as on his brow,  
Have sunk the marks of Dante's mind.  
—PARSONS.

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BOSTON:  
TICKNOR & FIELDS.  
1857.

## P R E F A C E .

THE following is a line-for-line literal translation of that divine poet whose pen was the opening wedge of the reformation; and whose great thought is so consonant with the spirit of our institutions that no apology would be needed for an American edition of his poem, whether it were an old or a new translation. The present, however, is on a different plan from all other translations, and must be judged accordingly. While I disclaim all intention of disputing the palm as a poet or scholar with the least of those who have walked with Dante before me, yet by such labor and plodding as their genius would not allow them to descend to, have I made a more literal, and perhaps, therefore, a better translation than they all. I mean not to cavil at my fellow laborers; they tell the story better than I tell it—better perhaps than Dante tells it himself. I only aim to

"tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

The very looseness of other translators gives them room to soar to the utmost bounds of our language, while I am cramped and confined by my fidelity to the original. Yet they are justified, I admit, by the noblest precedents. When Pope, in his Homer, renders *ὄλεκοντο δὲ λαοί*,—

"And heaped the plains with mountains of the dead;"

and Dryden, in his Virgil, elaborates *erroresque tuos* into

"Your fight, your wanderings and your woes;"

I will not find fault with the freest interpretation I have ever seen of a line of Dante. I will only offer mine among the rest, happy if we all together can inspire in the breast of the English race an understanding of and love for the great principles which he teaches.

It was my intention to preserve the *terza rima* of the Italian, which had never been attempted by any translator, and which had often been pronounced impossible. I had hardly finished two cantos, however, when Cayley's translation appeared in London on this plan; and feeling that I could not improve upon that if I retained the *terzines*, but that I could keep much closer to the original in another metre, I changed my design and adopted the present form. The first canto in the *terzines* is given that the reader may compare it with the blank verse.

The whole of the Divine Comedy, of which these ten cantos are a specimen, will appear in due time.

Newburyport, September, 1857.

## CANTO I.

### A R G U M E N T .

Dante finds himself astray in a dismal wood, where he passes a night of mortal terror, of which he will speak, that he may relate his escape, and what he saw of that hell underlying our human nature, where he learned the causes of all our woe. He reaches a hill, whose summit is all aglow with the sunlight, and which he begins to ascend. He is met by a panther, which seeks to divert him from the undertaking; and is at last driven back by a lion and a she-wolf. Virgil comes to his assistance, and tells him there will be no passing up the mountain that way, for the she-wolf, till the greyhound comes and chases her from the earth; that he will however conduct him another way; show him the eternal depths, whence misery springs; and leave him on the borders of Paradise, in the charge of a higher spirit, who shall guide him to the eternal heights, "the cause and principle of every joy."

## CANTO I.

—  
IN THE TERZA RIMA OF THE ORIGINAL.  
—

Along the journey of our life, midway,  
I found myself within a dismal wood ;  
For from the right path had I gone astray.  
Ah ! what a hard thing 'tis to tell how rude,  
How rugged was this forest, how forlorn—  
For in the very thought the fear 's renewed,  
So bitter is it, death were hardly more—  
But treating of the good I there discerned,  
I will recount the other marvels o'er.  
How I came there I never rightly learned,  
For in that moment was I full of sleep,  
When from the straight way thitherward I turned ;  
But when I reached the basis of a steep,  
The farther confine of that valley's shade  
That erewhile pained my heart with terror deep,  
I looked on high—its shoulders were arrayed  
Already in that planet's golden light,  
That guideth men wherever they have strayed.  
Then somewhat calmer grew the mortal fright,  
That in my heart's deep cavern lingered round,  
What time I passed so piteous a night—  
And like as one, with panting breath, doth bound  
From the deep sea, escaping to the shore,  
Then turning, gazes on the dread profound—  
My soul, still fleeing the dark passage o'er,  
Turned back, the horrors of that vale to see,  
*No mortal ever left alive before.*



H E L L .

Soon as my limbs of weariness were free,  
 I took my way along the desert strand,  
 So the firm foot should still the lower be.  
 Commencing now the mountain to ascend,  
 An agile leopard, beautiful and gay,  
 With motley skin, did on my pathway stand,  
 Nor from my presence would he pass away ;  
 Nay, rather did he so impede my course,  
 That I had well nigh faltered in dismay.  
 The time was early morning ; day's bright source  
 With that same constellation did arise  
 That journeyed with him when the vital force  
 Of Love Divine first moved them through the skies.  
 And causes of good hope did then appear  
 The gorgeous leopard's skin, the fair sunrise,  
 And the sweet season of the opening year.  
 Yet 'twas not so but that I feared the sight  
 Of a grim lion that assailed me here—  
 He rushed upon me with his head upright,  
 And with a look of rabid hunger sore ;  
 Whereat the air quaked—seeming in affright—  
 And a she-wolf, that eager cravings bore  
 In all her leanness, likewise came in view :  
 She that hath caused the nations to deplore ;  
 So did she then my heaviness renew,  
 With all the terrors flashing from her eye,  
 I lost the summit's hope, and bade it an adieu.  
 As one who after gain doth eager fly,  
 When comes the hour that makes him destitute,  
 Torments himself with many a tear and sigh ;  
 Such I became, for that wild, restless brute,  
 Which step by step did down upon me creep,  
 And drove me back to where the sun is mute.  
 While I was rushing headlong down the steep,  
 Behold a vision did my way oppose  
 Of one all hoarse with silence and long sleep.  
 When on the mighty waste this spectre rose,  
 " Have pity," cried I, " whate'er thou mayest be,  
 Whether a shade or true man thou disclose."

H E L L .

" I am no man, yet once was like to thee ;  
 Lombards my parents were, and both the same  
 Of Mantua by state and pedigree.  
 Late was I born beneath great Julius' fame ;  
 And under good Augustus lived at Rome.  
 When lying gods their falsehoods did proclaim.  
 A poet was I, and composed a tome,  
 Singing Archias son, who forth from Troy  
 Came when the fire proud Ilium did consume.  
 But why return where earthly cares annoy ?  
 Why not ascend into the pleasant mount,  
 The source and cause of every certain joy ?"  
 " Art thou that Virgil ? art thou that deep fount  
 Which pours abroad so rich a stream of song ?"  
 Replied I, standing with a bashful front,  
 " O light and glory of the tuneful throng !  
 May the great zeal avail me, and the love  
 That made me search thy wondrous volume long.  
 Thou art my master—thou art far above  
 My other authors—'twas from thee I drew  
 The lofty speech that doth my honor prove—  
 Behold the beast for which I backward flew.  
 Assist me from her, O thou mighty sage ;  
 For every vein pulsates with terror through."  
 " There is another path will disengage  
 Thy erring footsteps from this savage place,"  
 Responded he, my weeping to assuage—  
 " The beast that made thee, crying, flee apace,  
 Suffers no one to pass along her way,  
 But strangles them within her vile embrace—  
 Such morbid passions do her nature sway,  
 Her greedy maw no gorging e'er can sate ;  
 But after feeding craves she more for prey—  
 She weds herself to many a brutal mate ;  
 And so will ever till the hound comes forth,  
 Who shall with death her race exterminate.  
 He shall not feed on pelf, nor sordid earth,  
 But love and manfulness and wisdom grave—  
 'Twixt Felro and Felro shall be his birth ;

---

H E L L .

And humble Italy he'll bless and save.  
For whom the virgin, fair Camilla died,  
With Turnus, Nisus and Euryalus brave.  
Through every earthly city, far and wide,  
Shall he pursue her back again to Hell,  
Whence she was summoned first by envy and by pride.  
Now in my thought do I discern 'tis well  
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,  
And lead thee through th' eternal place where fell  
The hopeless souls, whose wallings ne'er subside.  
And ancient spirits shalt thou see in pain,  
Who ever for a second death have cried.  
And other spirits, who content remain  
Within the flames, still hoping to arise  
When the day dawns, and Paradise regain.  
Then, if thou wouldst ascend unto the skies,  
Another shade, more worthy far than I  
At our adieu, thy footsteps shall advise.  
For the great Emperor, who rules on high,  
Because on earth his precepts I transgressed,  
Wills not that to his city I draw nigh.  
He reigns in every part, but there doth rest—  
There is his city and his lofty seat,  
O blest the soul he chooses for a guest."  
Then answered I, "O poet, I entreat,  
By that Almighty One thou didst ignore,  
To flee this place ere greater woes we meet,  
And that whereof thou tellest to explore,  
Saint Peter's portals I desire to greet,  
And those thou makest in the shades deplore."  
Then moved he, and I followed his retreat.