

The Number 232: Mostly Inside Out

In which we learn of another vision of Hell

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (July 2023)



The Last Judgement (detail), Fra Angelico, c.1431

'Twas on the number 232 at Neasden,
It happened only very recently,
That someone by the name of Stephen Eden
Beheld a vision of eternity.

Inside the floor which opened up beneath him

A crowded stairway spiralled down to Hell.
And there among the screaming throng to greet him
He spied himself and all his mates as well.

And Stephen witnessed now the price of sinning
In torments grim and unendurable,
As horrid fiends and demons foully grinning
Performed on all the quite unmentionable.

He saw himself being roasted in a furnace
And neighbours in his terrace skinned alive.
But nothing else there made him quite as nervous
As what they did to Fred at Number 5.

They'd somehow turned him mostly inside out
So only now his face was on the outside.
Of Fred's discomfort Stephen had no doubt,
His friend appearing shocked and oddly popeyed.

Just then the bus arrived at Staples Corner
And in a flash he'd bolted out the door.
He'd had enough of all that horrid torture
Which naturally he tended to abhor.

But having seen the fruit of his behaviour,
His drunkenness and low debauchery,
Our Stephen sought the blessings of Our Saviour
Whose words till now he'd viewed with mockery.

And such was Stephen's terror of damnation,
Of which that day he'd had a warning taste,
Like Origen he practised self-castration
And lives a life now celibate and chaste.

And so we see the moral of this story
That virtue is the goal we ought pursue,
For otherwise it gets extremely gory,

But also never board the 232!

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Paul Freeman is an art dealer in London. The poems are from *The Bus Poems: A Tale of the Devil*, currently in preparation. His book, *A Chocolate Box Menagerie*, is published by New English Review Press and is available [here](#).

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