
THE DECAMERON

OF

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

FAITHFULLY TRANSLATED

BY J.M. RIGG¹

BEGINNETH HERE THE BOOK CALLED DECAMERON, OTHERWISE PRINCE
GALEOTTO, WHEREIN ARE CONTAINED ONE HUNDRED NOVELS TOLD IN TEN
DAYS BY SEVEN LADIES AND THREE YOUNG MEN.

PROEM

'Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure aflame with a most aspiring and noble love² more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead. But, as it pleased Him, who, being infinite, has

¹ I have reproduced the footnotes of J. M. Rigg and have added clarification when needed. My notes will appear in brackets.

² For Fiammetta, i. e. Maria, natural daughter of Robert, King of Naples.

assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time me abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful. But the cessation of the pain has not banished the memory of the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death. And as among the virtues, gratitude is in my judgment most especially to be commended, and ingratitude in equal measure to be censured, therefore, that I show myself not ungrateful, I have resolved, now that I may call myself to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so far as in me lies, some solace, if not to those who succoured and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least to such as may be apt to receive it.

And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it. Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers, they live, so to say, a life of vacant ease, and, yearning and renouncing in the same moment, meditate divers matters which cannot all be cheerful. If thereby a melancholy bred of amorous desire make entrance into their minds, it is like to tarry there to their sore distress, unless it be dispelled by a change of ideas. Besides which they have much less power to support such a weight than men. For, when men are enamoured, their case is very different, as we may readily perceive. They, if they are afflicted by a melancholy and heaviness of mood, have many ways of relief and diversion; they may go where they will, may hear and see many things, may hawk, hunt, fish, ride, play or traffic. By which means all are able to compose their minds, either in whole or in part, and repair the ravage wrought by the dumpish mood, at least for some space of time; and shortly after, by one way or another, either solace ensues, or the dumps become less grievous. Wherefore, in some measure to compensate the injustice of Fortune, which to those whose strength is least, as we see it to be in the delicate frames of ladies, has been most niggard of support, I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel), do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation. In which pleasant novels will be found some passages of love rudely crossed, with other courses of events of which the issues are felicitous, in times as well modern as ancient: from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue. Which cannot, I believe, come to pass unless the dumps be banished by diversion of mind. And if it so happen (as God grant it may) let them give thanks to Love, who, liberating me from his fetters, has given me the power to devote myself to their gratification.

THE PLAGUE IN FLORENCE

As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eye-witnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. To this brief exordium of woe—brief, I say, inasmuch as it can be put within the compass of a few letters—succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which I have promised you, and which, perhaps, had I not done so, were not to have been expected from it. In truth, had it been honestly possible to guide you whither I would bring you by a road less rough than this will be, I would gladly have so done. But, because without this review of the past, it would not be in my power to shew how the matters, of which you will hereafter read, came to pass, I am almost bound of necessity to enter upon it, if I would write of them at all.

I say, then, that the years of the beatific incarnation of the Son of God had reached the tale of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight when in the illustrious city of Florence, the fairest of all the cities of Italy, there made its appearance that deadly pestilence, which, whether disseminated by the influence of the celestial bodies, or sent upon us mortals by God in His just wrath by way of retribution for our iniquities, had had its origin some years before in the East, whence, after destroying an innumerable multitude of living beings, it had propagated itself without respite from place to place, and so, calamitously, had spread into the West.

In Florence, despite all that human wisdom and forethought could devise to avert it, as the cleansing of the city from many impurities by officials appointed for the purpose, the refusal of entrance to all sick folk, and the adoption of many precautions for the preservation of health; despite also humble supplications addressed to God, and often repeated both in public procession and otherwise, by the devout; towards the beginning of the spring of the said year the doleful effects of the pestilence began to be horribly apparent by symptoms that shewed as if miraculous.

Not such were they as in the East, where an issue of blood from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death; but in men and women alike it first betrayed itself by the emergence of certain tumours in the groin or the armpits, some of which grew as large as a common apple, others as an egg, some more, some less, which the common folk called *gavoccioli*. From the two said parts of the body this deadly *gavocciolo* soon began to propagate and spread itself in all directions indifferently; after which the form of the malady began to change, black spots or livid making their appearance in many cases on the arm or the thigh or elsewhere, now few and large, now minute and numerous. And as the *gavocciolo* had been and still was an infallible token of approaching death, such also were these spots on whomsoever they shewed themselves. Which maladies seemed to set entirely at naught both the art of the physician and the virtues of physic; indeed, whether it was that the disorder was of a nature to defy such treatment, or that the physicians were at fault—besides the qualified there was now a multitude both of men and of women who practised without having received the slightest tincture of medical science—and, being in ignorance of its source, failed to apply the proper remedies; in either case, not merely were those that recovered few, but almost all within three days from the appearance of the said symptoms, sooner or later, died, and in most cases without any fever or other attendant malady.

Moreover, the virulence of the pest was the greater by reason that intercourse was apt to convey it from the sick to the whole, just as fire devours things dry or greasy when they are brought close to it. Nay, the evil went yet further, for not merely by speech or association with the sick was the malady communicated to the healthy with consequent peril of common death; but any that touched the cloth of the sick or aught else that had been touched or used by them, seemed thereby to contract the disease.

So marvellous sounds that which I have now to relate, that, had not many, and I among them, observed it with their own eyes, I had hardly dared to credit it, much less to set it down in writing, though I had had it from the lips of a credible witness.

I say, then, that such was the energy of the contagion of the said pestilence, that it was not merely propagated from man to man but, what is much more startling, it was frequently observed, that things which had belonged to one sick or dead of the disease, if touched by some other living creature, not of the human species, were the occasion, not merely of sickening, but of an almost instantaneous death. Whereof my own eyes (as I said a little before) had cognisance, one day among others, by the following experience. The rags of a poor man who had died of the disease being strewn about the open street, two hogs came thither, and after, as is their wont, no little trifling with their snouts, took the rags between their teeth and tossed them to and fro about their chaps; whereupon, almost immediately, they gave a few turns, and fell down dead, as if by poison, upon the rags which in an evil hour they had disturbed.

In which circumstances, not to speak of many others of a similar or even graver complexion, divers apprehensions and imaginations were engendered in the minds of such as were left alive, inclining almost all of them to the same harsh resolution, to wit, to shun and abhor all contact with the sick and all that belonged to them, thinking thereby to make each his own health secure. Among whom there were those who thought that to live temperately and avoid all excess would count for much as a preservative against seizures of this kind. Wherefore they banded together, and, dissociating themselves from all others, formed communities in houses where there were no sick, and lived a separate and secluded life, which they regulated with the utmost care, avoiding every kind of luxury, but eating and drinking very moderately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines, holding converse with none but one another, lest tidings of sickness or death should reach them, and diverting their minds with music and such other delights as they could devise. Others, the bias of whose minds was in the opposite direction, maintained, that to drink freely, frequent places of public resort, and take their pleasure with song and revel, sparing to satisfy no appetite, and to laugh and mock at no event, was the sovereign remedy for so great an evil: and that which they affirmed they also put in practice, so far as they were able, resorting day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking with an entire disregard of rule or measure, and by preference making the houses of others, as it were, their inns, if they but saw in them aught that was particularly to their taste or liking; which they were readily able to do, because the owners, seeing death imminent, had become as reckless of their property as of their lives; so that most of the houses were open to all comers, and no distinction was observed between the stranger who presented himself and the rightful lord. Thus, adhering ever to their inhuman determination to shun the sick, as far as possible, they ordered their life. In this extremity of our city's suffering and tribulation the venerable authority of laws, human and divine, was abased and all but totally dissolved, for lack of those who should have administered and enforced them, most of whom, like the rest of the citizens, were either dead or sick, or so hard bested for servants that they were unable to execute any office; whereby every man was free to do what was right in his own eyes.

Not a few there were who belonged to neither of the two said parties, but kept a middle course between them, neither laying the same restraint upon their diet as the former, nor allowing themselves the same license in drinking and other dissipations as the latter, but living with a degree of freedom sufficient to

satisfy their appetites, and not as recluses. They therefore walked abroad, carrying in their hands flowers or fragrant herbs or divers sorts of spices, which they frequently raised to their noses, deeming it an excellent thing thus to comfort the brain with such perfumes, because the air seemed to be everywhere laden and reeking with the stench emitted by the dead and the dying and the odours of drugs.

Some again, the most sound, perhaps, in judgment, as they were also the most harsh in temper, of all, affirmed that there was no medicine for the disease superior or equal in efficacy to flight; following which prescription a multitude of men and women, negligent of all but themselves, deserted their city, their houses, their estate, their kinsfolk, their goods, and went into voluntary exile, or migrated to the country parts, as if God in visiting men with this pestilence in requital of their iniquities would not pursue them with His wrath, wherever they might be, but intended the destruction of such alone as remained within the circuit of the walls of the city; or deeming, perchance, that it was now time for all to flee from it, and that its last hour was come.

Of the adherents of these divers opinions not all died, neither did all escape; but rather there were, of each sort and in every place, many that sickened, and by those who retained their health were treated after the example which they themselves, while whole, had set, being everywhere left to languish in almost total neglect. Tedious were it to recount, how citizen avoided citizen, how among neighbours was scarce found any that shewed fellow-feeling for another, how kinsfolk held aloof, and never met, or but rarely; enough that this sore affliction entered so deep into the minds of men and women, that in the horror thereof brother was forsaken by brother, nephew by uncle, brother by sister, and oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children, untended, unvisited, to their fate, as if they had been strangers. Wherefore the sick of both sexes, whose number could not be estimated, were left without resource but in the charity of friends (and few such there were), or the interest of servants, who were hardly to be had at high rates and on unseemly terms, and being, moreover, one and all men and women of gross understanding, and for the most part unused to such offices, concerned themselves no farther than to supply the immediate and expressed wants of the sick, and to watch them die; in which service they themselves not seldom perished with their gains. In consequence of which dearth of servants and dereliction of the sick by neighbours, kinsfolk and friends, it came to pass—a thing, perhaps, never before heard of that no woman, however dainty, fair or well-born she might be, shrank, when stricken with the disease, from the ministrations of a man, no matter whether he were young or no, or scrupled to expose to him every part of her body, with no more shame than if he had been a woman, submitting of necessity to that which her malady required; wherefrom, perchance, there resulted in after time some loss of modesty in such as recovered. Besides which many succumbed, who with proper attendance, would, perhaps, have escaped death; so that, what with the virulence of the plague and the lack of due tendance of the sick, the multitude of the deaths, that daily and nightly took place in the city, was such that those who heard the tale—not to say witnessed the fact—were struck dumb with amazement. Whereby, practices contrary to the former habits of the citizens could hardly fail to grow up among the survivors.

It had been, as to-day it still is, the custom for the women that were neighbours and of kin to the deceased to gather in his house with the women that were most closely connected with him, to wail with them in common, while on the other hand his male kinsfolk and neighbours, with not a few of the other citizens, and a due proportion of the clergy according to his quality, assembled without, in front of the house, to receive the corpse; and so the dead man was borne on the shoulders of his peers, with funeral pomp of taper and dirge, to the church selected by him before his death. Which rites, as the pestilence waxed in fury, were either in whole or in great part disused, and gave way to others of a novel order. For not only did no crowd of women surround the bed of the dying, but many passed from this life unregarded, and few indeed were they to whom were accorded the lamentations and bitter tears of sorrowing relations;

nay, for the most part, their place was taken by the laugh, the jest, the festal gathering; observances which the women, domestic piety in large measure set aside, had adopted with very great advantage to their health. Few also there were whose bodies were attended to the church by more than ten or twelve of their neighbours, and those not the honourable and respected citizens; but a sort of corpse-carriers drawn from the baser ranks who called themselves *becchini*³ and performed such offices for hire, would shoulder the bier, and with hurried steps carry it, not to the church of the dead man's choice, but to that which was nearest at hand, with four or six priests in front and a candle or two, or, perhaps, none; nor did the priests distress themselves with too long and solemn an office, but with the aid of the *becchini* hastily consigned the corpse to the first tomb which they found untenanted. The condition of lower, and, perhaps, in great measure of the middle ranks, of the people shewed even worse and more deplorable; for, deluded by hope or constrained by poverty, they stayed in their quarters, in their houses, where they sickened by thousands a day, and, being without service or help of any kind, were, so to speak, irredeemably devoted to the death which overtook them. Many died daily or nightly in the public streets; of many others, who died at home, the departure was hardly observed by their neighbours, until the stench of their putrefying bodies carried the tidings; and what with their corpses and the corpses of others who died on every hand the whole place was a sepulchre.

It was the common practice of most of the neighbours, moved no less by fear of contamination by the putrefying bodies than by charity towards the deceased, to drag the corpses out of the houses with their own hands, aided, perhaps, by a porter, if a porter was to be had, and to lay them in front of the doors, where any one who made the round might have seen, especially in the morning, more of them than he could count; afterwards they would have biers brought up, or, in default, planks, whereon they laid them. Nor was it once or twice only that one and the same bier carried two or three corpses at once; but quite a considerable number of such cases occurred, one bier sufficing for husband and wife, two or three brothers, father and son, and so forth. And times without number it happened, that, as two priests, bearing the cross, were on their way to perform the last office for some one, three or four biers were brought up by the porters in rear of them, so that, whereas the priests supposed that they had but one corpse to bury, they discovered that there were six or eight, or sometimes more. Nor, for all their number, were their obsequies honoured by either tears or lights or crowds of mourners; rather, it was come to this, that a dead man was then of no more account than a dead goat would be to-day. From all which it is abundantly manifest, that that lesson of patient resignation, which the sages were never able to learn from the slight and infrequent mishaps which occur in the natural course of events, was now brought home even to the minds of the simple by the magnitude of their disasters, so that they became indifferent to them.

As consecrated ground there was not in extent sufficient to provide tombs for the vast multitude of corpses which day and night, and almost every hour, were brought in eager haste to the churches for interment, least of all, if ancient custom were to be observed and a separate resting-place assigned to each, they dug, for each graveyard, as soon as it was full, a huge trench, in which they laid the corpses as they arrived by hundreds at a time, piling them up as merchandise is stowed in the hold of a ship, tier upon tier, each covered with a little earth, until the trench would hold no more. But I spare to rehearse with minute particularity each of the woes that came upon our city, and say in brief, that, harsh as was the tenor of her fortunes, the surrounding country knew no mitigation, for there—not to speak of the castles, each, as it were, a little city in itself—in sequestered village, or on the open champaign, by the wayside, on the farm, in the homestead, the poor hapless husbandmen and their families, forlorn of physicians' care or servants' tendance, perished day and night alike, not as men, but rather as beasts. Wherefore, they too,

³ Probably from the name of the pronged or hooked implement with which they dragged the corpses out of the houses.

like the citizens, abandoned all rule of life, all habit of industry, all counsel of prudence; nay, one and all, as if expecting each day to be their last, not merely ceased to aid Nature to yield her fruit in due season of their beasts and their lands and their past labours, but left no means unused, which ingenuity could devise, to waste their accumulated store; denying shelter to their oxen, asses, sheep, goats, pigs, fowls, nay, even to their dogs, man's most faithful companions, and driving them out into the fields to roam at large amid the unsheaved, nay, unreaped corn. Many of which, as if endowed with reason, took their fill during the day, and returned home at night without any guidance of herdsman. But enough of the country! What need we add, but (reverting to the city) that such and so grievous was the harshness of heaven, and perhaps in some degree of man, that, what with the fury of the pestilence, the panic of those whom it spared, and their consequent neglect or desertion of not a few of the stricken in their need, it is believed without any manner of doubt, that between March and the ensuing July upwards of a hundred thousand human beings lost their lives within the walls of the city of Florence, which before the deadly visitation would not have been supposed to contain so many people! How many grand palaces, how many stately homes, how many splendid residences, once full of retainers, of lords, of ladies, were now left desolate of all, even to the meanest servant! How many families of historic fame, of vast ancestral domains, and wealth proverbial, found now no scion to continue the succession! How many brave men, how many fair ladies, how many gallant youths, whom any physician, were he Galen, Hippocrates, or Aesculapius himself, would have pronounced in the soundest of health, broke fast with their kinsfolk, comrades and friends in the morning, and when evening came, supped with their forefathers in the other world.

CALANDRINO, BRUNO AND BUFFALMACCO EPISODES

BOOK 8, NOVEL 3

CALANDRINO, BRUNO AND BUFFALMACCO GO IN QUEST OF THE HELIOTROPE BESIDE THE MUGNONE. THINKING TO HAVE FOUND IT, CALANDRINO GETS HIM HOME LADEN WITH STONES. HIS WIFE CHIDES HIM: WHEREAT HE WAXES WROTH, BEATS HER, AND TELLS HIS COMRADES WHAT THEY KNOW BETTER THAN HE.

Ended Pamfilo's story, which moved the ladies to inextinguishable laughter, the queen bade Elisa follow suit: whereupon, laughing, she thus began:—I know not, debonair my ladies, whether with my little story, which is no less true than entertaining, I shall give you occasion to laugh as much as Pamfilo has done with his, but I will do my best.

In our city, where there has never been lack of odd humours and queer folk, there dwelt, no long time ago, a painter named Calandrino, a simple soul, of uncouth manners, that spent most of his time with two other painters, the one Bruno, the other Buffalmacco, by name, pleasant fellows enough, but not without their full share of sound and shrewd sense, and who kept with Calandrino for that they not seldom found his singular ways and his simplicity very diverting. There was also at the same time at Florence one Maso del Saggio, a fellow marvellously entertaining by his cleverness, dexterity and unflinching resource; who having heard somewhat touching Calandrino's simplicity,

resolved to make fun of him by playing him a trick, and inducing him to believe some prodigy. And happening one day to come upon Calandrino in the church of San Giovanni, where he sate intently regarding the paintings and intaglios of the tabernacle above the altar, which had then but lately been set there, he deemed time and place convenient for the execution of his design; which he accordingly imparted to one of his comrades: whereupon the two men drew nigh the place where Calandrino sate alone, and feigning not to see him fell a talking of the virtues of divers stones, of which Maso spoke as aptly and pertinently as if he had been a great and learned lapidary. Calandrino heard what passed between them, and witting that 'twas no secret, after a while got up, and joined them, to Maso's no small delight. He therefore continued his discourse, and being asked by Calandrino, where these stones of such rare virtues were to be found, made answer:—"Chiefly in Berlinzone, in the land of the Basques. The district is called Bengodi, and there they bind the vines with sausages, and a denier will buy a goose and a gosling into the bargain; and on a mountain, all of grated Parmesan cheese, dwell folk that do nought else but make macaroni and ravioli,⁴ and boil them in capon's broth, and then throw them down to be scrambled for; and hard by flows a rivulet of Vernaccia, the best that ever was drunk, and never a drop of water therein." "Ah! 'tis a sweet country!" quoth Calandrino; "but tell me, what becomes of the capons that they boil?" "They are all eaten by the Basques," replied Maso. Then:—"Wast thou ever there?" quoth Calandrino. Whereupon:—"Was I ever there, sayst thou?" replied Maso. "Why, if I have been there once, I have been there a thousand times." "And how many miles is't from here?" quoth Calandrino. "Oh!" returned Maso, "more than thou couldst number in a night without slumber." "Farther off, then, than the Abruzzi?" said Calandrino. "Why, yes, 'tis a bit farther," replied Maso.

Now Calandrino, like the simple soul that he was, marking the composed and grave countenance with which Maso spoke, could not have believed him more thoroughly, if he had uttered the most patent truth, and thus taking his words for gospel:—" 'Tis a trifle too far for my purse," quoth he; "were it nigher, I warrant thee, I would go with thee thither one while, just to see the macaroni come tumbling down, and take my fill thereof. But tell me, so good luck befall thee, are none of these stones, that have these rare virtues, to be found in these regions?" "Ay," replied Maso, "two sorts of stone are found there, both of virtues extraordinary. The one sort are the sandstones of Settignano and Montisci, which being made into millstones, by virtue thereof flour is made; wherefore 'tis a common saying in those countries that blessings come from God and millstones from Montisci: but, for that these sandstones are in great plenty, they are held cheap by us, just as by them are emeralds, whereof they have mountains, bigger than Monte Morello, that shine at midnight, a God's name! And know this, that whoso should make a goodly pair of millstones, and connect them with a ring before ever a hole was drilled in them, and take them to the Soldan, should get all he would have thereby. The other sort of stone is the heliotrope, as we lapidaries call it, a stone of very great virtue, inasmuch as whoso carries it on his person is seen, so long as he keep it, by never another soul, where he is not." "These be virtues great indeed," quoth Calandrino; "but where is this second stone to be found?" Whereunto Maso made answer that there were usually some to be found in the Mugnone. "And what are its size and colour?" quoth Calandrino. "The size varies," replied Maso, "for some are bigger and some smaller than others; but all are of the same colour, being nearly black." All these matters duly marked and fixed in his memory, Calandrino made as if he had other things to attend to, and took his leave of Maso with the intention of going in quest of the stone, but not until he had let his especial friends, Bruno and Buffalmacco, know of his project. So, that no time

⁴ A sort of rissole. [rissole: A compressed mixture of meat and spices, coated in breadcrumbs and fried. (OED)]

might be lost, but, postponing everything else, they might begin the quest at once, he set about looking for them, and spent the whole morning in the search. At length, when 'twas already past none, he called to mind that they would be at work in the Faentine women's convent, and though 'twas excessively hot, he let nothing stand in his way, but at a pace that was more like a run than a walk, hied him thither; and so soon as he had made them ware of his presence, thus he spoke:—"Comrades, so you are but minded to hearken to me, 'tis in our power to become the richest men in Florence; for I am informed by one that may be trusted that there is a kind of stone in the Mugnone which renders whoso carries it invisible to every other soul in the world. Wherefore, methinks, we were wise to let none have the start of us, but go search for this stone without any delay. We shall find it without a doubt, for I know what 'tis like, and when we have found it, we have but to put it in the purse, and get us to the moneychangers, whose counters, as you know, are always laden with groats and florins, and help ourselves to as many as we have a mind to. No one will see us, and so, hey presto! we shall be rich folk in the twinkling of an eye, and have no more need to go besmearing the walls all day long like so many snails." Whereat Bruno and Buffalmacco began only to laugh, and exchanging glances, made as if they marvelled exceedingly, and expressed approval of Calandrino's project. Then Buffalmacco asked, what might be the name of the stone. Calandrino, like the numskull that he was, had already forgotten the name: so he made answer:—"Why need we concern ourselves with the name, since we know the stone's virtue? methinks, we were best to go look for it, and waste no more time." "Well, well," said Bruno, "but what are the size and shape of the stone?" "They are of all sizes and shapes," said Calandrino, "but they are all pretty nearly black; wherefore, methinks, we were best to collect all the black stones that we see until we hit upon it: and so, let us be off, and lose no more time." "Nay, but," said Bruno, "wait a bit." And turning to Buffalmacco:—"Methinks," quoth he, "that Calandrino says well: but I doubt this is not the time for such work, seeing that the sun is high, and his rays so flood the Mugnone as to dry all the stones; insomuch that stones will now shew as white that in the morning, before the sun had dried them, would shew as black: besides which, to-day being a working-day, there will be for one cause or another folk not a few about the Mugnone, who, seeing us, might guess what we were come for, and peradventure do the like themselves; whereby it might well be that they found the stone, and we might miss the trot by trying after the amble. Wherefore, so you agree, methinks we were best to go about it in the morning, when we shall be better able to distinguish the black stones from the white, and on a holiday, when there will be none to see us."

Buffalmacco's advice being approved by Bruno, Calandrino chimed in; and so 'twas arranged that they should all three go in quest of the stone on the following Sunday. So Calandrino, having besought his companions above all things to let never a soul in the world hear aught of the matter, for that it had been imparted to him in strict confidence, and having told them what he had heard touching the land of Bengodi, the truth of which he affirmed with oaths, took leave of them; and they concerted their plan, while Calandrino impatiently expected the Sunday morning. Whereon, about dawn, he arose, and called them; and forth they issued by the Porta a San Gallo, and hied them to the Mugnone, and following its course, began their quest of the stone, Calandrino, as was natural, leading the way, and jumping lightly from rock to rock, and wherever he espied a black stone, stooping down, picking it up and putting it in the fold of his tunic, while his comrades followed, picking up a stone here and a stone there. Thus it was that Calandrino had not gone far, before, finding that there was no more room in his tunic, he lifted the skirts of his gown, which was not cut after the fashion of Hainault, and gathering them under his leathern girdle and making them fast on every side, thus furnished himself with a fresh and capacious lap, which, however, taking no long time to fill, he made another lap out of his cloak, which in like manner he soon filled with stones. Wherefore, Bruno and Buffalmacco seeing that Calandrino was well laden, and that 'twas

nigh upon breakfast-time, and the moment for action come:—"Where is Calandrino?" quoth Bruno to Buffalmacco. Whereto Buffalmacco, who had Calandrino full in view, having first turned about and looked here, there and everywhere, made answer:—"That wot not I; but not so long ago he was just in front of us." "Not so long ago, forsooth," returned Bruno; "'tis my firm belief that at this very moment he is at breakfast at home, having left to us this wild-goose chase of black stones in the Mugnone." "Marry," quoth Buffalmacco, "he did but serve us right so to trick us and leave, seeing that we were so silly as to believe him. Why, who could have thought that any but we would have been so foolish as to believe that a stone of such rare virtue was to be found in the Mugnone?" Calandrino, hearing their colloquy, forthwith imagined that he had the stone in his hand, and by its virtue, though present, was invisible to them; and overjoyed by such good fortune, would not say a word to undeceive them, but determined to hie him home, and accordingly faced about, and put himself in motion. Whereupon:—"Ay!" quoth Buffalmacco to Bruno, "what are we about that we go not back too?" "Go we then," said Bruno; "but by God I swear that Calandrino shall never play me another such trick; and as to this, were I nigh him, as I have been all the morning, I would teach him to remember it for a month or so, such a reminder would I give him in the heel with this stone." And even as he spoke he threw back his arm, and launched the stone against Calandrino's heel. Galled by the blow, Calandrino gave a great hop and a slight gasp, but said nothing, and halted not. Then, picking out one of the stones that he had collected:—"Bruno," quoth Buffalmacco, "see what a goodly stone I have here, would it might but catch Calandrino in the back;" and forthwith he discharged it with main force upon the said back. And in short, suiting action to word, now in this way, now in that, they stoned him all the way up the Mugnone as far as the Porta a San Gallo. There they threw away the stones they had picked up, and tarried a while with the customs' officers, who, being primed by them, had let Calandrino pass unchallenged, while their laughter knew no bounds.

So Calandrino, halting nowhere, betook him to his house, which was hard by the corner of the Macina. And so well did Fortune prosper the trick, that all the way by the stream and across the city there was never a soul that said a word to Calandrino, and indeed he encountered but few, for most folk were at breakfast. But no sooner was Calandrino thus gotten home with his stones, than it so happened that his good lady, Monna Tessa, shewed her fair face at the stair's head, and catching sight of him, and being somewhat annoyed by his long delay, chid him, saying:—"What the Devil brings thee here so late? Must breakfast wait thee until all other folk have had it?" Calandrino caught the words, and angered and mortified to find that he was not invisible, broke out with:—"Alas! curst woman! so 'twas thou! Thou hast undone me: but, God's faith, I will pay thee out." Whereupon he was upstairs in a trice, and having discharged his great load of stones in a parlour, rushed with fell intent upon his wife, and laid hold of her by the hair, and threw her down at his feet, and beat and kicked her in every part of her person with all the force he had in his arms and legs, insomuch that he left never a hair of her head or bone of her body unscathed, and 'twas all in vain that she laid her palms together and crossed her fingers and cried for mercy.

Now Buffalmacco and Bruno, after making merry a while with the warders of the gate, had set off again at a leisurely pace, keeping some distance behind Calandrino. Arrived at his door, they heard the noise of the sound thrashing that he was giving his wife; and making as if they were but that very instant come upon the scene, they called him. Calandrino, flushed, all of a sweat, and out of breath, shewed himself at the window, and bade them come up. They, putting on a somewhat angry air, did so; and espied Calandrino sitting in the parlour, amid the stones which lay all about, untrussed, and puffing with the air of a man spent with exertion, while his lady lay in one of the corners, weeping bitterly, her hair all dishevelled, her clothes torn to shreds, and her face livid, bruised and battered. So after surveying the room a while:—"What means this, Calandrino?" quoth

they. "Art thou minded to build thee a wall, that we see so many stones about?" And then, as they received no answer, they continued:—"And how's this? How comes Monna Tessa in this plight? 'Twould seem thou hast given her a beating! What unheard-of doings are these?" What with the weight of the stones that he had carried, and the fury with which he had beaten his wife, and the mortification that he felt at the miscarriage of his enterprise, Calandrino was too spent to utter a word by way of reply. Wherefore in a menacing tone Buffalmacco began again:—"However out of sorts thou mayst have been, Calandrino, thou shouldst not have played us so scurvy a trick as thou hast. To take us with thee to the Mugnone in quest of this stone of rare virtue, and then, without so much as saying either God-speed or Devil-speed, to be off, and leave us there like a couple of gowks! We take it not a little unkindly: and rest assured that thou shalt never so fool us again." Whereto with an effort Calandrino replied:—"Comrades, be not wroth with me: 'tis not as you think. I, luckless wight! found the stone: listen, and you will no longer doubt that I say sooth. When you began saying one to the other:—"Where is Calandrino?" I was within ten paces of you, and marking that you came by without seeing me, I went before, and so, keeping ever a little ahead of you, I came hither." And then he told them the whole story of what they had said and done from beginning to end, and shewed them his back and heel, how they had been mauled by the stones; after which:—"And I tell you," he went on, "that, laden though I was with all these stones, that you see here, never a word was said to me by the warders of the gate as I passed in, though you know how vexatious and grievous these warders are wont to make themselves in their determination to see everything: and moreover I met by the way several of my gossips and friends that are ever wont to greet me, and ask me to drink, and never a word said any of them to me, no, nor half a word either; but they passed me by as men that saw me not. But at last, being come home, I was met and seen by this devil of a woman, curses upon her, forasmuch as all things, as you know, lose their virtue in the presence of a woman; whereby I from being the most lucky am become the most luckless man in Florence: and therefore I thrashed her as long as I could stir a hand, nor know I wherefore I forbear to sluice her veins for her, cursed be the hour that first I saw her, cursed be the hour that I brought her into the house!" And so, kindling with fresh wrath, he was about to start up and give her another thrashing; when Buffalmacco and Bruno, who had listened to his story with an air of great surprise, and affirmed its truth again and again, while they all but burst with suppressed laughter, seeing him now frantic to renew his assault upon his wife, got up and withstood and held him back, averring that the lady was in no wise to blame for what had happened, but only he, who, witting that things lost their virtue in the presence of women, had not bidden her keep aloof from him that day; which precaution God had not suffered him to take, either because the luck was not to be his, or because he was minded to cheat his comrades, to whom he should have shewn the stone as soon as he found it. And so, with many words they hardly prevailed upon him to forgive his injured wife, and leaving him to rue the ill-luck that had filled his house with stones, went their way.

BOOK 8, NOVEL 6

BRUNO AND BUFFALMACCO STEAL A PIG FROM CALANDRINO, AND INDUCE HIM TO ESSAY ITS RECOVERY BY MEANS OF PILLS OF GINGER AND VERNACCIA. OF THE SAID PILLS THEY GIVE HIM TWO, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, MADE OF DOG-GINGER COMPOUNDED WITH ALOES; AND IT THEN APPEARING AS IF HE HAD HAD THE PIG HIMSELF, THEY CONSTRAIN HIM TO BUY THEM OFF, IF HE WOULD NOT HAVE THEM TELL HIS WIFE.

Filostrato's story, which elicited not a little laughter, was no sooner ended, than the queen bade Filomena follow suit. Wherefore thus Filomena began:—As, gracious ladies, 'twas the name of Maso del Saggio that prompted Filostrato to tell the story that you have but now heard, even so 'tis with me in regard of Calandrino and his comrades, of whom I am minded to tell you another story, which you will, I think, find entertaining. Who Calandrino, Bruno and Buffalmacco were, I need not explain; you know them well enough from the former story; and therefore I will tarry no longer than to say that Calandrino had a little estate not far from Florence, which his wife had brought him by way of dowry, and which yielded them yearly, among other matters, a pig; and 'twas his custom every year in the month of December to resort to the farm with his wife, there to see to the killing and salting of the said pig. Now, one of these years it so happened that his wife being unwell, Calandrino went thither alone to kill the pig. And Bruno and Buffalmacco learning that he was gone to the farm, and that his wife was not with him, betook them to the house of a priest that was their especial friend and a neighbour of Calandrino, there to tarry a while. Upon their arrival Calandrino, who had that very morning killed the pig, met them with the priest, and accosted them, saying:—"A hearty welcome to you. I should like you to see what an excellent manager I am;" and so he took them into his house, and shewed them the pig. They observed that 'twas a very fine pig; and learned from Calandrino that he was minded to salt it for household consumption. "Then thou art but a fool," quoth Bruno. "Sell it, man, and let us have a jolly time with the money; and tell thy wife that 'twas stolen." "Not I," replied Calandrino: "she would never believe me, and would drive me out of the house. Urge me no further, for I will never do it." The others said a great deal more, but to no purpose; and Calandrino bade them to supper, but so coldly that they declined, and left him.

Presently:—"Should we not steal this pig from him to-night?" quoth Bruno to Buffalmacco. "Could we so?" returned Buffalmacco. "How?" "Why, as to that," rejoined Bruno, "I have already marked how it may be done, if he bestow not the pig elsewhere." "So be it, then," said Buffalmacco: "we will steal it; and then, perchance, our good host, Master Priest, will join us in doing honour to such good cheer?" "That right gladly will I," quoth the priest. Whereupon:—"Some address, though," quoth Bruno, "will be needful: thou knowest, Buffalmacco, what a niggardly fellow Calandrino is, and how greedily he drinks at other folk's expense. Go we, therefore, and take him to the tavern, and there let the priest make as if, to do us honour, he would pay the whole score, and suffer Calandrino to pay never a soldo, and he will grow tipsy, and then we shall speed excellent well, because he is alone in the house."

As Bruno proposed, so they did: and Calandrino, finding that the priest would not suffer him to pay, drank amain, and took a great deal more aboard than he had need of; and the night being far spent when he left the tavern, he dispensed with supper, and went home, and thinking to have shut the door, got him to bed, leaving it open. Buffalmacco and Bruno went to sup with the priest; and after

supper, taking with them certain implements with which to enter Calandrino's house, where Bruno thought it most feasible, they stealthily approached it; but finding the door open, they entered, and took down the pig, and carried it away to the priest's house, and having there bestowed it safely, went to bed. In the morning when Calandrino, his head at length quit of the fumes of the wine, got up, and came downstairs and found that his pig was nowhere to be seen, and that the door was open, he asked this, that, and the other man, whether they wist who had taken the pig away, and getting no answer, he began to make a great outcry:—"Alas, alas! luckless man that I am, that my pig should have been stolen from me!" Meanwhile Bruno and Buffalmacco, being also risen, made up to him, to hear what he would say touching the pig. Whom he no sooner saw, than well-nigh weeping he called them, saying:—"Alas! my friends! my pig is stolen from me." Bruno stepped up to him and said in a low tone:—"Tis passing strange if thou art in the right for once." "Alas!" returned Calandrino, "what I say is but too true." "Why, then, out with it, man," quoth Bruno, "cry aloud, that all folk may know that 'tis so." Calandrino then raised his voice and said:—"By the body o' God I say of a truth that my pig has been stolen from me." "So!" quoth Bruno, "but publish it, man, publish it; lift up thy voice, make thyself well heard, that all may believe thy report." "Thou art enough to make me give my soul to the Enemy," replied Calandrino. "I say—dost not believe me?—that hang me by the neck if the pig is not stolen from me!" "Nay, but," quoth Bruno, "how can it be? I saw it here but yesterday. Dost think to make me believe that it has taken to itself wings and flown away?" "All the same 'tis as I tell thee," returned Calandrino. "Is it possible?" quoth Bruno. "Ay indeed," replied Calandrino; "'tis even so: and I am undone, and know not how to go home. Never will my wife believe me; or if she do so, I shall know no peace this year." "Upon my hope of salvation," quoth Bruno, "'tis indeed a bad business, if so it really is. But thou knowest, Calandrino, that 'twas but yesterday I counselled thee to make believe that 'twas so. I should be sorry to think thou didst befool thy wife and us at the same time." "Ah!" vociferated Calandrino, "wilt thou drive me to despair and provoke me to blaspheme God and the saints and all the company of heaven? I tell thee that the pig has been stolen from me in the night." Whereupon:—"If so it be," quoth Buffalmacco, "we must find a way, if we can, to recover it." "Find a way?" said Calandrino: "how can we compass that?" "Why," replied Buffalmacco, "'tis certain that no one has come from India to steal thy pig: it must have been one of thy neighbours, and if thou couldst bring them together, I warrant thee, I know how to make the assay with bread and cheese, and we will find out in a trice who has had the pig." "Ay," struck in Bruno, "make thy assay with bread and cheese in the presence of these gentry hereabout, one of whom I am sure has had the pig! why, the thing would be seen through: and they would not come." "What shall we do, then?" said Buffalmacco. Whereto Bruno made answer:—"It must be done with good pills of ginger and good vernaccia;⁵ and they must be bidden come drink with us. They will suspect nothing, and will come; and pills of ginger can be blessed just as well as bread and cheese." "Beyond a doubt, thou art right," quoth Buffalmacco; "and thou Calandrino, what sayst thou? Shall we do as Bruno says?" "Nay, I entreat you for the love of God," quoth Calandrino, "do even so: for if I knew but who had had the pig, I should feel myself half consoled for my loss." "Go to, now," quoth Bruno, "I am willing to do thy errand to Florence for these commodities, if thou givest me the money."

Calandrino had some forty soldi upon him, which he gave to Bruno, who thereupon hied him to Florence to a friend of his that was an apothecary, and bought a pound of good pills of ginger, two of which, being of dog-ginger, he caused to be compounded with fresh hepatic aloes,⁶ and then to be

⁵ A white wine.

⁶ Both dog-ginger and hepatic aloes are bitter-tasting plants which could induce vomiting.

coated with sugar like the others; and lest they should be lost, or any of the others mistaken for them, he had a slight mark set upon them by which he might readily recognize them. He also bought a flask of good vernaccia, and, thus laden, returned to the farm, and said to Calandrino:—"Tomorrow morning thou wilt bid those whom thou suspectest come hither to drink with thee: as 'twill be a saint's day, they will all come readily enough; and to-night I and Buffalmacco will say the incantation over the pills, which in the morning I will bring to thee here, and for our friendship's sake will administer them myself, and do and say all that needs to be said and done." So Calandrino did as Bruno advised, and on the morrow a goodly company, as well of young men from Florence, that happened to be in the village, as of husbandmen, being assembled in front of the church around the elm, Bruno and Buffalmacco came, bearing a box containing the ginger, and the flask of wine, and ranged the folk in a circle. Whereupon: "Gentlemen," said Bruno, "'tis meet I tell you the reason why you are gathered here, that if aught unpleasant to you should befall, you may have no ground for complaint against me. Calandrino here was the night before last robbed of a fine pig, and cannot discover who has had it; and, for that it must have been stolen by some one of us here, he would have each of you take and eat one of these pills and drink of this vernaccia. Wherefore I forthwith do you to wit, that whoso has had the pig will not be able to swallow the pill, but will find it more bitter than poison, and will spit it out; and so, rather, than he should suffer this shame in presence of so many, 'twere perhaps best that he that has had the pig should confess the fact to the priest, and I will wash my hands of the affair."

All professed themselves ready enough to eat the pills; and so, having set them in a row with Calandrino among them, Bruno, beginning at one end, proceeded to give each a pill, and when he came to Calandrino he chose one of the pills of dog-ginger and put it in his hand. Calandrino thrust it forthwith between his teeth and began to chew it; but no sooner was his tongue acquainted with the aloes, than, finding the bitterness intolerable, he spat it out. Now, the eyes of all the company being fixed on one another to see who should spit out his pill, Bruno, who, not having finished the distribution, feigned to be concerned with nought else, heard some one in his rear say:—"Ha! Calandrino, what means this?" and at once turning round, and marking that Calandrino had spit out his pill:—"Wait a while," quoth he, "perchance 'twas somewhat else that caused thee to spit: take another;" and thereupon whipping out the other pill of dog-ginger, he set it between Calandrino's teeth, and finished the distribution. Bitter as Calandrino had found the former pill, he found this tenfold more so; but being ashamed to spit it out, he kept it a while in his mouth and chewed it, and, as he did so, tears stood in his eyes that shewed as large as filberts, and at length, being unable to bear it any longer, he spat it out, as he had its predecessor. Which being observed by Buffalmacco and Bruno, who were then administering the wine, and by all the company, 'twas averred by common consent that Calandrino had committed the theft himself; for which cause certain of them took him severely to task.

However, the company being dispersed, and Bruno and Buffalmacco left alone with Calandrino, Buffalmacco began on this wise:—"I never doubted but that thou hadst had it thyself, and wast minded to make us believe that it had been stolen from thee, that we might not have of thee so much as a single drink out of the price which thou gottest for it." Calandrino, with the bitterness of the aloes still on his tongue, fell a swearing that he had not had it. Whereupon:—"Nay, but, comrade," quoth Buffalmacco, "upon thy honour, what did it fetch? Six florins?" Whereunto, Calandrino being now on the verge of desperation, Bruno added:—"Now be reasonable, Calandrino; among the company that ate and drank with us there was one that told me that thou hadst up there a girl that thou didst keep for thy pleasure, giving her what by hook or by crook thou couldst get together, and that he held it for certain that thou hadst sent her this pig. And thou art grown expert

in this sort of cozenage. Thou tookest us one while adown the Mugnone a gathering black stones, and having thus started us on a wild-goose chase, thou madest off; and then wouldst fain have us believe that thou hadst found the stone: and now, in like manner, thou thinkest by thine oaths to persuade us that this pig which thou hast given away or sold, has been stolen from thee. But we know thy tricks of old; never another couldst thou play us; and, to be round with thee, this spell has cost us some trouble: wherefore we mean that thou shalt give us two pair of capons, or we will let Monna Tessa know all." Seeing that he was not believed, and deeming his mortification ample without the addition of his wife's resentment, Calandrino gave them the two pair of capons, with which, when the pig was salted, they returned to Florence, leaving Calandrino with the loss and the laugh against him.

BOOK 8, NOVEL 9

BRUNO AND BUFFALMACCO PREVAIL UPON MASTER SIMONE, A PHYSICIAN, TO BETAKE HIM BY NIGHT TO A CERTAIN PLACE, THERE TO BE ENROLLED IN A COMPANY THAT GO THE COURSE. BUFFALMACCO THROWS HIM INTO A FOUL DITCH, AND THERE THEY LEAVE HIM.

When the ladies had made merry a while over the partnership in wives established by the two Sieneſe, the queen, who now, unless ſhe were minded to infringe Dioneo's privilege, alone remained to tell, began on this wiſe:—Fairly earned indeed, loving ladies, was the flout that Spinelloccio got from Zeppa. Wherefore my judgment jumps with that which Pampinea expreſſed a while ago, to wit, that he is not ſeverely to be cenſured who beſtows a flout on one that provokes it or deſerves it; and as Spinelloccio deſerved it, ſo 'tis my purpoſe to tell you of one that provoked it, for I deem that thoſe from whom he received it, were rather to be commended than condemned. The man that got it was a phyſician, who, albeit he was but a blockhead, returned from Bologna to Florence in mantle and hood of vair.⁷

'Tis matter of daily experience that our citizens come back to us from Bologna, this man a judge, that a phyſician, and the other a notary, flaunting it in ample flowing robes, and adorned with the ſcarlet⁸ and the vair and other array moſt goodly to ſee; and how far their doings correſpond with this fair ſeeming, is alſo matter of daily experience. Among whom 'tis not long ſince Maſter Simone da Villa, one whoſe patrimony was more ample than his knowledge, came back wearing the ſcarlet and a broad ſtripe⁹ on the ſhoulder, and a doctor, as he called himſelf, and took a houſe in the ſtreet that we now call Via del Cocomero. Now this Maſter Simone, being thus, as we ſaid, come back, had this among other ſingular habits, that he could never ſee a ſoul paſs along the ſtreet, but he muſt needs aſk any that was by, who that man was; and he was as obſervant of all the doings of men, and as ſedulous¹⁰ to ſtore his memory with ſuch matters, as if they were to ſerve him to

⁷ Squirrel fur of blue-gray.

⁸ A red woolen cloth.

⁹ The diſtinguiſhing mark of a doctor in thoſe days. Fanfani, *Vocab. della Lingua Italiana*, 1891, "Batolo." (Rigg)

¹⁰ Diligent.

compound the drugs that he was to give his patients. Now, of all that he saw, those that he eyed most observantly were two painters, of whom here to-day mention has twice been made, Bruno, to wit, and Buffalmacco, who were ever together, and were his neighbours. And as it struck him that they daffed the world aside¹¹ and lived more light-heartedly than any others that he knew, as indeed they did, he enquired of not a few folk as to their rank. And learning on all hands that they were poor men and painters, he could not conceive it possible that they should live thus contentedly in poverty, but made his mind up that, being, as he was informed, clever fellows, they must have some secret source from which they drew immense gains; for which reason he grew all agog to get on friendly terms with them, or any rate with one of them, and did succeed in making friends with Bruno.

Bruno, who had not needed to be much with him in order to discover that this physician was but a dolt, had never such a jolly time in palming off his strange stories upon him, while the physician, on his part, was marvellously delighted with Bruno; to whom, having bidden him to breakfast, and thinking that for that reason he might talk familiarly with him, he expressed the amazement with which he regarded both him and Buffalmacco, for that, being but poor men, they lived so light-heartedly, and asked him to tell him how they managed. At which fresh proof of the doctor's simplicity and fatuity Bruno was inclined to laugh; but, bethinking him that 'twere best to answer him according to his folly, he said:—"Master, there are not many persons to whom I would disclose our manner of life, but, as you are my friend, and I know you will not let it go further, I do not mind telling you. The fact is that my comrade and I live not only as light-heartedly and jovially as you see, but much more so; and yet neither our art, nor any property that we possess, yields us enough to keep us in water: not that I would have you suppose that we go a thieving: no, 'tis that we go the course, and thereby without the least harm done to a soul we get all that we need, nay, all that we desire; and thus it is that we live so light-heartedly as you see." Which explanation the doctor believing none the less readily that he knew not what it meant, was lost in wonder, and forthwith burned with a most vehement desire to know what going the course might be, and was instant with Bruno to expound it, assuring him that he would never tell a soul. "Alas! Master," said Bruno, "what is this you ask of me? 'Tis a mighty great secret you would have me impart to you: 'twould be enough to undo me, to send me packing out of the world, nay, into the very jaws of Lucifer of San Gallo,¹² if it came to be known. But such is the respect in which I hold your quiditative¹³ pumpionship¹⁴ of Legnaia, and the trust I repose in you, that I am not able to deny you aught you ask of me; and so I will tell it you, on condition that you swear by the cross at Montesone that you will keep your promise, and never repeat it to a soul."

The Master gave the required assurance. Whereupon:—"You are then to know," quoth Bruno, "sweet my Master, that 'tis not long since there was in this city a great master in necromancy, hight¹⁵ Michael Scott, for that he was of Scotland, and great indeed was the honour in which he was held by not a few gentlemen, most of whom are now dead; and when the time came that he must

¹¹ Daffed the world aside > Played, dallied.

¹² Perhaps an allusion to some frightful picture. (Rigg)

¹³ Essential.

¹⁴ Shakespeare used pumion to mean "fat man" (*Merry Wives of Windsor*, III.iii.38.)

¹⁵ Called, named.

needs depart from Florence, he at their instant entreaty left behind him two pupils, adepts both, whom he bade hold themselves ever ready to pleasure those gentlemen who had done him honour. And very handsomely they did serve the said gentlemen in certain of their love affairs and other little matters; and finding the city and the manners of the citizens agreeable to them, they made up their minds to stay here always, and grew friendly and very intimate with some of the citizens, making no distinction between gentle and simple, rich or poor, so only they were such as were conformable to their ways. And to gratify these their friends they formed a company of perhaps twenty-five men, to meet together at least twice a month in a place appointed by them; where, when they are met, each utters his desire, and forthwith that same night they accomplish it. Now Buffalmacco and I, being extraordinarily great and close friends with these two adepts, were by them enrolled in this company, and are still members of it. And I assure you that, as often as we are assembled together, the adornments of the saloon in which we eat are a marvel to see, ay, and the tables laid as for kings, and the multitudes of stately and handsome servants, as well women as men, at the beck and call of every member of the company, and the basins, and the ewers, the flasks and the cups, and all else that is there for our service in eating and drinking, of nought but gold and silver, and therewithal the abundance and variety of the viands, suited to the taste of each, that are set before us, each in due course, these too be marvels. 'Twere vain for me to seek to describe to you the sweet concord that is there of innumerable instruments of music, and the tuneful songs that salute our ears; nor might I hope to tell you how much wax is burned at these banquets, or compute the quantity of the comfits that are eaten, or the value of the wines that are drunk. Nor, my pumpkin o' wit, would I have you suppose that, when we are there, we wear our common clothes, such as you now see me wear; nay, there is none there so humble but he shews as an emperor, so sumptuous are our garments, so splendid our trappings. But among all the delights of the place none may compare with the fair ladies, who, so one do but wish, are brought thither from every part of the world. Why, you might see there My Lady of the Barbanichs, the Queen of the Basques, the Consort of the Soldan, the Empress of Osbech, the Ciancianfera of Nornieca, the Semistante of Berlinzone, and the Scalpedra of Narsia. But why seek to enumerate them all? They include all the queens in the world, ay, even to the Schinchimurra of Prester John, who has the horns sprouting out of her nether end: so there's for you. Now when these ladies have done with the wine and the comfits, they tread a measure or two, each with the man at whose behest she is come, and then all go with their gallants to their chambers. And know that each of these chambers shews as a very Paradise, so fair is it, ay, and no less fragrant than the cases of aromatics in your shop when you are pounding the cumin: and therein are beds that you would find more goodly than that of the Doge of Venice, and 'tis in them we take our rest; and how busily they ply the treadle, and how lustily they tug at the frame to make the stuff close and compact, I leave you to imagine. However, among the luckiest of all I reckon Buffalmacco and myself; for that Buffalmacco for the most part fetches him the Queen of France, and I do the like with the Queen of England, who are just the finest women in the world, and we have known how to carry it with them so that we are the very eyes of their heads. So I leave it to your own judgment to determine whether we have not good cause to live and bear ourselves with a lighter heart than others, seeing that we are beloved of two such great queens, to say nothing of the thousand or two thousand florins that we have of them whenever we are so minded. Now this in the vulgar we call going the course, because, as the corsairs prey upon all the world, so do we; albeit with this difference, that, whereas they never restore their spoil, we do so as soon as we have done with it. So now, my worthy Master, you understand what we mean by going the course; but how close it behoves you to keep such a secret, you may see for yourself; so I spare you any further exhortations."

The Master, whose skill did not reach, perhaps, beyond the treatment of children for the scurf, took all that Bruno said for gospel, and burned with so vehement a desire to be admitted into this company, that he could not have longed for the summum bonum¹⁶ itself with more ardour. So, after telling Bruno that indeed 'twas no wonder they bore them light-heartedly, he could scarce refrain from asking him there and then to have him enrolled, albeit he deemed it more prudent to defer his suit, until by lavishing honour upon him he had gained a right to urge it with more confidence. He therefore made more and more of him, had him to breakfast and sup with him, and treated him with extraordinary respect. In short, such and so constant was their intercourse that it seemed as though the Master wist¹⁷ not how to live without Bruno. As it went so well with him, Bruno, to mark his sense of the honour done him by the doctor, painted in his saloon a picture symbolical of Lent, and an Agnus Dei¹⁸ at the entrance of his chamber, and an alembic over his front door, that those who would fain consult him might know him from other physicians, besides a battle of rats and mice in his little gallery, which the doctor thought an extremely fine piece. And from time to time, when he had not supped with the Master, he would say to him:—"Last night I was with the company, and being a little tired of the Queen of England, I fetched me the Gumedra of the great Can of Tarisi." "Gumedra," quoth the Master; "what is she? I know not the meaning of these words." "Thereat, Master," replied Bruno, "I marvel not; for I have heard tell that neither Porcograsso nor Vannacena say aught thereof." "Thou wouldst say Ippocrasso and Avicenna," returned the Master. "I'faith I know not," quoth Bruno. "I as ill know the meaning of your words as you of mine. But Gumedra in the speech of the great Can signifies the same as Empress in ours. Ah! a fine woman you would find her, and plenty of her! I warrant she would make you forget your drugs and prescriptions and plasters." And so, Bruno from time to time whetting the Master's appetite, and the Master at length thinking that by his honourable entreatment of him he had fairly made a conquest of Bruno, it befell that one evening, while he held the light for Bruno, who was at work on the battle of rats and mice, he determined to discover to him his desire; and as they were alone, thus he spoke:—"God knows, Bruno, that there lives not the man, for whom I would do as much as for thee: why, if thou wast to bid me go all the way from here to Peretola,¹⁹ I almost think I would do so; wherefore I trust thou wilt not deem it strange if I talk to thee as an intimate friend and in confidence. Thou knowest 'tis not long since thou didst enlarge with me on thy gay company and their doings, which has engendered in me such a desire as never was to know more thereof. Nor without reason, as thou wilt discover, should I ever become a member of the said company, for I straightway give thee leave to make game of me, should I not then fetch me the fairest maid thou hast seen this many a day, whom I saw last year at Cacavincigli, and to whom I am entirely devoted; and by the body of Christ I offered her ten Bolognese groats, that she should pleasure me, and she would not. Wherefore I do most earnestly entreat thee to instruct me what I must do to fit myself for membership in the company; and never doubt that in me you will have a true and loyal comrade, and one that will do you honour. And above all thou seest how goodly I am of my person, and how well furnished with legs, and of face as fresh as a rose; and therewithal I am a doctor of medicine, and I scarce think you have any such among you; and not a little excellent lore I have, and many a good song by heart, of which I will sing thee one;" and forthwith he fell a singing.

¹⁶ The highest good.

¹⁷ Knew.

¹⁸ Lamb of God.

¹⁹ About four miles from Florence. (Rigg)

Bruno had such a mind to laugh, that he could scarce contain himself; but still he kept a grave countenance; and, when the Master had ended his song, and said:—"How likes it thee?" he answered:—"Verily, no lyre of straw could vie with you, so artagutically²⁰ you refine your strain." "I warrant thee," returned the Master, "thou hadst never believed it, hadst thou not heard me." "Ay, indeed, sooth sayst thou," quoth Bruno. "And I have other songs to boot," said the Master; "but enough of this at present. Thou must know that I, such as thou seest me, am a gentleman's son, albeit my father lived in the contado;²¹ and on my mother's side I come of the Vallecchio family. And as thou mayst have observed I have quite the finest library and wardrobe of all the physicians in Florence. God's faith! I have a robe that cost, all told, close upon a hundred pounds in bagattines²² more than ten years ago. Wherefore I make most instant suit to thee that thou get me enrolled, which if thou do, God's faith! be thou never so ill, thou shalt pay me not a stiver for my tendance of thee." Whereupon Bruno, repeating to himself, as he had done many a time before, that the doctor was a very numskull:—"Master," quoth he, "shew a little more light here, and have patience until I have put the finishing touches to the tails of these rats, and then I will answer you." So he finished the tails, and then, putting on an air as if he were not a little embarrassed by the request:—"Master mine," quoth he, "I should have great things to expect from you; that I know: but yet what you ask of me, albeit to your great mind it seems but a little thing, is a weighty matter indeed for me; nor know I a soul in the world, to whom, though well able, I would grant such a request, save to you alone: and this I say not for friendship's sake alone, albeit I love you as I ought, but for that your discourse is so fraught with wisdom, that 'tis enough to make a beguine start out of her boots, much more, then, to incline me to change my purpose; and the more I have of your company, the wiser I repute you. Whereto I may add, that, if for no other cause, I should still be well disposed towards you for the love I see you bear to that fair piece of flesh of which you spoke but now. But this I must tell you: 'tis not in my power to do as you would have me in this matter; but, though I cannot myself do the needful in your behalf, if you will pledge your faith, whole and solid as may be, to keep my secret, I will shew you how to go about it for yourself, and I make no doubt that, having this fine library and the other matters you spoke of a while ago, you will compass your end." Quoth then the Master:—"Nay, but speak freely; I see thou dost yet scarce know me, and how well I can keep a secret. There were few things that Messer Guasparruolo da Saliceto did, when he was Podesta of Forlinpopoli, that he did not confide to me, so safe he knew they would be in my keeping: and wouldst thou be satisfied that I say sooth? I assure you I was the first man whom he told that he was about to marry Bergamina: so there's for thee." "Well and good," said Bruno, "if such as he confided in you, well indeed may I do the like. Know, then, that you will have to proceed on this wise:—Our company is governed by a captain and a council of two, who are changed every six months: and on the calends without fail Buffalmacco will be captain, and I councillor: 'tis so fixed: and the captain has not a little power to promote the admission and enrolment of whomsoever he will: wherefore, methinks, you would do well to make friends with Buffalmacco and honourably entreat him: he is one that, marking your great wisdom, will take a mighty liking to you forthwith; and when you have just a little dazzled him with your wisdom and these fine things of yours, you may make your request to him; and he will not know how to say no—I have already talked with him of you, and he is as well disposed to you as may be—and having so done you will leave the rest to me." Whereupon:—"Thy words are to me for an exceeding great joy," quoth the Master: "and if he be one that loves to

²⁰ In the Italian "artagoticamente," a word of Boccaccio's own minting. (Rigg)

²¹ Country-side.

²² A Venetian coin of extremely low value, being reckoned as 1/4 of the Florentine quattrino. (Rigg)

converse with sages, he has but to exchange a word or two with me, and I will answer for it that he will be ever coming to see me; for so fraught with wisdom am I, that I could furnish a whole city therewith, and still remain a great sage."

Having thus set matters in train, Bruno related the whole affair, point by point, to Buffalmacco, to whom it seemed a thousand years till he should be able to give Master Noodle that of which he was in quest. The doctor, now all agog to go the course, lost no time, and found no difficulty, in making friends with Buffalmacco, and fell to entertaining him, and Bruno likewise, at breakfast and supper in most magnificent style; while they fooled him to the top of his bent; for, being gentlemen that appreciated excellent wines and fat capons, besides other good cheer in plenty, they were inclined to be very neighbourly, and needed no second bidding, but, always letting him understand that there was none other whose company they relished so much, kept ever with him.

However, in due time the Master asked of Buffalmacco that which he had before asked of Bruno. Whereat Buffalmacco feigned to be not a little agitated, and turning angrily to Bruno, made a great pother about his ears, saying:—"By the Most High God of Pasignano I vow I can scarce forbear to give thee that over the head that should make thy nose fall about thy heels, traitor that thou art, for 'tis thou alone that canst have discovered these secrets to the Master." Whereupon the Master interposed with no little vigour, averring with oaths that 'twas from another source that he had gotten his knowledge; and Buffalmacco at length allowed himself to be pacified by the sage's words. So turning to him:—"Master," quoth he, "'tis evident indeed that you have been at Bologna, and have come back hither with a mouth that blabs not, and that 'twas on no pippin, as many a dolt does, but on the good long pumpkin that you learned your A B C; and, if I mistake not, you were baptized on a Sunday;²³ and though Bruno has told me that 'twas medicine you studied there, 'tis my opinion that you there studied the art of catching men, of which, what with your wisdom and your startling revelations, you are the greatest master that ever I knew." He would have said more, but the doctor, turning to Bruno, broke in with:—"Ah! what it is to consort and converse with the wise! Who but this worthy man would thus have read my mind through and through? Less quick by far to rate me at my true worth wast thou. But what said I when thou toldst me that Buffalmacco delighted to converse with sages? Confess now; have I not kept my word?" "Verily," quoth Bruno, "you have more than kept it." Then, addressing Buffalmacco:—"Ah!" cried the Master, "what hadst thou said, hadst thou seen me at Bologna, where there was none, great or small, doctor or scholar, but was devoted to me, so well wist I how to entertain them with my words of wisdom. Nay more; let me tell thee that there was never a word I spoke but set every one a laughing, so great was the pleasure it gave them. And at my departure they all deplored it most bitterly, and would have had me remain, and by way of inducement went so far as to propose that I should be sole lecturer to all the students in medicine that were there; which offer I declined, for that I was minded to return hither, having vast estates here, that have ever belonged to my family; which, accordingly, I did." Quoth then Bruno to Buffalmacco:—"How shews it, now, man? Thou didst not believe me when I told thee what he was. By the Gospels there is never a physician in this city that has the lore of ass's urine by heart as he has: verily, thou wouldst not find his like between here and the gates of Paris. Now see if thou canst help doing as he would have thee." "'Tis even as Bruno says," observed the doctor, "but I am not understood here. You Florentines are somewhat slow of wit. Would you could see me in my proper element, among a company of doctors!" Whereupon:—"Of a truth, Master,"

²³ I.e. without salt, that Florentine symbol of wit, not being so readily procurable on a holiday as on working-days. (Rigg)

quoth Buffalmacco, "your lore far exceeds any I should ever have imputed to you; wherefore, addressing you as 'tis meet to address a man of your wisdom, I give you disjointedly to understand that without fail I will procure your enrolment in our company."

After this promise the honours lavished by the doctor upon the two men grew and multiplied; in return for which they diverted themselves by setting him a prancing upon every wildest chimera in the world; and promised, among other matters, to give him by way of mistress, the Countess of Civillari,²⁴ whom they averred to be the goodliest creature to be found in all the Netherlands of the human race; and the doctor asking who this Countess might be:—"Mature my gherkin," quoth Buffalmacco, "she is indeed a very great lady, and few houses are there in the world in which she has not some jurisdiction; nay, the very Friars Minors, to say nought of other folk, pay her tribute to the sound of the kettle-drum. And I may tell you that, when she goes abroad, she makes her presence very sensibly felt, albeit for the most part she keeps herself close: however, 'tis no great while since she passed by your door one night on her way to the Arno to bathe her feet and get a breath of air; but most of her time she abides at Laterina.²⁵ Serjeants has she not a few that go their rounds at short intervals, bearing, one and all, the rod and the bucket in token of her sovereignty, and barons in plenty in all parts, as Tamagnino della Porta,²⁶ Don Meta,²⁷ Manico di Scopa,²⁸ Squacchera,²⁹ and others, with whom I doubt not you are intimately acquainted, though you may not just now bear them in mind. Such, then, is the great lady, in whose soft arms we, if we delude not ourselves, will certainly place you, in which case you may well dispense with her of Cacavincigli."

The doctor, who had been born and bred at Bologna, and understood not their words, found the lady quite to his mind; and shortly afterwards the painters brought him tidings of his election into the company. Then came the day of the nocturnal gathering, and the doctor had the two men to breakfast; and when they had breakfasted, he asked them after what manner he was to join the company. Whereupon:—"Lo, now, Master," quoth Buffalmacco, "you have need of a stout heart; otherwise you may meet with some let, to our most grievous hurt; and for what cause you have need of this stout heart, you shall hear. You must contrive to be to-night about the hour of first sleep on one of the raised tombs that have been lately placed outside of Santa Maria Novella; and mind that you wear one of your best gowns, that your first appearance may impress the company with a proper sense of your dignity, and also because, as we are informed, for we were not present at the time, the Countess, by reason that you are a gentleman, is minded to make you a Knight of the Bath at her own charges. So you will wait there, until one, whom we shall send, come for you: who, that you may know exactly what you have to expect, will be a beast black and horned, of no great size; and he will go snorting and bounding amain about the piazza in front of you, with intent to terrify you; but, when he perceives that you are not afraid, he will draw nigh you quietly, and when he is

²⁴ A public sink at Florence.

²⁵ In the contado of Arezzo: the equivoque is tolerably obvious.

²⁶ Slang for an ill-kept jakes. [jakes: toilet]

²⁷ Also slang: signifying a pyramidal pile of ordure. [ordure: dung, shit]

²⁸ Broom-handle.

²⁹ The meaning of this term may perhaps be divined from the sound.

close by you, then get you down from the tomb, fearing nothing; and, minding you neither of God nor of the saints, mount him, and when you are well set on his back, then fold your arms upon your breast, as in submission, and touch him no more. Then, going gently, he will bear you to us; but once mind you of God, or the saints, or give way to fear, and I warn you, he might give you a fall, or dash you against something that you would find scarce pleasant; wherefore, if your heart misgives you, you were best not to come, for you would assuredly do yourself a mischief, and us no good at all." Quoth then the doctor:—"You know me not as yet; 'tis perchance because I wear the gloves and the long robe that you misdoubt me. Ah! did you but know what feats I have done in times past at Bologna, when I used to go after the women with my comrades, you would be lost in amazement. God's faith! on one of those nights there was one of them, a poor sickly creature she was too, and stood not a cubit in height, who would not come with us; so first I treated her to many a good cuff, and then I took her up by main force, and carried her well-nigh as far as a cross-bow will send a bolt, and so caused her, willy-nilly, come with us. And on another occasion I mind me that, having none other with me but my servant, a little after the hour of Ave Maria, I passed beside the cemetery of the Friars Minors, and, though that very day a woman had been there interred, I had no fear at all. So on this score you may make your minds easy; for indeed I am a man of exceeding great courage and prowess. And to appear before you with due dignity, I will don my scarlet gown, in which I took my doctor's degree, and it remains to be seen if the company will not give me a hearty welcome, and make me captain out of hand. Let me once be there, and you will see how things will go; else how is it that this countess, that has not yet seen me, is already so enamoured of me that she is minded to make me a Knight of the Bath? And whether I shall find knighthood agreeable, or know how to support the dignity well or ill, leave that to me." Whereupon:—"Well said, excellent well said," quoth Buffalmacco: "but look to it you disappoint us not, either by not coming or by not being found, when we send for you; and this I say, because 'tis cold weather, and you medical gentlemen take great care of your health." "God forbid," replied the doctor, "I am none of your chilly folk; I fear not the cold: 'tis seldom indeed, when I leave my bed a nights, to answer the call of nature, as one must at times, that I do more than throw a pelisse over my doublet; so rest assured that I shall be there."

So they parted; and towards nightfall the Master found a pretext for leaving his wife, and privily got out his fine gown, which in due time he donned, and so hied him to the tombs, and having perched himself on one of them, huddled himself together, for 'twas mighty cold, to await the coming of the beast. Meanwhile Buffalmacco, who was a tall man and strong, provided himself with one of those dominos that were wont to be worn in certain revels which are now gone out of fashion; and enveloped in a black pelisse turned inside out, shewed like a bear, save that the domino had the face of a devil, and was furnished with horns: in which guise, Bruno following close behind to see the sport, he hied him to the piazza of Santa Maria Novella. And no sooner wist he that the Master was on the tomb, than he fell a careering in a most wild and furious manner to and fro the piazza, and snorting and bellowing and gibbering like one demented, insomuch that, as soon as the Master was ware of him, each several hair on his head stood on end, and he fell a trembling in every limb, being in sooth more timid than a woman, and wished himself safe at home: but as there he was, he strove might and main to keep his spirits up, so overmastering was his desire to see the marvels of which Bruno and Buffalmacco had told him. However, after a while Buffalmacco allowed his fury to abate, and came quietly up to the tomb on which the Master was, and stood still. The Master, still all of a tremble with fear, could not at first make up his mind, whether to get on the beast's back, or no; but at length, doubting it might be the worse for him if he did not mount the beast, he overcame the one dread by the aid of the other, got down from the tomb, saying under his breath:—"God help me!"

and seated himself very comfortably on the beast's back; and then, still quaking in every limb, he folded his arms as he had been bidden.

Buffalmacco now started, going on all-fours, at a very slow pace, in the direction of Santa Maria della Scala, and so brought the Master within a short distance of the Convent of the Ladies of Ripoli. Now, in that quarter there were divers trenches, into which the husbandmen of those parts were wont to discharge the Countess of Civillari, that she might afterwards serve them to manure their land. Of one of which trenches, as he came by, Buffalmacco skirted the edge, and seizing his opportunity, raised a hand, and caught the doctor by one of his feet, and threw him off his back and headforemost right into the trench, and then, making a terrific noise and frantic gestures as before, went bounding off by Santa Maria della Scala towards the field of Ognissanti, where he found Bruno, who had betaken him thither that he might laugh at his ease; and there the two men in high glee took their stand to observe from a distance how the bemired doctor would behave. Finding himself in so loathsome a place, the Master struggled might and main to raise himself and get out; and though again and again he slipped back, and swallowed some drams of the ordure, yet, bemired from head to foot, woebegone and crestfallen, he did at last get out, leaving his hood behind him. Then, removing as much of the filth as he might with his hands, knowing not what else to do, he got him home, where, by dint of much knocking, he at last gained admittance; and scarce was the door closed behind the malodorous Master, when Bruno and Buffalmacco were at it, all agog to hear after what manner he would be received by his wife. They were rewarded by hearing her give him the soundest rating that ever bad husband got. "Ah!" quoth she, "fine doings, these! Thou hast been with some other woman, and wast minded to make a brave shew in thy scarlet gown. So I was not enough for thee! not enough for thee forsooth, I that might content a crowd! Would they had choked thee with the filth in which they have soused thee; 'twas thy fit resting-place. Now, to think that a physician of repute, and a married man, should go by night after strange women!" Thus, and with much more to the like effect, while the doctor was busy washing himself, she ceased not to torment him until midnight.

On the morrow, Bruno and Buffalmacco, having painted their bodies all over with livid patches to give them the appearance of having been thrashed, came to the doctor's house, and finding that he was already risen, went in, being saluted on all hands by a foul smell, for time had not yet served thoroughly to cleanse the house. The doctor, being informed that they were come to see him, advanced to meet them, and bade them good morning. Whereto Bruno and Buffalmacco, having prepared their answer, replied:—"No good morning shall you have from us: rather we pray God to give you bad years enough to make an end of you, seeing that there lives no more arrant and faithless traitor. 'Tis no fault of yours, if we, that did our best to honour and pleasure you, have not come by a dog's death; your faithlessness has cost us to-night as many sound blows as would more than suffice to keep an ass a trotting all the way from here to Rome; besides which, we have been in peril of expulsion from the company in which we arranged for your enrolment. If you doubt our words, look but at our bodies, what a state they are in." And so, baring their breasts they gave him a glimpse of the patches they had painted there, and forthwith covered them up again. The doctor would have made them his excuses, and recounted his misfortunes, and how he had been thrown into the trench. But Buffalmacco broke in with:—"Would he had thrown you from the bridge into the Arno! Why must you needs mind you of God and the saints? Did we not forewarn you?" "God's faith," returned the doctor, "that did I not." "How?" quoth Buffalmacco, "you did not? You do so above a little; for he that we sent for you told us that you trembled like an aspen, and knew not where you were. You have played us a sorry trick; but never another shall do so; and as for you, we will give you such requital thereof as you deserve." The doctor now began to crave their pardon,

and to implore them for God's sake not to expose him to shame, and used all the eloquence at his command to make his peace with them. And if he had honourably entreated them before, he thenceforth, for fear they should publish his disgrace, did so much more abundantly, and courted them both by entertaining them at his table and in other ways. And so you have heard how wisdom is imparted to those that get it not at Bologna.

BOOK 9, NOVEL 3

MASTER SIMONE, AT THE INSTANCE OF BRUNO AND BUFFALMACCO AND NELLO, MAKES CALANDRINO BELIEVE THAT HE IS WITH CHILD. CALANDRINO, ACCORDINGLY, GIVES THEM CAPONS AND MONEY FOR MEDICINES, AND IS CURED WITHOUT BEING DELIVERED.

When Elisa had ended her story, and all had given thanks to God that He had vouchsafed the young nun a happy escape from the fangs of her envious companions, the queen bade Filostrato follow suit; and without expecting a second command, thus Filostrato began:—Fairest my ladies, the uncouth judge from the Marches, of whom I told you yesterday, took from the tip of my tongue a story of Calandrino, which I was on the point of narrating: and as nought can be said of him without mightily enhancing our jollity, albeit not a little has already been said touching him and his comrades, I will now give you the story which I had meant yesterday to give you. Who they were, this Calandrino and the others that I am to tell of in this story, has already been sufficiently explained; wherefore, without more ado, I say that one of Calandrino's aunts having died, leaving him two hundred pounds in petty cash, Calandrino gave out that he was minded to purchase an estate, and, as if he had had ten thousand florins of gold to invest, engaged every broker in Florence to treat for him, the negotiation always falling through, as soon as the price was named. Bruno and Buffalmacco, knowing what was afoot, told him again and again that he had better give himself a jolly time with them than go about buying earth as if he must needs make pellets;³⁰ but so far were they from effecting their purpose, that they could not even prevail upon him to give them a single meal. Whereat as one day they grumbled, being joined by a comrade of theirs, one Nello, also a painter, they all three took counsel how they might wet their whistle at Calandrino's expense; and, their plan being soon concerted, the next morning Calandrino was scarce gone out, when Nello met him, saying:—"Good day, Calandrino:" whereto Calandrino replied:—"God give thee a good day and a good year." Nello then drew back a little, and looked him steadily in the face, until:—"What seest thou to stare at?" quoth Calandrino. "Hadst thou no pain in the night?" returned Nello; "thou seemest not thyself to me." Which Calandrino no sooner heard, than he began to be disquieted, and:—"Alas! How sayst thou?" quoth he. "What tak'st thou to be the matter with me?" "Why, as to that I have nothing to say," returned Nello; "but thou seemest to be quite changed: perchance 'tis not what I suppose;" and with that he left him.

Calandrino, anxious, though he could not in the least have said why, went on; and soon Buffalmacco, who was not far off, and had observed him part from Nello, made up to him, and greeted him, asking him if he was not in pain. "I cannot say," replied Calandrino; "'twas but now that Nello told me that I looked quite changed: can it be that there is aught the matter with me?" "Aught?" quoth Buffalmacco, "ay, indeed, there might be a trifle the matter with thee. Thou look'st to be half dead,

³⁰ I.e. bolts of clay for the cross-bow.

man." Calandrino now began to think he must have a fever. And then up came Bruno; and the first thing he said was:—"Why, Calandrino, how ill thou look'st! thy appearance is that of a corpse. How dost thou feel?" To be thus accosted by all three left no doubt in Calandrino's mind that he was ill, and so:—"What shall I do?" quoth he, in a great fright. "My advice," replied Bruno, "is that thou go home and get thee to bed and cover thee well up, and send thy water to Master Simone, who, as thou knowest, is such a friend of ours. He will tell thee at once what thou must do; and we will come to see thee, and will do aught that may be needful." And Nello then joining them, they all three went home with Calandrino, who, now quite spent, went straight to his room, and said to his wife:—"Come now, wrap me well up; I feel very ill." And so he laid himself on the bed, and sent a maid with his water to Master Simone, who had then his shop in the Mercato Vecchio, at the sign of the pumpkin. Whereupon quoth Bruno to his comrades:—"You will stay here with him, and I will go hear what the doctor has to say, and if need be, will bring him hither." "Prithee, do so, my friend," quoth Calandrino, "and bring me word how it is with me, for I feel as how I cannot say in my inside." So Bruno hied him to Master Simone, and before the maid arrived with the water, told him what was afoot. The Master, thus primed, inspected the water, and then said to the maid:—"Go tell Calandrino to keep himself very warm, and I will come at once, and let him know what is the matter with him, and what he must do." With which message the maid was scarce returned, when the Master and Bruno arrived, and the Master, having seated himself beside Calandrino, felt his pulse, and by and by, in the presence of his wife, said:—"Harkye, Calandrino, I speak to thee as a friend, and I tell thee that what is amiss with thee is just that thou art with child." Whereupon Calandrino cried out querulously:—"Woe's me! 'Tis thy doing, Tessa, for that thou must needs be uppermost: I told thee plainly what would come of it," Whereat the lady, being not a little modest, coloured from brow to neck, and with downcast eyes, withdrew from the room, saying never a word by way of answer. Calandrino ran on in the same plaintive strain:—"Alas! woe's me! What shall I do? How shall I be delivered of this child? What passage can it find? Ah! I see only too plainly that the lasciviousness of this wife of mine has been the death of me: God make her as wretched as I would fain be happy! Were I as well as I am not, I would get me up and thrash her, till I left not a whole bone in her body, albeit it does but serve me right for letting her get the upper place; but if I do win through this, she shall never have it again; verily she might pine to death for it, but she should not have it."

Which to hear, Bruno and Buffalmacco and Nello were like to burst with suppressed laughter, and Master Scimmione ³¹ laughed so frantically, that all his teeth were ready to start from his jaws. However, at length, in answer to Calandrino's appeals and entreaties for counsel and succour:—"Calandrino," quoth the Master, "thou mayst dismiss thy fears, for, God be praised, we were apprised of thy state in such good time that with but little trouble, in the course of a few days, I shall set thee right; but 'twill cost a little." "Woe's me," returned Calandrino, "be it so, Master, for the love of God: I have here two hundred pounds, with which I had thoughts of buying an estate: take them all, all, if you must have all, so only I may escape being delivered, for I know not how I should manage it, seeing that women, albeit 'tis much easier for them, do make such a noise in the hour of their labour, that I misdoubt me, if I suffered so, I should die before I was delivered." "Disquiet not thyself," said the doctor: "I will have a potion distilled for thee; of rare virtue it is, and not a little palatable, and in the course of three days 'twill purge thee of all, and leave thee in better fettle than a fish; but thou wilt do well to be careful thereafter, and commit no such indiscretions again. Now to make this potion we must have three pair of good fat capons, and, for divers other ingredients, thou

³¹ I.e. great ape: with a play on Simone.

wilt give one of thy friends here five pounds in small change to purchase them, and thou wilt have everything sent to my shop, and so, please God, I will send thee this distilled potion to-morrow morning, and thou wilt take a good beakerful each time." Whereupon:—"Be it as you bid, Master mine," quoth Calandrino, and handing Bruno five pounds, and money enough to purchase three pair of capons, he begged him, if it were not too much trouble, to do him the service to buy these things for him. So away went the doctor, and made a little decoction by way of draught, and sent it him. Bruno bought the capons and all else that was needed to furnish forth the feast, with which he and his comrades and the doctor regaled them. Calandrino drank of the decoction for three mornings, after which he had a visit from his friends and the doctor, who felt his pulse, and then:—"Beyond a doubt, Calandrino," quoth he, "thou art cured, and so thou hast no more occasion to keep indoors, but needst have no fear to do whatever thou hast a mind to." Much relieved, Calandrino got up, and resumed his accustomed way of life, and, wherever he found any one to talk to, was loud in praise of Master Simone for the excellent manner in which he had cured him, causing him in three days without the least suffering to be quit of his pregnancy. And Bruno and Buffalmacco and Nello were not a little pleased with themselves that they had so cleverly got the better of Calandrino's niggardliness, albeit Monna Tessa, who was not deceived, murmured not a little against her husband.

BOOK 9, NOVEL 5

CALANDRINO BEING ENAMOURED OF A DAMSEL, BRUNO GIVES HIM A SCROLL, AVERRING THAT, IF HE BUT TOUCH HER THEREWITH, SHE WILL GO WITH HIM: HE IS FOUND WITH HER BY HIS WIFE WHO SUBJECTS HIM TO A MOST SEVERE AND VEXATIOUS EXAMINATION.

So, at no great length, ended Neifile her story, which the company allowed to pass with none too much laughter or remark: whereupon the queen, turning to Fiammetta, bade her follow suit. Fiammetta, with mien most gladsome, made answer that she willingly obeyed, and thus began:—As I doubt not, ye know, ladies most debonair, be the topic of discourse never so well worn, it will still continue to please, if the speaker knows how to make due choice of time and occasion meet. Wherefore, considering the reason for which we are here (how that 'tis to make merry and speed the time gaily, and that merely), I deem that there is nought that may afford us mirth and solace but here may find time and occasion meet, and, after serving a thousand turns of discourse, should still prove not unpleasing for another thousand. Wherefore, notwithstanding that of Calandrino and his doings not a little has from time to time been said among us, yet, considering that, as a while ago Filostrato observed, there is nought that concerns him that is not entertaining, I will make bold to add to the preceding stories another, which I might well, had I been minded to deviate from the truth, have disguised, and so recounted it to you, under other names; but as whoso in telling a story diverges from the truth does thereby in no small measure diminish the delight of his hearers, I purpose for the reason aforesaid to give you the narrative in proper form.

Niccolo Cornacchini, one of our citizens, and a man of wealth, had among other estates a fine one at Camerata, on which he had a grand house built, and engaged Bruno and Buffalmacco to paint it throughout; in which task, for that 'twas by no means light, they associated with them Nello and Calandrino, and so set to work. There were a few rooms in the house provided with beds and other furniture, and an old female servant lived there as caretaker, but otherwise the house was unoccupied, for which cause Niccolo's son, Filippo, being a young man and a bachelor, was wont sometimes to bring thither a woman for his pleasure, and after keeping her there for a few days to escort her thence again. Now on one of these occasions it befell that he brought thither one Niccolosa, whom a vile fellow, named Mangione, kept in a house at Camaldoli as a common prostitute. And a fine piece of flesh she was, and wore fine clothes, and for one of her sort, knew how to comport herself becomingly and talk agreeably.

Now one day at high noon forth tripped the damsel from her chamber in a white gown, her locks braided about her head, to wash her hands and face at a well that was in the courtyard of the house, and, while she was so engaged, it befell that Calandrino came there for water, and greeted her familiarly. Having returned his salutation, she, rather because Calandrino struck her as something out of the common, than for any other interest she felt in him, regarded him attentively. Calandrino did the like by her, and being smitten by her beauty, found reasons enough why he should not go back to his comrades with the water; but, as he knew not who she was, he made not bold to address her. She, upon whom his gaze was not lost, being minded to amuse herself at his expense, let her glance from time to time rest upon him, while she heaved a slight sigh or two. Whereby Calandrino was forthwith captivated, and tarried in the courtyard, until Filippo called her back into the chamber. Returned to his work, Calandrino sighed like a furnace: which Bruno, who was ever

regardful of his doings for the diversion they afforded him, failed not to mark, and by and by:— "What the Devil is amiss with thee, comrade Calandrino?" quoth he. "Thou dost nought but puff and blow." "Comrade," replied Calandrino, "I should be in luck, had I but one to help me." "How so?" quoth Bruno. "Why," returned Calandrino, "'tis not to go farther, but there is a damsel below, fairer than a lamia, and so mightily in love with me that 'twould astonish thee. I observed it but now, when I went to fetch the water." "Nay, but, Calandrino, make sure she be not Filippo's wife," quoth Bruno. "I doubt 'tis even so," replied Calandrino, "for he called her and she joined him in the chamber; but what signifies it? I would circumvent Christ Himself in such case, not to say Filippo. Of a truth, comrade, I tell thee she pleases me I could not say how." "Comrade," returned Bruno, "I will find out for thee who she is, and if she be Filippo's wife, two words from me will make it all straight for thee, for she is much my friend. But how shall we prevent Buffalmacco knowing it? I can never have a word with her but he is with me." "As to Buffalmacco," replied Calandrino: "I care not if he do know it; but let us make sure that it come not to Nello's ears, for he is of kin to Monna Tessa, and would spoil it all." Whereto:—"Thou art in the right," returned Bruno.

Now Bruno knew what the damsel was, for he had seen her arrive, and moreover Filippo had told him. So, Calandrino having given over working for a while, and betaken him to her, Bruno acquainted Nello and Buffalmacco with the whole story; and thereupon they privily concerted how to entreat him in regard of this love affair. Wherefore, upon his return, quoth Bruno softly:—"Didst see her?" "Ay, woe's me!" replied Calandrino: "she has stricken me to the death." Quoth Bruno:—"I will go see if she be the lady I take her to be, and if I find that 'tis so, leave the rest to me." Whereupon down went Bruno, and found Filippo and the damsel, and fully apprised them what sort of fellow Calandrino was, and what he had told them, and concerted with them what each should do and say, that they might have a merry time together over Calandrino's love affair. He then rejoined Calandrino, saying:—"Tis the very same; and therefore the affair needs very delicate handling, for, if Filippo were but ware thereof, not all Arno's waters would suffice to cleanse us. However, what should I say to her from thee, if by chance I should get speech of her?" "I'faith," replied Calandrino, "why, first, first of all, thou wilt tell her that I wish her a thousand bushels of the good seed of generation, and then that I am her servant, and if she is fain of—aught—thou tak'st me?" "Ay," quoth Bruno, "leave it to me."

Supper-time came; and, the day's work done, they went down into the courtyard, Filippo and Niccolosa being there, and there they tarried a while to advance Calandrino's suit. Calandrino's gaze was soon riveted on Niccolosa, and such and so strange and startling were the gestures that he made that they would have given sight to the blind. She on her part used all her arts to inflame his passion, primed as she had been by Bruno, and diverted beyond measure as she was by Calandrino's antics, while Filippo, Buffalmacco and the rest feigned to be occupied in converse, and to see nought of what passed. However, after a while, to Calandrino's extreme disgust, they took their leave; and as they bent their steps towards Florence:—"I warrant thee," quoth Bruno to Calandrino, "she wastes away for thee like ice in the sunlight; by the body o' God, if thou wert to bring thy rebeck, and sing her one or two of thy love-songs, she'd throw herself out of window to be with thee." Quoth Calandrino:—"Think'st thou, comrade, think'st thou, 'twere well I brought it?" "Ay, indeed," returned Bruno. Whereupon:—"Ah! comrade," quoth Calandrino, "so thou wouldst not believe me when I told thee to-day? Of a truth I perceive there's ne'er another knows so well what he would be at as I. Who but I would have known how so soon to win the love of a lady like that? Lucky indeed might they deem themselves, if they did it, those young gallants that go about, day and night, up and down, a strumming on the one-stringed viol, and would not know how to gather a handful of nuts once in a millennium. Mayst thou be by to see when I bring her the rebeck! thou wilt

see fine sport. List well what I say: I am not so old as I look; and she knows it right well: ay, and anyhow I will soon let her know it, when I come to grapple her. By the very body of Christ I will have such sport with her, that she will follow me as any love-sick maid follows her swain." "Oh!" quoth Bruno, "I doubt not thou wilt make her thy prey: and I seem to see thee bite her dainty vermeil mouth and her cheeks, that shew as twin roses, with thy teeth, that are as so many lute-pegs, and afterwards devour her bodily." So encouraged, Calandrino fancied himself already in action, and went about singing and capering in such high glee that 'twas as if he would burst his skin. And so next day he brought the rebeck, and to the no small amusement of all the company sang several songs to her. And, in short, by frequently seeing her, he waxed so mad with passion that he gave over working; and a thousand times a day he would run now to the window, now to the door, and anon to the courtyard on the chance of catching sight of her; nor did she, astutely following Bruno's instructions, fail to afford him abundance of opportunity. Bruno played the go-between, bearing him her answers to all his messages, and sometimes bringing him messages from her. When she was not at home, which was most frequently the case, he would send him letters from her, in which she gave great encouragement to his hopes, at the same time giving him to understand that she was at the house of her kinsfolk, where as yet he might not visit her.

On this wise Bruno and Buffalmacco so managed the affair as to divert themselves inordinately, causing him to send her, as at her request, now an ivory comb, now a purse, now a little knife, and other such dainty trifles; in return for which they brought him, now and again, a counterfeit ring of no value, with which Calandrino was marvellously pleased. And Calandrino, to stimulate their zeal in his interest, would entertain them hospitably at table, and otherwise flatter them. Now, when they had thus kept him in play for two good months, and the affair was just where it had been, Calandrino, seeing that the work was coming to an end, and bethinking him that, if it did so before he had brought his love affair to a successful issue, he must give up all hopes of ever so doing, began to be very instant and importunate with Bruno. So, in the presence of the damsel, and by preconcert with her and Filippo, quoth Bruno to Calandrino:—"Harkye, comrade, this lady has vowed to me a thousand times that she will do as thou wouldst have her, and as, for all that, she does nought to pleasure thee, I am of opinion that she leads thee by the nose: wherefore, as she keeps not her promises, we will make her do so, willy-nilly, if thou art so minded." "Nay, but, for the love of God, so be it," replied Calandrino, "and that speedily." "Darest thou touch her, then, with a scroll that I shall give thee?" quoth Bruno. "I dare," replied Calandrino. "Fetch me, then," quoth Bruno, "a bit of the skin of an unborn lamb, a live bat, three grains of incense, and a blessed candle; and leave the rest to me." To catch the bat taxed all Calandrino's art and craft for the whole of the evening; but having at length taken him, he brought him with the other matters to Bruno: who, having withdrawn into a room by himself, wrote on the skin some cabalistic jargon, and handed it to him, saying:—"Know, Calandrino, that, if thou touch her with this scroll, she will follow thee forthwith, and do whatever thou shalt wish. Wherefore, should Filippo go abroad to-day, get thee somehow up to her, and touch her; and then go into the barn that is hereby—'tis the best place we have, for never a soul goes there—and thou wilt see that she will come there too. When she is there, thou wottest well what to do." Calandrino, overjoyed as ne'er another, took the scroll, saying only:—"Comrade, leave that to me."

Now Nello, whom Calandrino mistrusted, entered with no less zest than the others into the affair, and was their confederate for Calandrino's discomfiture; accordingly by Bruno's direction he hied to Florence, and finding Monna Tessa:—"Thou hast scarce forgotten, Tessa," quoth he, "what a beating Calandrino gave thee, without the least cause, that day when he came home with the stones from Mugnone; for which I would have thee be avenged, and, so thou wilt not, call me no more

kinsman or friend. He is fallen in love with a lady up there, who is abandoned enough to go closeting herself not seldom with him, and 'tis but a short while since they made assignation to forgather forthwith: so I would have thee go there, and surprise him in the act, and give him a sound trouncing." Which when the lady heard, she deemed it no laughing matter; but started up and broke out with:—"Alas, the arrant knave! is't thus he treats me? By the Holy Rood, never fear but I will pay him out!" And wrapping herself in her cloak, and taking a young woman with her for companion, she sped more at a run than at a walk, escorted by Nello, up to Camerata. Bruno, espying her from afar, said to Filippo:—"Lo, here comes our friend." Whereupon Filippo went to the place where Calandrino and the others were at work, and said:—"My masters, I must needs go at once to Florence; slacken not on that account." And so off he went, and hid himself where, unobserved, he might see what Calandrino would do. Calandrino waited only until he saw that Filippo was at some distance, and then he went down into the courtyard, where he found Niccolosa alone, and fell a talking with her. She, knowing well what she had to do, drew close to him, and shewed him a little more familiarity than she was wont: whereupon Calandrino touched her with the scroll, and having so done, saying never a word, bent his steps towards the barn, whither Niccolosa followed him, and being entered, shut the door, and forthwith embraced him, threw him down on the straw that lay there, and got astride of him, and holding him fast by the arms about the shoulders, suffered him not to approach his face to hers, but gazing upon him, as if he were the delight of her heart:—"O Calandrino, sweet my Calandrino," quoth she, "heart of my body, my very soul, my bliss, my consolation, ah! how long have I yearned to hold thee in my arms and have thee all my own! Thy endearing ways have utterly disarmed me; thou hast made prize of my heart with thy rebeck. Do I indeed hold thee in mine embrace?" Calandrino, scarce able to move, murmured:—"Ah! sweet my soul, suffer me to kiss thee." Whereto:—"Nay, but thou art too hasty," replied Niccolosa. "Let me first feast mine eyes on thee; let me but sate them with this sweet face of thine."

Meanwhile Bruno and Buffalmacco had joined Filippo, so that what passed was seen and heard by all three. And while Calandrino was thus intent to kiss Niccolosa, lo, up came Nello with Monna Tessa. "By God, I swear they are both there," ejaculated Nello, as they entered the doorway; but the lady, now fairly furious, laid hold of him and thrust him aside, and rushing in, espied Niccolosa astride of Calandrino. Niccolosa no sooner caught sight of the lady, than up she jumped, and in a trice was beside Filippo. Monna Tessa fell upon Calandrino, who was still on the floor, planted her nails in his face, and scratched it all over: she then seized him by the hair, and hauling him to and fro about the barn:—"Foul, pestilent cur," quoth she, "is this the way thou treatest me? Thou old fool! A murrain on the love I have borne thee! Hast thou not enough to do at home, that thou must needs go falling in love with strange women? And a fine lover thou wouldst make! Dost not know thyself, knave? Dost not know thyself, wretch? Thou, from whose whole body 'twere not possible to wring enough sap for a sauce! God's faith, 'twas not Tessa that got thee with child: God's curse on her, whoever she was: verily she must be a poor creature to be enamoured of a jewel of thy rare quality." At sight of his wife, Calandrino, suspended, as it were, between life and death, ventured no defence; but, his face torn to shreds, his hair and clothes all disordered, fumbled about for his capuche, which having found, up he got, and humbly besought his wife not to publish the matter, unless she were minded that he should be cut to pieces, for that she that was with him was the wife of the master of the house. "Then God give her a bad year," replied the lady. Whereupon Bruno and Buffalmacco, who by this time had laughed their fill with Filippo and Niccolosa, came up as if attracted by the noise; and after not a little ado pacified the lady, and counselled Calandrino to go back to Florence, and stay there, lest Filippo should get wind of the affair, and do him a mischief. So Calandrino, crestfallen and woebegone, got him back to Florence with his face torn to shreds; where, daring not to shew himself at Camerata again, he endured day and night the grievous

torment of his wife's vituperation. Such was the issue, to which, after ministering not a little mirth to his comrades, as also to Niccolosa and Filippo, this ardent lover brought his amour.

THE AUTHOR'S EPILOGUE.

Most noble damsels, for whose solace I addressed me to this long and toilsome task, meseems that, aided by the Divine grace, the bestowal whereof I impute to the efficacy of your pious prayers, and in no wise to merits of mine, I have now brought this work to the full and perfect consummation which in the outset thereof I promised you. Wherefore, it but remains for me to render, first to God, and then to you, my thanks, and so to give a rest to my pen and weary hand. But this I purpose not to allow them, until, briefly, as to questions tacitly mooted—for well assured I am that these stories have no especial privilege above any others, nay, I forget not that at the beginning of the Fourth Day I have made the same plain—I shall have answered certain trifling objections that one of you, maybe, or some other, might advance. Peradventure, then, some of you will be found to say that I have used excessive license in the writing of these stories, in that I have caused ladies at times to tell, and oftentimes to list, matters that, whether to tell or to list, do not well beseem virtuous women. The which I deny, for that there is none of these stories so unseemly, but that it may without offence be told by any one, if but seemly words be used; which rule, methinks, has here been very well observed. But assume we that 'tis even so (for with you I am not minded to engage in argument, witting that you would vanquish me), then, I say that for answer why I have so done, reasons many come very readily to hand. In the first place, if aught of the kind in any of these stories there be, 'twas but such as was demanded by the character of the stories, which let but any person of sound judgment scan with the eye of reason, and 'twill be abundantly manifest that, unless I had been minded to deform them, they could not have been otherwise recounted. And if, perchance, they do, after all, contain here and there a trifling indiscretion of speech, such as might ill sort with one of your precious prudes, who weigh words rather than deeds, and are more concerned to appear, than to be, good, I say that so to write was as permissible to me, as 'tis to men and women at large in their converse to make use of such terms as hole, and pin, and mortar, and pestle, and sausage, and polony, and plenty more besides of a like sort. And therewithal privilege no less should be allowed to my pen than to the pencil of the painter, who without incurring any, or at least any just, censure, not only will depict St. Michael smiting the serpent, or St. George the dragon, with sword or lance at his discretion; but male he paints us Christ, and female Eve, and His feet that for the salvation of our race willed to die upon the cross he fastens thereto, now with one, now with two nails.

Moreover, 'tis patent to all that 'twas not in the Church, of matters whereto pertaining 'tis meet we speak with all purity of heart and seemliness of phrase, albeit among her histories there are to be found not a few that will ill compare with my writings; nor yet in the schools of the philosophers, where, as much as anywhere, seemliness is demanded, nor in any place where clergy or philosophers congregate, but in gardens, in pleasaunces, and among folk, young indeed, but not so young as to be seducible by stories, and at a time when, if so one might save one's life, the most sedate might without disgrace walk abroad with his breeches for headgear, that these stories were told. Which stories, such as they are, may, like all things else, be baneful or profitable according to the quality of the hearer. Who knows not that wine is, as Cinciglione and Scolaio³² and many

³² Noted toppers of the day. [toper: drinker, alcoholic]

another aver, an excellent thing for the living creature, and yet noxious to the fevered patient? Are we, for the mischief it does to the fever-stricken, to say that 'tis a bad thing? Who knows not that fire is most serviceable, nay, necessary, to mortals? Are we to say that, because it burns houses and villages and cities, it is a bad thing? Arms, in like manner, are the safeguard of those that desire to live in peace, and also by them are men not seldom maliciously slain, albeit the malice is not in them, but in those that use them for a malicious purpose. Corrupt mind did never yet understand any word in a wholesome sense; and as such a mind has no profit of seemly words, so such as are scarce seemly may as little avail to contaminate a healthy mind as mud the radiance of the sun, or the deformities of earth the splendours of the heavens. What books, what words, what letters, are more sacred, more excellent, more venerable, than those of Holy Writ? And yet there have been not a few that, perversely construing them, have brought themselves and others to perdition. Everything is in itself good for somewhat, and being put to a bad purpose, may work manifold mischief. And so, I say, it is with my stories. If any man shall be minded to draw from them matters of evil tendency or consequence, they will not gainsay him, if, perchance, such matters there be in them, nor will such matters fail to be found in them, if they be wrested and distorted. Nor, if any shall seek profit and reward in them, will they deny him the same; and censured or accounted as less than profitable and seemly they can never be, if the times or the persons when and by whom they are read be such as when they were recounted. If any lady must needs say paternosters or make cakes or tarts for her holy father, let her leave them alone; there is none after whom they will run a begging to be read: howbeit, there are little matters that even the beguines tell, ay, and do, now and again.

In like manner there will be some who will say that there are stories here which 'twere better far had been omitted. Granted; but 'twas neither in my power, nor did it behove me, to write any but such stories as were narrated; wherefore, 'twas for those by whom they were told to have a care that they were proper; in which case they would have been no less so as I wrote them. But, assuming that I not only wrote but invented the stories, as I did not, I say that I should take no shame to myself that they were not all proper; seeing that artist there is none to be found, save God, that does all things well and perfectly. And Charlemagne, albeit he created the Paladins, wist not how to make them in such numbers as to form an army of them alone. It must needs be that in the multitude of things there be found diversities of quality. No field was ever so well tilled but that here and there nettle, or thistle, or brier would be found in it amid the goodlier growths. Whereto I may add that, having to address me to young and unlearned ladies, as you for the most part are, I should have done foolishly, had I gone about searching and swinking to find matters very exquisite, and been sedulous to speak with great precision. However, whoso goes a reading among these stories, let him pass over those that vex him, and read those that please him. That none may be misled, each bears on its brow the epitome of that which it hides within its bosom.

Again, I doubt not there will be such as will say that some of the stories are too long. To whom, once more, I answer, that whoso has aught else to do would be foolish to read them, albeit they were short. And though, now that I approach the end of my labours, 'tis long since I began to write, I am not, therefore, oblivious that 'twas to none but leisured ladies that I made proffer of my pains; nor can aught be long to him that reads but to pass the time, so only he thereby accomplish his purpose. Succinctness were rather to be desired by students, who are at pains not merely to pass, but usefully to employ, their time, than by you, who have as much time at your disposal as you spend not in amorous delights. Besides which, as none of you goes either to Athens, or to Bologna, or to Paris to study, 'tis meet that what is meant for you should be more diffuse than what is to be read by those whose minds have been refined by scholarly pursuits.

Nor make I any doubt but there are yet others who will say that the said stories are too full of jests and merry conceits, and that it ill beseems a man of weight and gravity to have written on such wise. To these I am bound to render, and do render, my thanks, for that, prompted by well-meant zeal, they have so tender a regard to my reputation. But to that, which they urge against me, I reply after this sort:—That I am of weight I acknowledge, having been often weighed in my time; wherefore, in answer to the fair that have not weighed me, I affirm that I am not of gravity; on the contrary I am so light that I float on the surface of the water; and considering that the sermons which the friars make, when they would chide folk for their sins, are to-day, for the most part, full of jests and merry conceits, and drolleries, I deemed that the like stuff would not ill beseem my stories, written, as they were, to banish women's dumps. However, if thereby they should laugh too much, they may be readily cured thereof by the Lament of Jeremiah, the Passion of the Saviour, or the Complaint of the Magdalen.

And who shall question but that yet others there are who will say that I have an evil tongue and venomous, because here and there I tell the truth about the friars? Now for them that so say there is forgiveness, for that 'tis not to be believed but that they have just cause; seeing that the friars are good folk, and eschew hardship for the love of God, and grind intermittently, and never blab; and, were they not all a trifle malodorous, intercourse with them would be much more agreeable. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the things of this world have no stability, but are ever undergoing change; and this may have befallen my tongue, albeit, no great while ago, one of my fair neighbours—for in what pertains to myself I trust not my own judgment, but forgo it to the best of my power—told me 'twas the goodliest and sweetest tongue in the world; and in sooth, when this occurred, few of the said stories were yet to write; nor, for that those who so tax me do it despitefully, am I minded to vouchsafe them any further answer.

So, then, be every lady at liberty to say and believe whatever she may think fit: but 'tis now time for me to bring these remarks to a close, with humble thanks to Him, by whose help and guidance I, after so long travail, have been brought to the desired goal. And may you, sweet my ladies, rest ever in His grace and peace; and be not unmindful of me, if, peradventure, any of you may, in any measure, have been profited by reading these stories.

ENDETH HERE THE TENTH AND LAST DAY OF THE BOOK CALLED DECAMERON,
OTHERWISE PRINCE GALEOTTO.

THE END.

THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OF THE DECAMERON, VOLS. I AND II., BY GIOVANNI
BOCCACCIO

THIS EBOOK IS FOR THE USE OF ANYONE ANYWHERE AT NO COST AND WITH ALMOST
NO RESTRICTIONS WHATSOEVER. YOU MAY COPY IT, GIVE IT AWAY OR RE-USE IT UNDER
THE TERMS OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE INCLUDED WITH THIS EBOOK OR
ONLINE AT WWW.GUTENBERG.NET

TITLE: THE DECAMERON, VOLS. I AND II.

AUTHOR: GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 3, 2004 [EBOOK #13102]

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PRODUCED BY DONNA HOLSTEN