THE TRANQUIL HEART
PORTRAIT OF GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

by

Andrea Dal Castagno

(1396?-1457)

From the fresco in S. APOLLONIA, Florence
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DOMINVS IOHANNES BOCCACCIVS

THE TRANQUIL HEART
Portrait of Giovanni Boccaccio

By

CATHERINE CARSWELL

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The world belongs to men, but men to women.

BOCCACCIO

PREFACE

Boccaccio, eminent in many respects, is in one unique. No writer before him dreamed of writing avowedly for women readers, and not many great writers have done so since. He was the first to consider the life of women in relation to men in every rank of society, and he did it with a warmth of admission that is without parallel. He gave himself to the school of love and chose his subjects from daily life. And what he learned from love and from life led him to become the laughing champion of women. He could and did deride women, as he could accept their derision. But he was never frivolous, never fatuous, never false and never superior. He was ribald, but at the lightest of loves he could neither leer nor jeer. Where his friend Petrarch wrote solemnly of famous men, he wrote gallantly of famous women—from Eve (to whom he was deeply grateful) to Queen Joan of Naples (for whom he felt admiring compassion). His originality has met with signal success, yet it may be doubted if anybody, including himself, understood how original he was. While his talents were recognized, his themes and his predilection were regarded with tolerant amusement as wanting in seriousness.

If any apology is needed for the portrait that follows, it lies here. Again and again Boccaccio repeated that he wrote for women's instruction and delight, yet none but men have written about him. In Italy, France, Germany, England and America, he and his work have been dealt with by male critics and historians in a manner which would seem, at first sight, to be exhaustive. All the avail-

able information about him has been traversed and discussed—with considerable differences of opinion—in books that are invaluable to those whom, for any reason, he has interested. Yet, turning from the writings of the literary assessors to the writings of the man assessed, I have felt that something of Boccaccio's essence has been ignored because the writers were all men.

Others besides Boccaccio and before him have, of course, claimed to love some particular woman even to the point of being inspired by her, or they have had a weakness for women in general, which they have alternately boasted or deplored. Both Dante and Petrarch, who form with him the remarkable trio which divides the medieval world from our own, are famous for having set the fashion of poetic inspiration, while, in fact, they behaved badly towards those women who returned their embraces. Dante was a supreme poet, Petrarch an exquisite artist. With their fine workmanship and their tone of solemn sublimity they have had an incalculable influence upon later poets and upon loving men and women. But they were flatterers and liars towards women and themselves, and in that respect their influence has been incalculably harmful. These men, with their great gifts and their moving words, were mighty twisters of love away from its object. They used Beatrice and Laura as false reflectors of their own male egotism. So concerned were they with themselves and their salvation that they were forced into a denial of the very principle by which they achieved fame.

There are good historical reasons for this. Dante and Petrarch were caught in the confusion between the pedestrian ideas of European medievalism and the Oriental fantasy of Troubadour love. But Boccaccio, reverencing both men as his masters, escaped by sheer humility from their false solutions. He imitated and worshipped them.

He adopted their forms. He was always timid and sometimes muddled through self-distrust. But he followed nature, was faithful to natural love, and in essentials, trusted the heart before the intellect.

How far he was conscious of this as an artist is an open question. That he held to it as a man I have tried to show, and the man is everywhere in his work.

C. C.

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PRELIMINARY

I

SOON after Pope Celestine V had been hounded to death by Boniface VIII, a rumour was sponsored by Boniface that the shrine of St. Peter possessed more than its normal assoiling virtue during the first year of each century. There was no written testimony to the fact, but oral inquiries, prosecuted among the few centenarians then alive, satisfied the Sacred College. One man, claiming to be a hundred and seven, said that his father had received Roman purgation in the year 1200 so effectively that he had urged his descendants to repeat the experiment on behalf of their own souls should they live to see 1300. Several other ancients endorsed a memory which was popularly fortified by yet older traditions concerning Roman games and Roman graves. Somewhat hurriedly Boniface announced to Christendom that he would be at home daily throughout the twelve opening months of the fourteenth century for the purpose of remitting sins. His announcement was well received by Christendom, and vast numbers of pilgrims took the road to Rome.

Dante, it is said, met Boniface at Rome during the year of the first jubilee. If so, the purpose of his pilgrimage was not penitential but political. In any case he fixed 1300 as the earthly date of the opening of his *Comedy*, the first seven cantos of which, if we may believe Boccaccio, he wrote immediately upon his return.* Not long afterwards, by events rising from his Roman visit, he was driven from his home in Florence "almost a beggar, to show against his

* That same year, Giovanni Villani, the first modern historian (as compared with mere chroniclers) began his *History of Florence*.

will the wound of fortune, and to find how salt is the bread of strangers and how steep their stairs." This experience gave a potency (barely suggested in the early cantos and not to be excelled in cantos by any other poet since) to the remainder of what Shelley has called "the misty ocean of his dark and extravagant fiction."

By the ruling of Boniface there could have been no second great remission of sins until 1400. The point had been that the year should have two 0's in it, and thus should make the natural appeal to a humanity which had its foot on a new threshold. But by 1347 the purse of Clement V in his shameful fastness at Avignon, and the desires of his elegant mistress, Cécile de Commignes, Countess of Turenne, were straitened by the diminishing returns of the States of the Church consequent upon the removal of the papacy from Rome. Clement, who was notoriously "addicted to felicities," found Provence expensive. He refused the request—laid before him by the Laureate, Francis Petrarch, and by Petrarch's remarkable friend, Cola di Rienzo—that he should resume occupation of the Lateran. Even the eloquent reminder that Rome, and Rome alone, harboured a scrap of the Virgin's petticoat and the fragment of Our Lord's body which had been removed upon circumcision failed to move God's Vicar in the matter of domicile. He was amenable, however, to a second request concerning another jubilee, and to the consideration that a century "went far beyond the ordinary duration of human life and cut off the faithful from enjoying the institution." It went also far beyond his own tenure of office and left his coffers as they were. Similar considerations would cause successive Popes to reduce the intervals between jubilees yet further. During the Avignonese "captivity" the empty Lateran and the schism of the Cardinals became the symbols of the division in the soul of Christendom.

In his hasty improvisation of the second, or, as it was called, "Mosaic" jubilee, Clement, as Frenchman and as Pope, had also in mind the pacific nature of such gatherings. There was war between Apulia and Hungary. The English "cowards, cravens and barbarians,"* having been long inconclusively at war with the French, had gained a signal victory at Crécy. When the word went forth that sinners should come from everywhere to Rome to be cleansed, English as well as French sinners, Neapolitans as well as Hungarians would obey.

Ten to fifteen days within the holy but deserted city were decreed to be sufficient for Italian penitents, with a special reduction to six days for Florentines, who feared to leave their Commune exposed to Christian foes even for so long. But thirty days were appointed for outlanders. In spite of the Black Death, or because of it and its passing, at least a million sinners made the journey. Rome, sadly deteriorated since the last great remission of sins, was turned for twelve months into a hostelry which was also a paradise for rogues. Many pilgrims achieved moral and financial ruin along with spiritual purgation. The prelates who came to represent His absent Holiness were so grossly insulted by the Roman mob that the city was presently put under an interdict. The physical mortality also was heavy.

Petrarch attended the second jubilee solely on his own account. He was forty-five, and, like most men of his time, old for his age. "The knot that had bound him to Babylon" was, moreover, "untied." Or so he fondly believed. His Laura was dead, and although he referred to her death as "my great sorrow" and as "premature and bitter," he saw it also as "salutary" in that it removed

* Petrarch. *Familiar Letters.* He says elsewhere, "the inhabitants of Britain called the English were in my youth the most cowardly of all barbarians, inferior even to the vile Scots."

the last stumbling-block from his road to perfection. Even were Laura to return in the flesh, he was at last confident that her power over him would be gone, and he was the surer of this from the knowledge that she could not return. He had put away poetry and the vulgar language (except in editing his remains) and was confident that he had put woman also out of his life. "I am not ashamed of past follies," he said, in imitation of his admired Horace, "but I should be now if I did not end them." Accordingly he sought timely absolution.

He was not, as it happened, to be wholly immune from irregular desires, nor perhaps from irregular behaviour, until he became weakened by illness some years later. But while he envied he felt unable to emulate the cropped head, coarse garb and monkish vows in which his younger brother in like circumstances had taken refuge. All the more, he seized upon the accommodation offered by the jubilee. It was characteristic that he should time his arrival in Rome for October, by which month the rabble should have been served and, after the vintage with its usual diminution of spiritual business, the great lords and ladies from beyond the Alps came riding in state with their sins.

In the fifty years between the two jubilees, which may be called Dante's and Petrarch's, the world of thought had secretly shifted. Less secretly, the material world had changed. The century was to produce John Wyclif,* John Baconthorpe,† William Ockham‡ and William Langland|| in England, in Bohemia John Hus,§ and in

* 1320–84.

† d.? 1346. "The Resolute Doctor," head of the Carmelite Order in England, Baconthorpe anticipated Wyclif in holding that priestly should be subordinated to secular authority. Like Roger Bacon, an Averrhoist, he wrote commentaries on Aristotle.

‡ d., 1347. "The Invincible Doctor," Ockham attacked the Pope.

|| 1330–1400. § 1369–1415.

France, Jean de Jaudun*—prominent sons of the Church outside of Italy who found the Church worse than fallible. St. Bridget† in Sweden called the Pope "the murderer of souls," and in so doing did not merely echo Dante, but expressed a conviction presently to be more widely published by St. Catherine of Siena,‡ and popularly held among the unsainted who had never read Dante.

Earlier than Petrarch, Marsilio of Padua,‖ and later Antonio Beccadelli§ and Lorenzo Valla,¶ poured contempt upon all ecclesiastical authority. Petrarch himself, "the mirror of his age," though he sheltered behind privilege and forbore from sending his invectives to the addressees, condemned churchmen in high places with far greater vehemence than afterwards bound others to the stake. Boccaccio, whose best works were put on the Index, made unreserved fun of priests and friars, and must have made multiple fun of jubilees and wholesale indulgences.

While the theocratic order broke up and religious division ruined the Church's bosom, a wave of social disturbance, augmented by the Plague, passed through Western Europe. The agrarian feudal order gave way to urban industrialism, bourgeois capitalism, political nationalism and the first articulate, if not yet logical assertion of the workers. In Flanders, in France, in Switzerland, in England, the peasants for the first time found able leaders who were imbued with political ideas not dreamed of before. In 1356—the year of Poitiers—the first rising of the *Jacquerie* occurred in France. Before

* d., 1328. † 1302–73. ‡ 1347–80.

‖ d., 1328. Author of the revolutionary *Defensor Pacis*, which anticipated the French Revolution and even Marx, declaring that all power should be in the hands of the people.

§ b., 1394. Sicilian author of *Hermaphroditus*.

¶ b., 1404. Humanist author of the *Dialogue on Pleasure*, and first competent translator of Homer into Latin.

the Wat Tyler rebellion in England, there was the Ciompi rising in Florence, and Machiavelli's estimate of the heroic woolcomber's character marks that movement as something that diverged sharply from the democratic ideals even of the Italian Communes.

At the same time the arts of building and sculpture had leaped forward in Tuscany and in the Kingdom of Naples, while Rome crumbled neglected.* Writers everywhere had developed a double eagerness in discovering the world, rediscovering the secular classics and exploring the possibilities of their own vernaculars. The air was full of new hopes shooting from the now visible crevices of the old establishment, all of them confused, many contradictory of each other. Doubt was as strong as hope, frustration as evident as vitality. The men who most welcomed and worked for a new era were the most attached to the old, and were saddened by the impossibility of their position without clearly perceiving it. While their fears and, in a great degree, their intellects, still clung to the medieval doctrines, declaring with Augustine that human beings, begotten in filth by sin upon disgust, were "vessels for dishonour," "children of God's wrath," "fit only for ignominious usage," and holding as worthless the only life we know, their hearts and imaginations reached towards other conceptions. The "discovery of man by himself" was expedited, not only by haphazard researches into the lost Greek and Roman cultures, but by the subtle and powerful, because almost unrecognized, influence of Islam and other Eastern civilizations.

The Eastern element in Western culture is still much

* Petrarch was horrified by the change that had taken place in Rome between his first visit in 1335 and his jubilee visit in 1350. The roofless, untenanted churches especially helped to give the city the air of a place recently pillaged. The actual population had been halved since 1300.

underrated. Western civilization remained far inferior to Eastern until the fourteenth century, and not until after the maritime expansion of the fifteenth, was the order reversed. Insinuatingly the East imposed itself and furthered the confusion. Not only did the sporadic heresies of medieval Europe arise in districts infiltrated with Oriental lore—Languedoc, Spain, Calabria and the two Sicilies—but also the ideals of knighthood and of Troubadour love, which found their Italian voice in the *dolce stil nuovo*. The fascinating tenet that man could best be saved by renouncing all God's earthly gifts had derived from the Eastern Gnostics. The freedoms of romance and the exaltation of woman had their sources in the poetry of India and Persia, in Arab and Saracen tales and in Milesian fables. None of these ideas had their roots in the European past. They were, in fact, so alien as to be irreconcilable with the society into which they were so subtly introduced. They have not yet been reconciled.

Add to these a dawning of the beauties and delights of terrestrial colours and shapes, which, for ages, had been condemned by authority as "false and fugitive" when nothing worse, and it will appear no wonder that Petrarch, whom Pascal calls "the first modern man," was rent by opposing tides with which he had neither the passion nor the intellect to cope. "I resemble a sea beaten by two opposite winds," he said three years after the jubilee, when talking with an Emperor, and "my intentions are good, but a bad habit, which I cannot conquer, masters my better will."* Nor can we be surprised that the simpler Boccaccio, after opening a dozen avenues to new life for his fellows, ultimately ran back like a baffled child to seek shelter in the confusion of a Church which claimed eternal simplicities.

Boccaccio, instinctive being and warm realist that he

* Cf. Ovid, *Met. VII*, 20.

was, saw where the new paths led, but became afraid. Petrarch lacked both Boccaccio's simplicity and Dante's rooted power. His feelings ran counter to his beliefs, so, while he became the first modern analyst of himself, he could not see wherein his impotence lay. All he could do was to disinter and decipher, as by the light of an altar candle, those classical codices which would destroy Christian altars in the soul by proclaiming nature to be something other than a bad habit, and to become the inventor of art for art's sake. Unknowingly he was a victim of that crucifixion which has followed the Cross of Christ in Europe—a crucifixion upon the transverse beams of the genius of the East, whence both Christ and culture came, and that of the West, which gave us our Church and our conscience.

What most immediately concerns this narrative is that, in September, 1350, Francis Petrarch, on his way from Parma to Rome to be shriven, met Giovanni Boccaccio for the first time.

For fifteen years these two had corresponded by means of letters, gifts, introductions, and messages carried by common friends. This interchange had followed upon some five years of more distant worship by the younger man, who was Boccaccio. Petrarch had been repeatedly in Italy, and for the past three years had made his home there, dividing his favours between tyrant dictators who were mostly at each other's throats. But neither in Naples, where, nine years earlier, he had undergone a farcical *viva voce* examination by King Robert as candidate for the laurel, nor upon his first visit to Florence, had he and Boccaccio come face to face. Than this meeting there had been only one event of greater importance in Boccaccio's life.

Two men of letters whose first conversations must have been better worth overhearing could not be named, and

both were garrulous. *The Divine Comedy* was already a classic in that it was better known by name than read in fact. But Petrarch, as a child, had seen Dante,* and Boccaccio had recently returned from Ravenna where he had been on a visit of charity to Dante's destitute daughter. Nor were their interests merely literary. They were men of action as well as shapers of language and of thought, conscious heirs of the glory of Rome as Republic and as Empire, re-discoverers of Greece, ambassadors used to courts and acquainted with the seamy sides of politics and commerce. Their world was everywhere convulsed, and had lately been swept by a natural calamity such as had not been known before.

Both men were also celebrated as lovers. If three more significant writers than Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, have never been alive at the same time in one small patch of the world, the three married ladies whom they, without marrying, loved into fame, also merit our attention. Indeed Beatrice, Laura and Fiammetta stand revealingly behind them, even as that other woman, Monica, and the saint's shadowy mistress, stand at the shoulder of Augustine. Not in the men alone, but in their behaviour towards their chosen women—in their delight and loathing, their need and denunciation, their triumphs and their failures in love—can we find them, and their genius, and the shattered life of their time, fairly mirrored across the centuries. The attempt is worth while, because, of all centuries, the fourteenth is the fullest of interest for those who would examine into the human spirit as we know it to-day.

* He was impressed chiefly by Dante's brusqueness.

II

PETRARCH has earned the title of "Phœnix of poets" which was given him during his lifetime. For if, towards the end of his life, his glory became a trifle tarnished, so that after his death he suffered almost a century of eclipse, the Renaissance witnessed a powerful Petrarcan revival. All our Elizabethan sonneteers drew from him. He is the star of Thomas Watson's *Passionate Century*,* and the model, more or less, of Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey, Lodge, Sidney, Ralegh and a host of lesser poets, including Bartholomew Griffin and that Barnaby Barnes who has been credited with some of Shakespeare's sonnets.† Several of these translated appealing examples of the Laura poems as well as imitating them. Some addressed Laura on their own account, but most were content to substitute for hers the fancy name of their own beloved of the moment, while claiming that their devotion was for all time. Petrarch's example as moralist, scholar and charmer persisted. Though we never read him, we are still by no means rid of him as an ideal. Realism itself owes much to him not only as a definite reaction against him. If six of the most significant makers of modern literature had to be selected, his name would have to be among them.

In his own day he won a world reputation that could scarcely be challenged by the great dead. Innumerable people held that he was the most distinguished man alive.

* *Hecatompathia*, 1582. Watson translated some of Petrarch's sonnets into Latin.

† See *Shakespeare*, D.N.B.

Seeing that his friend Boccaccio shared this view, it is convenient to examine the elder man's career and character up to the date of the second jubilee before turning to the other as the main object of this book. After 1350, the two lives run parallel in such a way as to illuminate one another not only then but retrospectively. Without Petrarch Boccaccio can scarcely be known. Besides he was a fascinating creature in himself. One of the most fortunate men who ever tasted fame, he was expert at making the best of both worlds. Nobody has more beautifully succeeded in eating his cake and having it, and such troubles as came his way, apart from those common to all mortals, were mostly of the subduable sort that are inseparable from this achievement.

The son of a Florentine notary of good family, he was born at Arezzo in 1304. With Dante his father had been exiled from his native place. But the child, Francis, was spared the then common pains of exile, indeed the exile of his family was all to his profit.

After seven years in Italy, mostly passed in comfort at Ancisa, where his mother had property, he went with his parents to Avignon. There, and at the neighbouring village of Carpentras, he passed a happy boyhood on the windy banks of that "windiest of rivers, the Rhone." Far from the turmoil and the commercial atmosphere of Florence he enjoyed, as if by birthright, the benefits of Provençal safety, the language of the Troubadours, the nurture afforded by a cultured Italian colony without Italian strife, and the social advantages conferred by the neighbourhood of the Papacy. Graceful, quick and active, if not exceptionally strong, he was, by his own account, "comely enough in my best days," by other accounts so handsome that strangers would stop to look after him in the street and wonder who he was. His complexion, between light and dark, was clear, his features firm, his voice musical, his eyes—although

from an early age he was obliged to wear glasses*—lively and speaking. In youth he had been a great dandy, who suffered much from tight shoes and curling-irons, but his manners from first to last were frank, simple and persuasive. He possessed courage of body and spirit, and his memory was quick if not always accurate. Too much a man of the world not to cultivate the graces of modesty, he found his own style in writing to be "weak and obscure," while he did not fail to record the finding of others that it was "clear and forcible," and in his mature estimation of himself he had "a well-balanced rather than a keen intellect." He possessed a facetious if not a piercing sense of humour. All who met him, and many who had not, felt his charm. He was a voluminous letter-writer and had a genius for friendships.

During his first years of pupilage at Carpentras he was the pride of his Italian schoolmaster, and he grew up speaking French, Tuscan, and the fashionable *Langue d'Oc*, besides being well grounded in Latin, which attracted him so much that he was fascinated by Cicero's periods before he could understand them.

His Latin received polish from his sixteenth year at Montpellier University, whither he went with his younger only brother, Gherardo, and with a friend of his own age, Guido Settimo, whose father was an exile from Genoa. At eighteen he went on with the same companions, whom he loved, to Bologna, there to acquire at the fountain-head that training in the law without which no fourteenth-century Italian was held to be learned. He learned his Civil Law from the great Cino da Pistoia, another distinguished exile, who was the friend of Dante and him-

* The first written mention of spectacles in Italy is made five years before Petrarch's birth, but they must still have been something of a novelty in his youth and his wearing of them at sixteen would seem to indicate the care lavished on his upbringing.

self no mean poet. Inspired perhaps by Cecco d'Ascoli, who occupied the Chair of Philosophy, he conceived a highly modern contempt for astrology.* Not that he cared for the law either—to the grief and wrath of his father who threw on the fire all the precious classics he had painfully collected, with the exception of Cicero and Virgil. "It is not my vocation," he announced, "to undertake the defence of others. I detest the bar, I love retirement, I despise money; and if I tried to let out my tongue for hire, my nature would revolt at the attempt."†

Luckily his father died while he was still a student, and his mother did not long survive. The only trouble was that the brothers were left poorly provided. But Gherardo became a Carthusian monk (after a disappointment in love) and the remainder of Petrarch's life demonstrates the power of charm combined with sagacity in the matter of a livelihood. Averse to the law as a calling, he had the itch to write, and the craving for prolonged, gracious and unremunerative study. But for this there were few ways open. The time was not yet when the lay Humanist could, with calculated subservience, adopt a prince and subject him to recurrent blackmail, threatening to show the tyrant up to his contemporaries should a sufficient sum for each new dedication not be forthcoming. True, Petrarch was later to prove that he could perform equivalent feats with the maximum of grace and the minimum of offence. But at the age of twenty-two, when he returned orphaned from Bologna to Avignon, the best he could have done for himself, outside of the conventual

* Horoscopes of children were drawn up in all good families, omens and stars consulted before any action. Cecco later became Court Astrologer to Charles of Calabria in Florence, but in 1327 his jealous colleagues had him burnt alive for calculating the date of the Crucifixion from the date of the Nativity.

† Preface to *Familiar Letters*.

life for which he felt no vocation, would have been to join the despised and hungry army of copyists.

He was well advised in leaving everything to his personal attractions and a kind providence. At first befriended by one of the Papal secretaries, who was a Florentine, he soon afterwards became the protégé of the brothers Giacomo and Giovanni Colonna. Members of a famous family which had been deprived and driven from Rome by the enmity of Boniface VIII, these were now, under the wing of John XXII, leaders of Avignonese society. The change in their fortunes had come about through their hostility to the Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, who, after defeating the Pope's candidate, Frederick of Austria, at Muhldorf, had further incensed the Pope by refusing a properly submissive coronation. Lewis had gone further and had elected a rival Pope at Rome. At a time when it was one thing to issue a Bull declaring a ruler to be a heretic and rebel, and quite another to see that this was made known in the place where it was to take effect, Giacomo Colonna, with only four attendants, had gone to Rome, had read aloud the comminatory document in the open street crowded with Lewis's soldiers and supporters, and, before nailing it to a church door, had offered to prove its truth by argument or arms. Lewis, by his petulant retaliation upon the Pope and by subsequent actions and accidents, lost prestige in Italy. But Giacomo's deed was rewarded with the bishopric of Lombes, a fat if distant preferment eight leagues from Toulouse, and his elder brother, the Cardinal, with his hat restored, was made welcome at Avignon.

When Petrarch was still a student at Bologna, Giacomo had noted his graces and upon the youth's return carried him off for a summer holiday at Lombes. There, among the foothills of the Pyrenees, undisturbed by the recent struggle for Gascony between our Edward II and his

French father-in-law, Philip the Fair, Petrarch made two more lifelong friends of his own age whom he always called Lælius and Socrates.* He became a climber of mountains (not then a conventional holiday employment)† and confirmed a childish passion for country life which he never lost.

Returning to Avignon he became attached in a filial manner to the court of Cardinal Giovanni where he met all the most distinguished residents and visitors of the modern Babylon. Among these latter was "the most learned man in England,"‡ Richard de Bury, who came in 1331 and in 1333: on the first occasion to apologize to the Pope for young Edward III's imprisonment of his mother and his execution (by his own hand, it was said) of his mother's lover, Mortimer; on the second to discuss the new troubles brewing between England and France.

By way of return for these favours Petrarch acted for a time as tutor to the Cardinal's little nephew, Agapito. The boy did not like lessons any more than his teacher liked or understood small boys, so the arrangement lacked both goodwill and success. Petrarch preferred simpler pursuits, such as solitary study and fine society—this last in moderation and according to his own choice. His gifts secured both. He developed into that kind of enviable

* "Lælius" was Pietro Stefano, a well-born and highly cultured youth attached to the Colonna, "Socrates" a musical and warm-hearted German whose real name has been lost.

† Petrarch was then unaware that Dante had climbed Bismantova, near Reggio, but he had probably read and taken to heart St. Augustine's counsel to discover one's own insignificance by admiring mountains and torrents, sea and sky. He had also the example of King Philip in Livy.

‡ This was perhaps no great compliment to the English, who were not accorded a high standard of learning. So illiterate was Bishop Lewis Beaumont of Durham (1318–33) "that he had great difficulty in learning his part of the service before his consecration, and stumbling over a hard word exclaimed, 'By St. Louis, the man who wrote that word had no courtesy in him!' "—*Life of Edward A. Freeman* by W. R. W. Stephens, 1895.

person who, never happy for long without a pen or a book in his hand, is yet not obliged to earn his living by either means. Also he became, for a time, a poet. Here again his luck held. For, while falling deeply in love at the age of twenty-one with a Society girl, the daughter of a rich Provençal nobleman,* who married another man and could be trusted to inspire the poet's muse without herself being moved in any inconvenient degree by reciprocal feeling, he was able elsewhere and unfettered to gratify his desires, which were by nature strong.

From his twenty-seventh year to his thirtieth, when his Italian poems in honour of Laura were already beginning to run like a delicate electric illumination through Italy and beyond, he was treated by the Colonna to an extended and solitary European tour, to a trip to Rome, and to a sea voyage through the Straits of Gibraltar and as far as the shores of England, in which barbarous country, however, he did not land. While celebrating himself as a wooer, he had so well concealed his lady's identity that Boccaccio, among others, on first reading the *Canzoni* believed her to be "a figment."† The Bishop of Lombes himself, as late as 1335, in an affectionately jocular letter declared his belief that she was no more than "a phantom."

"You are fooling us all, my dear Petrarch, and it is wonderful that at so tender an age you can deceive the world so artfully and so successfully. And, not content with deceiving the world, you would fain deceive Heaven itself. You make a semblance of loving St. Augustine and his works: but in

* Born at Avignon, it is believed in 1308, she was the daughter of the Count de Noves, and when very young married Hugh de Sade by whom she had ten children. Among her descendants were the Abbé de Sade, 1705–78, who wrote the first good life of Petrarch, and his nephew, the more famous "Marquis," to whom we owe the term sadist. Her husband has a reputation for moroseness. He remarried within a year of Laura's death.

† This belief was expressed in 1342, eight years before the two poets met.

your heart, you love the poets and the philosophers. Your Laura is a phantom created by your imagination for the exercise of your poetry. Your verse, your love, your sighs, are all a fiction; or, if there is anything real in your passion, it is not for the lady Laura, but for the laurel . . . my eyes are now opened to all your rogueries, which nevertheless, will not prevent me from loving you."

This, from a man who probably numbered both the lady and her husband among his acquaintance, who had known and observed his protégé at close quarters for over ten years, and who, unlike his protégé, preferred St. Jerome before St. Augustine, tells us much of the character of Petrarch and of the effect that Petrarch had on those near to him. But we need note only that the worldly-wise bishop did not take Petrarch's love seriously, and that he found Petrarch to be one of those sincere half-frauds who do not forfeit the affection or the respect even of those who see through them.

But what makes the poet interesting is that the bishop was not more than half right. Petrarch did, in his own way, really love a real woman. His love was merely so divided as to be highly sophisticated alike in its pleasure and its pain. Just then the pain was uppermost, and his lonely journey to Paris, to Flanders, Brabant and Germany, was in his own view undertaken with the motive of subduing what was at once his "constant and pure" and his "perverse and wicked passion." At Paris he had a long conference on the subject with his confessor—a friar of good family, professor of theology at the University, and a Tuscan. This man, Dionisio dal Borgo a San Sepolcro, who was, most conveniently for Petrarch, to become astrological adviser to King Robert at Naples, had been his fellow-student at Bologna. Petrarch cultivated him in spite of his astrological side, as he later did other men of that calling. Dionisio joined his various

pretensions to the austerity of Augustinian tenets. It was he who first put into Petrarch's hands a copy of Augustine's *Confessions*. Till then the young man's acquaintance with Augustine had been limited to the *De Civitate Dei*. The *Confessions* were a revelation to him.

Confessions and confessionals apart, his letters from abroad show that he enjoyed himself and that he was interested in all he saw, including the women, that he hunted with zest for classical codices (discovering some of Cicero's lost *Orations*), that he admired the splendid half-built cathedral at Cologne, and that he was respectfully received, at first no doubt on the recommendations of his patrons but quickly in his own right, by people of standing. Travel filled him with interest in topography. He is numbered among the first modern European geographers.

At Paris he made another particularly useful friend in the Florentine Chancellor of the University, Roberto dei Bardi, a member of the famous banking family. (These Florentines were everywhere in key positions.) Yet when he came home he found that he had not cast out Laura's image and that he was still enslaved. In his own words, he experienced that " 'gainst which nor force nor intellect prevails."*

Not long after Petrarch's return to Avignon Pope John XXII put to the test certain peculiar doctrines of his own concerning the after-life. Already it was lamented by one of the Church's most ardent supporters,† that, when he entered the chambers of the Papal Court, he found "brokers and clergy, engaged in weighing and reckoning the money which lay in heaps before them." For His Holiness had died a multi-millionaire. Now the baker's son, Benedict XII, himself austere and anxious for reform,

* From the translation by Nottingham of one of the most beautiful of the sonnets.

† Alvaro Pelayo. *Lamentation of the Church.*

but weak, could think of nothing better than to add a third crown to the Papal tiara, and the triple headpiece was appropriately decorated with white peacock's feathers. Abandoning all ideas of returning to Rome, Benedict brought almost to completion the palace begun by his predecessor on the rock of the Doms. Fortress and cloister, castle and prison, it spread over 8,000 metres and made a pigmy of the cathedral. The Cardinals who hitherto had occupied hired houses, followed suit in magnificence. More than in Jerome's century, the clerics, with their curled hair, beringed fingers and unwrinkled shoes, resembled "bridegrooms rather than priests."

Petrarch, in theory "a contemner of riches," never ceased to fulminate against ecclesiastical luxury. But at the age of thirty-one he was faced with the question of earning his living, and he saw that without the help of the Church such a task was not compatible for him with a congenial existence. "The layman who purchased holy orders bought usually peace, security of life, and comparative ease."* Petrarch had no money. But Benedict, at the request of the Colonna, offered him a canonicate of Lombes, which carried with it no duties, and promised him the first prebend that should fall vacant. Having seen the world, he was now able to enjoy in earnest that contemplative existence with excursions into the world of fashion and affairs, which best suited his temper. Although he was obliged to take orders, and thus was secured from the cares and perils of matrimony, he never became a priest. While duly grateful to the Colonna he felt himself to be an independent man.

He was still only thirty-three when he built his cottage at rocky, romantic, stream-infested Vaucluse. Of modern men he was, in this, once more a pioneer. He discovered, that is to say, the full piquancy of alternating a sylvan life

* Milman. *Latin Christianity*, Vol. IV, p. 14.

of calculated simplicity with sojourns in a gay and wicked urban centre not further than fourteen miles away. At Avignon he could see Laura, hear the European gossip and meet anybody worth meeting. At the cottage on the Sorgue he dressed as a shepherd sage, adopted a semi-monastic regimen, and was attended by faithful rustics who provided him with the freshest of river fish, the most delicate of game and the sweetest of grapes, figs and almonds. With Philip de Cabassoles, the congenial Bishop of Cavaillon, less than two miles off, and in the knowledge that more distant friends would come at his word should he weary of solitude, he read, wrote, meditated, began (in Latin prose) a history of Rome, gave this up, embarked (in Latin hexameters) on his "Italian Æneid"—a Roman epic poem having Scipio Africanus as its hero—left this too unfinished, wrote sonnets to the de Sade, walked, sketched, burned sweet midnight oil, strummed upon the lute, and in all such ways "made war upon his senses."

When these triumphed, as they occasionally did, he knew just where to seek relief. For, after a long season of giving rein to his desires as fancy dictated, he had found a woman whom he need never so much as name, for that which he "abhorred as sin from the depths of his soul," and had begotten on her a son. This did not interfere with his still ardent and often-depicted love for Laura any more than did Dante's repeated infidelities (apart from his marriage) with the blaze of his passion for Beatrice. He continued to see her, if only now and again, and this period witnessed some of his most exquisitely accomplished sonnets in her praise.

Within three years of his retirement he received, not without astute pre-arrangement on his part (abetted by Roberto in the north, and by Dionisio, now Bishop of Monopolo, in the south) simultaneous invitations from Paris and Rome to lend his brow in public to the laurel

wreath. It was an honour long obsolete* that was now revived for him. He chose, of course, Rome, for which place he cherished imperial dreams.†

Amid what he afterwards liked to call "the windy plaudits of the multitude," he received his coronal in the Capitol as Italy's premier historian and poet (the former achievement being based on the half-finished Roman epic which nobody had read) and proceeded to remove and offer it to God kneeling under the dome of St. Peter. His route through the streets was lined with lovely ladies wearing their best dresses and tossing rose-petals and sweet-scented waters at the man who had made each one feel herself to be a potential Laura; and the procession was accompanied by trumpeters, by the six leading citizens arrayed in green, and by scarlet-clad, flower-crowned youths selected from the "Upper Twelve" families. The Senator, who was a Colonna, addressed the assembly; boys recited Petrarch's lines; and Petrarch himself uttered three solemn prayers for the place of which he was now a citizen. True, the poet's speech, upon examination, was poor, and he forgot part of it. Also a crazy crone with a good aim threw over him a homely liquid bearing no resemblance to sweet-scented waters, to which Petrarch later referred as "a corrosive acid," while he attributed his early baldness to its pernicious after-effects. But there are flaws in all

* Gibbon reminds us, in his account of Petrarch's coronation, that the laurel was not, as Petrarch and his friends fondly believed, of Capitoline, but of Delphic origin. In a small way—to the great contempt of Dante—Albertino Murato, an indifferent poet in the pay of the Carrara, had been crowned at Padua. But he had fallen into disgrace with his patron and the honour had lapsed in 1318.

† In 1155 Abelard's disciple, Arnold of Brescia, was burned alive as a heretic before the Castle of St. Angelo by Innocent I, for having tried to revive the old liberty of the people in Rome. Again, in 1253 the Bolognese Senator Brancaleone d'Andolo so nearly achieved the same thing that he was able to issue his orders to Innocent III who was obliged to take refuge in Assisi. But the Church always triumphed.

things human. From then onwards Petrarch was the idol of Italy. Throughout the country he was known as "the king of poets." His fancy portrait hung in palaces, as the photograph of Lord Tennyson in Victorian drawing-rooms, while his exquisite and unavailing wooings in verse were repeated—to his often alleged disgust—in market-places and taverns as well as in the homes of the cultured.*

Like all such triumphs this opened lucrative paths. When certifying him for the laureateship, King Robert of Naples, who owned Avignon and was the Pope's Imperial Vicar in Italy, though he was also an enemy of the Colonna, had given Petrarch the coveted office of Almoner-General, which carried with it exemption from the tithes of benefice and a dispensation from residence. On leaving Rome he became advisory guest of state at Parma to the brothers Correggio, who owed their illegal power to the poet's single exploit in legal pleading before the Papal Court six years earlier. For Azzo Correggio, whom Sismondi holds to be the worst of the four brothers, he expressed the greatest admiration, and doubtless Azzo took care to show his best sides to a man whom he wished to detain as an ornament and moral support. In the course of a year, during which he received another canonicate, Petrarch lived outside the city in a pleasant hired house with a stream flowing through the garden. Repeatedly he refused pressing invitations from Bishop Colonna to return to Avignon, and, while still at Parma, he learned of this friend's death. When at length he returned to Provence it was as orator of the Roman people to plead with the new Pope, Clement VI, for the Roman jubilee and the return of the Papacy.

* Dante also lamented that "every blacksmith and donkey-driver sang and parodied his *Canzoni*."

III

PETRARCH was the first of the romantic idealists not only in the direction of love. Dead causes like the Crusades attracted him so much that at one time he had encouraged John XXII in his absurd project of resuscitating the wars in the Holy Land—which, of course, came to nothing except that the Laureate wrote a guide-book to Jerusalem without going there. Grand but futile dreams for the future had equal power over him equally without demanding much sacrifice except on the part of his friends. Hence he was spared much of the bitterness of disappointment when these dreams either fell short or did not come true. For he had always another string to his bow.

By far the most persevering of his enthusiasms was one which was rendered impracticable by the Church to which he was attached as a part of its machinery. Marsilio of Padua had pointed this out twenty years earlier. But Petrarch either did not read or did not heed the author of *Defensor Pacis*. It must be admitted also that his fantasy was shared by a considerable number of other worthy people of his own as well as of bygone days. He wished to see Rome restored as the great Republic of the world under the joint rule of Pope and Emperor, neither claiming more than his share of government. This, and this alone, would put a distracted world in order, and hence he saw great promise in Nicola di Rienzo. Rienzo's cause was hopeless from the outset, but Petrarch could not know that any more than he could foresee that an action of his own was to be the occasion of Rienzo's ultimate fall. For the

moment the Tribune and the Laureate were associated in pleading with Clement to do that which, if it came about, would ruin the whole Colonna family, possibly the Pope himself. It is true that, unlike John XXII, Clement VI might have appeared in the streets of Rome without courting more than some unpleasant incidents. But, also unlike John, Clement genuinely hated unpleasantness. The furthering of tasteful if prodigal good cheer was with him an article of belief. When blamed for this he had replied, "My predecessors did not know how to be Popes." He obstructed the persecutors of the Jews and cast a tolerant eye upon heretics who did not overstep the bounds of propriety. Now he listened to these two well-spoken dreamers, showed himself impressed by their rhetorical efforts, promised Petrarch that he would institute a new Roman jubilee, and courteously declined to go to Rome himself either as Pope or as Senator.

Petrarch proceeded to draft "Rules of Good Government" for Rienzo, and to despatch high-toned letters of encouragement to him in Rome, to which place he promised his presence later as adviser to a ruler who would rule the world. With equal eloquence he indicted Papal corruption in eighteen pieces of verse and prose, permitting himself such expressions as "the filthy whore of Babylon" and calling Avignon "a palace of strumpets."

Clement, who was noted for his good memory as much as for his gentlemanly manners, perhaps recalled that since the time of Jerome the Papal office had often been assailed, but never visibly injured by hard words, even when bestowed by the Church's most saintly and scholarly children. To do justice to Petrarch's prudence his fulminations were not given circulation outside a select circle. His Holiness kept his eye and his spies on Rienzo's activities, and offered his critical Canon of

Lombes the post of Papal secretary* and the choice of several vacant bishoprics, all of which offers were rejected as "gilded chains." They carried too onerous duties. Presumably it would have been easy for Petrarch to have put a Cardinal's hat on the top of his laurels. But he knew too much of the uneasiness of mitred and red-hatted heads and held out for "a small sum or a sinecure." He wished to keep his freedom and to combine "a life of obscurity and peace" with the conveniences and excitements of fame. Notwithstanding his differences with Clement he enjoyed a commission to collect early manuscripts of Cicero for the Papal library.

It was then that he made a first effort to learn Greek with the object of reading Homer in the original. At this time Homer was known in Italy only by the corrupt Latin epitome of Italicus, and to possess and read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would be a rare accomplishment. Petrarch, as yet, did not even possess them. His teacher of Greek was a Basilian monk born in Calabria where the spoken language had never quite died out. Barlaamo, as he was called, was a little firebrand, reputed for his learning, but not gifted with precise expression, who had come from Constantinople to Avignon, partly because he was in trouble, partly to treat of the union of the Greek and Roman Churches, and partly to borrow money for the Emperor of the Turks. He also desired to learn Latin, in which he was deficient.

With this man Petrarch plunged straight into Plato's Dialogues, scorning grammar. He persevered long enough to master the alphabet (which was more than Dante knew for all his quotations from Greek authors) and to greet with enthusiasm Barlaamo's translation of the Platonic theory that when we are strictly in love, physical charms

* He was asked five times in his life to be Papal Secretary, but employed admirable ingenuity in avoiding so irksome an employment.

have nothing to do with it, seeing that we worship the beloved only with our souls and thus regard her as an emanation of divinity. This fitted well with the fact that, although he had loved Laura expressively for nearly twenty years, Petrarch had only once got to the length of holding her hand for a few moments.* For Barlaamo, by way of reward for his Platonic knowledge, his pupil procured the Bishopric of Gerace in Calabria.

That same year he wrote his highly autobiographical and introspective "Secret," which tried to combine "our modern style and language old,"† and is his most remarkable work in prose. Cast in the form of a discussion between himself ("natural truth") and St. Augustine ("truth revealed") on the topic of his love for Laura, it allows the saint to triumph after some animated but half-hearted opposition by the human lover. While this was forward, without discussing the incident with Augustine, he begot a daughter—to be called Francesca after him—upon the same woman who had borne him his son John some six years before, and from an obscure reference in one of his letters it seems that the mother died not long after the girl's birth.

Of this mistress of at least fourteen years standing, of her life, her death, or of any affection she may have inspired or elicited, Petrarch has no more to say than had Augustine of the mother of his children. He makes it sufficiently clear, however, that he regarded her as a typical instance of "what women really are," namely a deplorable incitement to those unclean desires of the male, which he admitted in himself as much as he condemned them.

* The sixteenth century Academy of Ferrara formally found for the Platonic purity of Petrarch's love for Laura. One dissentient, who remarked that the lady was married, was crushed. Macaulay for his part declared that Laura was "a heartless coquette."

† Sonnet XXXIII.

He might be, as Pascal has called him, "the first modern man," but he did not doubt the medieval doctrine that woman was the chief stumbling-block upon the road of man to perfection, and, accordingly, the great evil in human life. Remove woman, and man would be faultless and blissful.

Petrarch's next undertaking, which involved a second visit to Naples, was in obedience to Clement and to oblige the Colonna. Nobody but he could have hoped to succeed in so peculiar a mission; anyone less fatuously romantic would have seen through its motives and foreseen the mischief that must result. In choosing him Clement and the Colonna showed themselves to be neither fatuous nor romantic.

King Robert had died that year, and for some time before his death had been failing as a ruler. His kingdom, once remarkably free from noble bandits, had become as unsafe as the rest of Italy. Two years earlier, when he had passed Petrarch as the Laureate, giving him a robe from the royal wardrobe to wear in the Capitol, his Chancellor and Petrarch's friend, Barbato of Sulmona, had been set upon just outside Naples as he was following Petrarch.

Among the worst of the titled robbers had been the three brothers Pipini. Their grandfather, for fighting the Saracens under Robert's father, had been awarded the title and lands of Minorbino. His children had married well. But his grandsons on the male side had taken to crime with rapine. Failing though Robert was, he had chained the three of them up in Castel Capuano, and had sold and ceded their possessions to more useful servants of the State. They had now been imprisoned for two years, and their mother, who was a friend of the Colonna, had pleaded in vain both at Naples and at Avignon for their release.

The achievements of Rienzo in Rome, much as these

delighted Petrarch, gave no satisfaction either to Clement or to the Colonna. All Italy was talking of the new Tribune's charms and talents, which were carrying the Roman populace before them, and threatened to bring order in the deserted home of the Popes, so long disgraced by the antics of its rival nobles, particularly the Orsini and the Colonna. A convenient channel must be found for Rienzo's undoing before he went too far. The Pipini, if only they could be set free, would provide this. Every circumstance would favour the dastardly brothers at Rome. They would be grateful and deadly. Petrarch accordingly, all important innocence, was despatched to sue for their liberation before the young Queen Joan and her younger husband and cousin, Andrew of Hungary.

Even Petrarch found the task hard. Joan for a long time would not hear of a thing so palpably absurd and so contrary to her grandfather's wishes. Her advisers, good and bad, were mostly behind her in this. But her position was shaken by the hostile Hungarian element which her marriage had introduced, by her extreme youth (she was still in her 'teens), and by the fact that she was forbidden by her special circumstances to take or refuse any steps without the Pope's consent.

For some months she persisted. She was charming to Petrarch. She gave him the sinecure of Chaplain and Household Clerk, and no doubt listened with deference to his eloquent advice upon many subjects. But she would not release the Pipini.* Petrarch, much annoyed, was obliged to go about sightseeing, now and then visiting the prisoners and writing tearfully home about their sad condition. He would have had to leave them where they were, had it not been for the conspiracies surrounding Joan and her weak if amiable mate, and the strings that

* Fourteen years later the jail-birds were hanged outside their own castle by the angry populace.

were adroitly pulled from Avignon. But in the end he succeeded. From that moment Rienzo's doom was certain.

With the consciousness of a good deed well done, Petrarch went on to Parma again to enjoy the company of his friend, Azzo Correggio, and to buy the pleasant house with a stream running through the garden. Here he stayed for nearly two years; but then the place was besieged by the Lord of Milan, Luchino Visconti, with whom Azzo had dealt treacherously, so that it became uncomfortable for a student sage. Luchino, being a lover of literature and a versifier in his spare time, made flattering advances to the Laureate, whom he wanted as an ornament and upholder at Milan. But for the present Petrarch preferred to return to Vaucluse, there to spend what he had so hardly earned at Naples on structural improvements of his beloved cottage To his library he brought back a codex found at Verona containing the then unknown letters from Cicero to Atticus, Brutus and Quintus;* to his garden Italian laurels. Happily he enriched his shelves and his plots, constructed a water-garden, took to fishing and sketching, enjoyed the soothing company of a dog, received visits from old friends, made excursions in which ladies took part, and began to draft Latin treatises on *The Solitary Life* (to be dedicated to Philip de Cabassoles) and *The Joys of the Religious Life*. He said he was glad to be back to the softer airs and ways of Provence. The grateful Clement gave him a canonicate of Parma and a prebend at Modena. The news came of young Andrew's assassination at Naples, this being very generally ascribed to Andrew's wife. But Petrarch had inside information from Philip de Cabassoles who knew better.

* He never saw Cicero's *Familiar Letters* although half of these lay "lost" in Verona to be discovered later by Salutati, the eminent Secretary of Florence, who did not think highly of Petrarch's Latinity.

Philip had become the Pope's minister at the Neapolitan court.

He wrote more sonnets to Laura than in any preceding year, and never before had Laura shown him so much kindness. A woman who was her friend came to him privately with the hint to persevere. But he would have been in a predicament had he succeeded in his interminable wooing.

For all his cravings for "obscurity and peace" he was not a man who cared to stay at home for any length of time. Often for many months on end he was in Avignon, which he had so often condemned as a sink of restless iniquity, and Laura notwithstanding, he now spoke of leaving Provence to make his home in Italy. Reproached by Cardinal Colonna for such ingratitude, he pointed out that, after fourteen years in the Colonna service, his future was still unprovided for. The reply of his patron, already irritated by the poet's refusal to work and by his support of Rienzo in the hostile Roman venture, is not recorded.

Rome or no Rome, the honour of Petrarch's permanent presence was increasingly and competingly solicited by tyrants of the city states in Italy—as, for example, by Luchino Visconti,* enemy of the Correggi, by Gonzaga of Mantua, who had a blood feud with the Visconti on account of a love affair between Luchino's wife and young Ugolino Gonzaga; by Mastino della Scala at Verona, who hated the Gonzaga because they had deprived him of Parma; and by Giacomo Carrara at Padua, who had murdered the legitimate successor there and held the della Scala as his chief foes. So Petrarch had a wide choice. He indicated that, should he accept

* Luchino during his ten years' lordship in Milan made useful laws, but he was vindictive in punishments and his police were the most efficient in Italy. He was ultimately poisoned by his wife.

any of the dictators' invitations, this should not involve his liberty of opinion, of pursuit or of movements. In his own words, he might live "nominally with princes, but in reality the princes lived with him." They were indeed to take in good part, if never in any more practical manner, his voluminous good advice. It suited, and perhaps also tickled their humours to be harangued, even to be scolded, by a Petrarch. All he said was privileged; and if he sometimes failed in tact, his charm remained invincible.

After more than a year of retirement, therefore, in which he declared himself more and more disgusted with Avignon, indeed with everything on the Rhone except flowers, trees and birds' nests (while in the character of a recluse and a lover of Virgil he had acquired the reputation of being a magician), he decided to set out upon his fifth and most definitive visit to Italy. He had been infuriated by the treatment of one of Rienzo's couriers, who, armed only with his silver rod of office, had been arrested, maltreated and thrown into prison when about to enter Avignon. Yet it was still the year of Rienzo's triumph, and the Laureate had high hopes of Rome. There must, one thinks, have been a lack of warmth in the farewells that passed between him and Cardinal Colonna. For at that very time, while Rienzo was being melodramatically crowned at the Lateran, the men of the Colonna family there were constrained as "foreign tyrants" to stand and look on "bare-headed, their hands crossed on their breasts" with downcast looks of unwilling devotion.

In his leave-taking of Laura there was a different bitterness. He had now, in his Petrarcan fashion, loved her for a lifetime,* and had written more than two hundred

* It is said that he first fell in love with her when he saw her as a very young girl in the Church of Santa Chiara, when she was wearing a green dress embroidered with violets.

sonnets to her, during which time she had continually borne children to her disagreeable husband. Some years earlier he had told himself that, having at last reached the stage of not wishing to love her, he might count upon being wholly free from love when he reached his fortieth year. But now, though he was past forty, as he came into her presence he was overwhelmed by what the Augustinian part of him proclaimed to be sin.

Not long since, he had rejoiced in her beauty when at a grand ball at Avignon, given for the Pope's imperial candidate, Charles of Bohemia,* the brilliant guest of honour had chosen Laura as partner from among the other ladies. But on this August day which her lover had chosen for his farewell she sat in her own house plainly dressed, without her pearls, not even wearing a garland on her fair hair. Besides feeling the uprush of his love, he fancied that she looked at him strangely, as if for the last time. When he next heard of her, his Laura with her lovely black eyebrows and her sweet enigmatic smile, would be the "little heap of dust which nothing feels" (*Poca polvere son, che nulla sente*) which, thanks to one of his happiest sonnets, was destined to be more famous than her breathing beauty.† Beautiful she must have been, and gracious. Petrarch's devotion surely gratified, but did it also bore her? About this, as in fact, about everything else, her dust is silent. What we do know is that she once said to him, "I am not what you suppose me to be."

Before he went south he took care to obtain from the Pope the legitimation of his son John, then ten years old. John as "a scholar of Florence" was thereafter entitled

* Grandson of Henry VII and son of the blind John of Bohemia who died at Crécy.

† It was characteristic of the fame of Laura that Sir Walter Ralegh should begin his sonnet to Spenser with the line "Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay." She was always the dead beauty.

to hold a benefice* without mention of his irregular begetting, and was sent from Vaucluse to Verona to take possession under a tutor. Thus the boy was destined for the Church whether he wished it or not—and he hated learning as heartily as had young Agapito Colonna.

Petrarch took Genoa on his way. Learning there of Rienzo's follies of grandeur, he wrote a letter of expostulation in his best manner and went on, not to Rome, but once more to Parma, which was by then in the hands of Luchino Visconti. The news here was of the catastrophe of the Colonna at Rome and the ill-treatment of their murdered bodies by Rienzo (an event calling for a letter of condolence to the bereaved Cardinal) followed by the Tribune's downfall and flight. Again Petrarch was saved from a whole-hearted committal. After a visit to Mantua, and to Verona, where he had somewhat lost favour with the tyrant, Mastino della Scala, owing to his connection with Mastino's foe, Luchino, he returned to Parma bringing his son to live with him. His influence in Parma is demonstrated by the fact that he persuaded Luchino to furnish a refuge there for Azzo Correggio, who had been wandering homeless in the north. Appropriately, Petrarch dedicated his *Antidotes for Good and Evil Fortune* to the refugee, and when Azzo died some fourteen years later, he wrote that he had "lost that which gave life its charm." Never was there such a man for keeping all his friends.

But death was busy with intent to rob him of them. That spring saw the outbreak of the Black Death, and he received the information that Laura had died of it. The death of Cardinal Colonna—attributed to a broken heart—followed soon afterwards.

Yet another blow was dealt to his affections. Two of

* Youthful theological students were often given benefices as a means of paying for their education. cf., Jarrett's *Life of St. Dominic*, p. 10.

his chief remaining friends at Avignon, desolated alike by his absence and by the death of the Cardinal who had been their patron, yielded to his invitations to make their home with him in Italy and set out. But when they reached Parma in March he was away. They therefore left a note in his library to say they would return after an excursion in the Apennines. During this pleasure journey one of them, a Florentine, whom Petrarch called Olympius,* was murdered by Florentine robbers, and the other, a noble Roman† to whom Petrarch had passed on his canonicate at Modena, died of wounds.

Petrarch roused the Florentines by letter. They sent troops and wiped out the bandit stronghold which had shamed their Commune. But this did not bring the two friendly clerics back to life. Petrarch sought solace from his grief by writing a long and impassioned letter to the shade of Virgil and sending it about for public edification.

Soon he accepted the invitation of Giacomo Carrara of Padua and also a canonicate there. Presently his canonicate at Parma was advanced to an archdeaconry.

He had been writing songs and sonnets to the dead Laura with a peace of mind denied to him in her lifetime. Judiciously he divided his time between his powerful hosts, and early in the jubilee year he welcomed the Papal legate, Guy of Boulogne, at Mantua.‡ This youthful Cardinal had just arrived from Hungary where he had been trying to smooth out the murder of Andrew, which had thrown the Angevin kingdom into war. He was the supporter, as Papal legate, of the Pope's imperial candidate, Charles of Bohemia. Accordingly he was also the enemy

* Mainardo Accursio, of distinguished Florentine descent, said to be very pleasant but illiterate. He was Abbot of St. Antonio at Piacenza.

† Luca Christiani, who had a benefice in the same place.

‡ Son of Mary of Flanders, Guy became Archbishop of Lyons at the age of twenty and a cardinal two years later.

of the Visconti, whom Charles was ordered by the Pope to fight. Further, he was the implacable foe of Rienzo, who was wandering about Italy in disguise—even, it was said, mingling with the crowds of pilgrims at Rome. Petrarch had poured contempt upon Charles. He was on friendly terms with Luchino Visconti. He still professed faith in Rienzo's capacity to maintain "the Good Establishment" in Rome which he had drafted. Yet he warmly fraternized with Guy in the palace which Giacomo Carrara had lent for the legate and his suite of three hundred, and after the young man's departure, he wrote a flattering letter to Charles bidding him to come and rule as Emperor in Rome.

For himself he had decided to remain in Italy though not to live in Rome, and he wrote to such friends as were spared to him begging them to come and settle near him. He had taken his place, by universal consent, at the receipt of customs for wisdom for all Europe. Floods of letters reached him from every quarter, even from so far away as England. Those who had become poets, in their own estimation, through reading his youthful effusions, expected him to encourage their efforts. This was his punishment if also his reward. He often uttered peevish complaints, but did not forbear to answer his correspondents. Writing was his only sedative for thought, his only way of escape from a world that was out of joint and a self that was secretly divided. He felt ill when, for any considerable time, he was obliged to stop writing. Once he had said that there was "no lighter nor more agreeable burden than the pen." He certainly shouldered his burden. His exhortations were addressed not only to living celebrities and nonentities, but to Homer, to Cicero and to Virgil, regretting to the first that so much of his work was lost and the remainder neglected, that he himself could not read Greek, and that what survived had

not yet been translated into Latin; reproaching the second for having lived "like a mere man"; congratulating the third on his virginity; sending his kind regards to Orpheus and Euripides; and in general letting himself go in a flood of verbosity leavened with platitudinous good sense that was everywhere hailed as unprecedented eloquence.

Part II

BACKGROUND

I

To turn from Petrarch to Boccaccio is to pass from a sharp, well-documented narrative, to one full of gaps and dubieties. The circumstances of his birth are obscure. Even the generally received date—1313—is only an inference from a passage in one of Petrarch's letters. All that is known for certain is that it was illegitimate; that his father was one Boccaccino (or Bulcantino) di Chellino da Certaldo, a Florentine merchant who spent some time in Paris in the early years of the fourteenth century; and that his mother was a Frenchwoman.

The occasional references to the latter in his writings are not very informing. They appear to spring more from sentiment than from knowledge. It was in his character to feel tender towards the parent of whom he possessed no memories, and this sentiment was to be enhanced by later events. He plays in allegory and anagram with her Christian name, calling her "Gannia" (Gianna?) in his *Filocolo*. In an undated letter written in the Neapolitan dialect to a "greatest friend" of his early manhood,* he has signed himself "John of Paris of the Rocks." Familiarity with his ways, borne out by known incidents, encourages the belief that Paris was his birthplace and de la Roche his mother's surname. Elsewhere he hints that she was a French widow and "if not noble, yet not of the lower class," and he reproaches his father for having deserted her.†

* Franceschino di Bardi, a young Florentine resident at Gaeta.

† Besides clear references to his mother in *Filocolo* and the *Ameto*, it is thought that Boccaccio sees her in his tale of *Fiordelisa*, *Decameron* II, 5.

Considering that he was himself to beget at least five children on a woman whom he had no idea of marrying, this filial disapproval seems out of place. But the circumstances of the elder man's pre-marital love were perhaps discreditable, or, at least, his son knowing them, may have judged them to be so by his own code. On the face of it the poet was the issue of the sort of *ménage* commonly set up in Paris by a young bachelor merchant on business there. The girl may well have been respectable though she lacked the means to command marriage. Further, the fact that Boccaccio's father, immediately upon his return, married a Florentine woman who brought him considerable property, suggests that he was already betrothed before he went to Paris.

Whatever his feelings for Jeanne may have been he accepted his paternity. If the author of the *Decameron* was half French and born out of wedlock in Paris, he was also parted from his mother before he was of an age to notice, and was placed in the hands of his father's lawful wife.

Boccaccino prospered. Early in 1324 his name is to be found among the assistant deputies of the Florentine Money-Changers' Guild (*Arte del Cambio*), which had been in existence since before 1280, and two years later he figures as one of that Guild's five jealously chosen consuls. A smart fellow, or as Domenico Bandino says, "a man shrewd and extremely skilled in affairs," he began well for himself by being born in time to profit by the triumph of the burghers and magnates in Florence, which had followed the exclusion of the aristocrats and had resulted in a modification of the hardly won people's charter known as the *Ordinances of Justice*. His youth coincided with the downfall of "the good old times," lamented by Dante, and the rise of the modern commercial civilization, with the power of the Angevin King Robert of Naples (who was more a merchant than a soldier) and

with the expulsion of the Jew financiers from England by Edward I.

The luxury at Avignon, which was reflected elsewhere, the series of short pontificates, and the absence of an Emperor, all helped Florence. Already in 1263, Urban IV had borrowed heavily from the Florentine bankers that he might support the Angevins against the Hohenstaufens, and two years later, after the battle of Benevento, he filled important offices everywhere with educated Florentines, and poured money into the bags of Florentine merchants by giving them concessions in the Angevin kingdom which comprised the whole of Southern Italy. Florentines had the lion's share of the grain trade of Apulia, and handled the floating capital of the Church, for which they had long acted as travelling agents. The removal to Avignon enormously increased their turnover and extended their trade in France and in England. Their gold and silver coin, of unrivalled quality in Europe, was declared to be sterling by King Robert's father, Charles II. Soon the florin,* bearing St. John on one side and the Lily on the other, was almighty. No Florentine crime was worse than tampering with it. Even Dante found the maker of false coin worse than him who coveted the genuine; and perhaps the most heinous sin of Henry VII, in the eyes of Florence was his interference with her exclusive right to issue and to stamp.

The florin went to the ends of the earth. Where the Cross was carried there it was also. Where famine stalked—and in England it stalked together with pestilence more than once early in the fourteenth century—there went Apulian corn at famine prices. Each year 400,000 new minted pieces of gold passed through the eighty

* Minted first in 1252 at 24 carats fine, and weighing 1 drachm, it was worth 1 lira. A lira was worth 20 soldi, and a soldo was worth 12 danari. Hence we get our own £ s. d.

banking-houses that clustered beside Dante's "accurst ill-fated ditch," the Arno, and the defeat of Pisa by Genoa removed a powerful rival. Tagliacozzo, the Sicilian Vespers and Campeldino, which were disasters to so many people, had only brought more gold-dust to her scales. The Church, in all but words, had forsaken her doctrines concerning usury. It was the grand opportunity for the money-changer who practised the trade "against Nature and against Art."*

Boccaccino was born in the last decade of the thirteenth century at about the time when Florence was *en fête* for the meeting between Charles II and his eldest son, Charles Martel, King of Hungary. His actual birthplace, however, was not Florence, but the village of Certaldo in the Valdelsa, about twenty miles to the south in the Florentine *Contada*—a red and grey and yellow township heaped about its castle and having the onion as its homely coat of arms.

He was thus one of those upstart country fellows whom Dante deplored as *gente nuova*, contaminators of the pure Florentine blood, and workers of woe.† Another writer of the time says that such became "rich Florentine merchants, as it were overnight," and that they were regarded as "ill-bred churls, puffed out with riches, who neither appreciate good manners nor show courtesy to others, and whose only desire in life is to heap up gold with which they vainly hope to ennoble themselves."‡ According to Villani,‖ these energetic outsiders remained in their villages only until they had saved enough to "leave the spade," when they descended upon the pure-blooded City of the Lily, there to juggle with the florin —Dante's "accursed Flower which corrupts the world."

* *Inferno*, xvii, 76. † *Paradiso*, xvi, 49–51.
‡ *Documenti d'Amore*, p. 77, by Francesco da Barberino.
‖ *Life of Francesco da Barberino.*

Young Boccaccino, after serving his apprenticeship in the New Market—at which he arrived in excellent time for the further expansion due to the rising power of the Florentine Guilds under the *secolo popolo* (bourgeois domination)—went to Paris as a budding money-merchant. One of his brothers, named Vanni, was already established there. The brothers from Certaldo lived and worked in the quarter devoted to the Italian usurers, or "Lombards"—namely at the corner of the rue Pierre-au-Let and the rue des Arsis, which is opposite to the church of St. Jacques-à-Boucherie. There also, in friendly competition, often in combination, were the French Christian money-lenders —the "men of Cahors" and the Jewish ones of all nationalities. A major part of Boccaccino's work was the lending of Florentine gold at anything from ten to forty per cent.

The Florentine brokers abroad had their troubles. They were commonly known as "these Lombard dogs,"* and, if the Church did not practise her precept that as usurers they were "excluded from her pale,"† this was merely because successive Popes had coveted their gains. One of the expenses of the Florentine bankers was bribing the Curial officials to discover the Pope's plans. Again, their Burgundian customers, as we learn from the first *Decameron* tale, were "quarrelsome, perfidious, ill-conditioned men" notorious for their bad debts. As for Philip IV of France ("the Fair"), he had passed measures so inimical to the Florentine interests and had extracted such huge ransoms that, in the year following Boccaccino's arrival, an obsequious protest was directed from the *Signoria* of Florence to the French court. This would seem to have been successful. But whatever concessions Philip might grant,

* *Decameron*, I, i.

† By Canon 67 in the Lateran Council of 1215, Innocent III had decreed that usury was to be left to the Jews, but nobody took this seriously.

Florentines, Guelph and Ghibelline alike could hardly regard him as other than "the New Pilate" of Dante's phrase. To the Guelph merchant the imperial claims of a German Emperor were bad enough. Florence held that "The Latins must always hold the Germans in enmity, seeing that they are opposed in act and deed, in manners and soul; not only is it impossible to serve, but even to hold any converse with that race." But it was as bad to contemplate the candidature of Philip's brother, and evil genius, whose period of "peaceful mediation" in Florentine affairs, instigated by Boniface VIII in 1301, could never be forgotten. Charles of Valois in a long six months, had not only left human wreckage behind him, but had carried off with him enough of Florentine treasure to make men like Boccaccino lie awake at night at the mere remembrance of the sum. More money—a heap of it—had had to be sent to him long after he left.

Threatened alternatively by the tyrant Luxembourger, Henry VII, and the needy Valois, Charles, the Florentines had made overtures to Robert of Anjou, who was crowned King of Naples at Avignon in the same year in which the Emperor was crowned at Aix. Robert had good reason to welcome Florentine friendship. Accordingly, on his way from Provence to his Southern Kingdom, in the autumn of 1310, he passed a month in Florence. The Peruzzi entertained him sumptuously, and the Bardi and other banks gave him a large sum for troops to fight Henry, receiving in return important commercial concessions in Naples. The only shadow on this visit was the death of Robert's second son, Louis, then a child of eight. This left him with but a single heir male, the young Charles of Calabria, and it seemed unlikely that his second wife, Sancia, would have issue.

Three years later, shortly before the unexpected death of Henry VII, which rejoiced every Florentine banker and

shopkeeper, Florence further cemented her friendship with King Robert by the surprising offer of her government for five years. He was to make no changes in the constitution, to send none but a near relative as his representative, and to permit a change of representatives every six months. Mutually profitable terms were reached by Robert in conference with the Florentine envoys, who were also representatives of the Bardi and the Acciajuoli banks. Robert's earliest deputies were not, in fact, relatives; but within a couple of years he sent his brother-in-law, Bertrando del Balzo III, a Provençal nobleman, whose daughter was later to marry the famous and foolish Dauphin of Vienne; and henceforward the Florentines received none but claimants to Angevin blood or alliances for some considerable time.

Robert's investiture in the Commune of Florence and Giovanni Boccaccio's birth in Paris took place in the same year—1313—and before that year was out, Boccaccino had left Paris and Jeanne de la Roche. Whether she was still an expectant mother when he went, there is no date to tell. His departure was doubtless hastened by certain great wedding celebrations that were forward in Florence. King Robert's brother, big-nosed Philip of Taranto, who was known as "the Unlucky," was taking as his second wife the twelve-year-old Catherine de Courteney. At the same time, Philip's son, by his earlier, divorced wife, Ithamar Comnena, was espousing Catherine's half-sister, Giovanna. And both girls were daughters of Charles of Valois. Florentine money-lenders loathed Charles, but these alliances between Naples and the French throne were propitious for trade. Besides, where any royal bride and bridegroom were, there the brokers were gathered together.

Apart from the circumstance that he had a French mistress we know of only one incident of Boccaccino's

stay in Paris. This, however, must have impressed the young usurer deeply, or he would not have described it later to his child, who has recorded it in the Latin work, *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum.**

Among the outstanding actions of Clement V was the suppression of the Knights Templars in 1310. All the Templar leaders were men of good birth; many were rich. Good management (which included the practice of usury for the glory of God) had made the order exceedingly wealthy. Clement, whose mistress was the beautiful Brunisnida de Foix (mother of the Cardinal de Talleyrand), and Philip, who needed money, saw this with covetous eyes. Some of the Templars were corrupt; charges were trumped up against all. Under torture confessions were elicited. Boccaccino saw in a Paris square the burning of fifty-three wretched fellow-usurers—survivors out of a hundred and twenty of the tortured. They protested their innocence to the last.

> "Whan the flawme approched ther visage
> Ful plenti spak and cried pitousli
> Of ther acushion were nat gilti."

And one spectator at least, believed that their death—

> " . . . verraili in deede
> Compassed was of malis and hatreed."

However, the Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, was held by Boccaccino to be blameworthy, though possibly not to be deserving of death. De Molay's execution was delayed until 1313, so the Florentine may have seen this too before he left. He was bound at least to have heard the story of one Templar who, at the stake at Avignon, prayed to God that his soul should be speedily

* Translated by Lydgate as *The Fall of Princes.*

confronted with those of the Pope and the King. His prayer became famous because it was so quickly answered. Philip the Fair, persecutor of usurers, and Clement the Gascon, who had supported the Luxembourgers, soon followed their victims to the grave.

Louis X, the new King of France was married to a niece of Robert of Naples, Clemenza of Hungary. The death of Clement was followed by an interregnum of two years, which ensured further prosperity for Florence. When the new Pope was elected he was King Robert's former Chancellor, old Jacques d'Euse, who owed his elevation as John XXII to his royal master. Boccaccino, with his Parisian experience and his French connections, could not have returned at a better time. He might well be a dutiful father.

II

It is now a commonplace of history that Florence, not Rome, was the centre of freedom and culture in the fourteenth century as truly as Avignon was the centre of politics. But that was not how the fourteenth century saw it. At such a suggestion Dante would have looked his most hellish and Petrarch his most incredulous, while Boccaccio would have laughed without his accustomed gaiety. All three would readily have granted the sunken condition of Rome. But the pre-eminence of Florence? Without a university? Consisting of "ungrateful, malignant people . . . blind . . . avaricious, envious and proud?" A "city of wolves," given over to faction and devoted to money-making? Boccaccio, the only one of the three not to be exiled, was to be as glad to escape from her as he was sorry to return. He would have endorsed Machiavelli's exclamation—"When did the Florentines know how to maintain liberty or to endure slavery?"

Florence was the city of the almighty florin. One must recall the unique position occupied by Italy in the economy of Western Europe at the opening of the fourteenth century. Like most of her neighbours she lacked political unity, but unlike them she was indifferent to the idea, if not hostile to it. In other countries the medieval system was still the rule, but the Italian states had never truly belonged to feudalism, and a century and a half before the Renaissance, they had emerged into the full bloom of capitalist societies. In spite of her fierce particularism and intestine wars and factions; in spite, too, of the fact that France was a long way in advance of her in political self-consciousness, Italy

had become the European centre of money power. And Florence, on account of her civic independence, had become the centre of that centre. Pisa, her only rival in Tuscany, had yielded to the government of tyrants after her defeat by Genoa in 1282. Milan, Bologna, Parma, Pavia, Modena, Mantua, Verona and Padua, having similar traditions of liberty, had tried heroically to seize their advantage during the struggle between Emperors and Popes, and had achieved their successes in those periods when the Emperors had been obliged to leave Italy alone. But their successes were not maintained. One after the other their leaders, at first patriotic, had developed into men made bad by power, who sought in turn the title of either Papal or Imperial Vicar. At the time of Boccaccio's birth, while the sea-ports of Venice and Genoa remained aloof and were envied for their shipping trade, princely families, claiming a more than kingly right of inheritance, ruled most of the other cities. These, when they fought one another, which was their practice, fought on the blood of their various city-states. But the Florentine record was less one of arms than of paying the huge sums exacted by the greed of hired protectors or as the penalty of defeat in the field; and the significant thing is that, in spite of the merciless blackmail to which she had been subjected, Florence was now richer than ever. She had also the more reason to defend herself against the envy of others, always, if possible, without loss of her citizens' blood. Money was indeed her blood in that it had proved itself to be her strength. Nothing would shake her estimation of this commodity.

Internal factions—"enough," as Machiavelli says, "to have subverted and destroyed any other state in the world"—arose and split into ever more factions, their very names changing sides and meanings as men and passions started up. Burghers and populace, nobles and magnates,

were shuffled and re-shuffled into new and confusing combinations and enmities. Blood and gold spurted from dissensions within and wars without. What Florence spun in October, said Dante, she usually unravelled in November. Boccaccio and his father were destined to live through years of delirious politics which perhaps puzzled those who took part in them as much as they have puzzled historians ever since. But Florence went on growing greater and her citizens richer.

The New Market,* where the money-changers had their stalls and the Cavalcanti a house, was overlooked by the Bostichi Palace, where noble gentlemen, though considering themselves sorely oppressed,† were still able any midday to put to the cord anybody they disliked. Now and again, as in the June of 1304, when the Cavalcanti, who were Whites, fought their Black enemies there, the place was turned into a battleground and partly burned down. Yet the stalls increased, and the business of the scales was not more interrupted by the cries from the adjacent torture-chamber than it might have been by the wailing of an infant—both sounds being indeed much alike to a busy ear. Nobles, it was true, had to be kept down. But nobles, as these were never tired of reiterating, had set the Republic high with the battle of Campaldino, and they were needed to wield the sword while better men were better engaged.

Through Pisa, although the port was not theirs until early in the following century, these better men had gained access to the sea, through Siena and Arezzo to the South, and through Bologna to the North. Taking advantage of the great wave of prosperity, the Spini of

* New then. It was rebuilt in 1547.

† A decree of 1282 had placed elected members of the Guilds at the head of the government. Hence, if an aristocrat wished to take part in governing, he had to be enrolled in a Guild.

Florence had ensconced themselves as financiers to the Roman Curia, and the Bardi, Peruzzi and Acciajuoli to the Neapolitan court. With the peasants and workers even less powerful than the nobles, the burgher class held the balance and profited accordingly.

They sided now with one party, now with another. They appealed in turn to friends and enemies—as it suited their trade. They turned deaf ears to their nobler well-wishers and a blind eye to their despoilers. With their gates at one side of the city closed against a dreaded Emperor, they kept open those at the other side for the uninterrupted arrival and departure of commercial travellers. They were ready to invest titled rogues with the freedom of their democracy for ten costly years on end—if thereby a stoppage of trade might be prevented; eager, as an exasperated spectator* put it, "to tempt with their lousy small coin any lord" worth tempting. Later they could pay for the interloper's departure as they had already paid for his coming. No wonder that Dante felt a more intense political disdain than has poisoned the blood of any poet before or since. Yet Villani said truly that the completed republic then entered upon "a course of dissolution during which art and literature blossomed to new splendours."

Boccaccio's father, who was to contribute in more ways than he knew to the decomposing splendours of Florence, must have rejoiced in what to him had every appearance of a healthy condition. Throughout his boyhood the city challenged or invited Heaven by sending up resolute piles of stone like Arnolfo's Palace of the Signoria, his third ring of walls (which Lapo Gianni would like to have covered with silver), and a dozen other public buildings of pride, while the lovely spire of the Badia soared, and Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella and the Cathedral to

* Cardinal da Prato, in 1311.

St. Mary of the Flowers grew at leisure in their bourgeois magnificence. No citizen's will was valid unless it contributed at least a few soldi towards the city buildings. There has never been a finer array of architects, but plans passed from hand to hand, and many of the peculiar glories of Florence were achieved, as it were, haphazard.

Such men of letters as the place could boast have been called artisans rather than artists. Grammarians, politicians, chroniclers, anthologists, reformers of manners and makers of maxims, they were also shapers of forms and founders of language—as different as might be from the gifted triflers with literature who were attached to courts. One of them, who was Dante's great friend, was reputed to have set about "to prove that God is not." Of another—Giovanni Villani, the historian—Dante said that he was "somewhat presumptuous, harsh and disdainful." It was not for nothing that a Florentine, Cimabue, made the first break from the Byzantine school of painting, and that his pupil, Giotto, was the first of the naturalists in pictorial art. Florentines were more interested in what is than in what ought to be.

The boy, Giovanni Boccaccio, doubtless watched with interest the progress of the Florentine buildings, but he had no chance of such literary education as the city could afford. For him, as for most citizens, everything was dominated by the twenty-one Guilds and by the activities of the bankers in which his father was increasingly expert. The two Woollen Guilds in particular—the *Arte di Calimala*, which handled foreign cloth, and gave a street to each of its trades, and the still larger and more complex *Art di Lana* which imported raw material—employed a whole world of outlying shepherds, and displayed its device of a crowned sheep's head in the *'Or San Michele*, controlled almost all the wealth and enjoyed an important share in the political power. These two, with the three

other Great Guilds had formed an authoritative tribunal whose statutes ranked as law. With the recent rise of the wool trade in England the quality of the Florentine work had improved to twice its former value, and the larger Woollen Guild alone employed 30,000 out of the 90,000 inhabitants in its 200 factories. In close combination with these was the Money-changers' Guild, in which Boccaccino was soon to have a voice, while the Bardi Society, like the later House of Rothschild, bestrode the world. The city's annual revenues were larger than those yielded two centuries later to Elizabeth by the whole of England and Ireland.

Although profits and fortunes were nominally limited, and both gambling and usury were theoretically (that is to say, by the law of God), forbidden capitalism had its way, as the city prostitutes had theirs despite ordinances to the contrary. Ostentation was discouraged, but there were gay and splendid occasions, especially at the Calends of May and the Nativity of the Baptist, in which all took part. The richer men lived in a high degree of simple comfort not unlike that of the well-to-do Victorian merchant when England was at the top of the industrial wave. Softness and self-indulgence were not among their vices. Not more than 600 of their children received a learned education, but twice that number were instructed in arithmetic. Only one-seventeenth of the population could read.

Ostensibly subject to rules of piety—as that daily Masses must be said for the Guilds at members' expense in S. Giovanni, that members must not take the name of God or of the saints in vain, that they must keep the Lord's Day, (not to speak of forty feast days every year), and that they must each present the City's patron saint with a half-pound candle on St. John's Day—merchants conformed rather by way of convention than from religion. No Guelph rebelled against the more pedestrian ordinances of the Church. But, equally, few Florentines leaned to

mysticism. Superstition was rife, but friars who uttered spiritual warnings in the squares were regarded with tolerant amusement. When a man saw fit to leave provision in his will for a hospital, he often saw fit also to provide that "neither the Pope nor any other prelate is ever to be allowed to interfere with it, and they are to have nothing to do with it."*

The life of the streets was more cheerful than nice. Its notions of a good joke were apt to involve the town drain. Nothing was sacred from the Florentines' rough and critical tongues. Before the middle of the thirteenth century, Frederick II, who had reason to know what he was talking about, said they were "extremely curious and perceived all too quickly the defects of others." Petrarch, more than a hundred years later, disliked them because they were "carping, novelty-loving and outspoken men" who "misconceived and ridiculed and believed themselves capable of criticizing anything and everything." He found their censure to be "harsh rather than benevolent," especially towards fellow-citizens, who, like himself, had "risen above the common herd." Nowhere else, until then, had his "poor verses" encountered fault-finding except from himself. In short, the community which was to lead the Renaissance was composed of tough business men, and the enduring beauties of Florence are trophies of the triumph of trade and the conquests of gold.

Boccaccio has told us that the Arno—that flood of "fine balsam"† which is green in fine weather, and in wet weather runs yellow as horn from the earth of Vallombrosa—was his first river; that is, as the Rhone to Petrarch, the first he saw with conscious eyes; from which it has been deduced that his father, soon after marrying the

* *The Chronicles of a Florentine Family*, 1200–1470, by Ginevra Niccolini di Camugliano.

† So called by Lapo Gianni.

Florentine, Margarita di Gian Donato di Martoli,* caused his Parisian offspring to be brought from the unpaved city on the Seine to the more decorous precincts of the new home in Florence. Florentines returning from Paris had full purses; and with this and his prudent marriage, Boccaccino was a solid man.

His first house, which was part of Margarita's dowry, was in the Via Santa Maria nel Gonfalone della Chiave in the Quarter of S. Pier Maggiore. This lay west of the site of the Church of S. Reparata, upon which the beginnings of the Duomo were now well forward with Andrea Pisano as architect, though sixteen years were still to pass before the first stone of Giotto's tower was laid. Round the corner was the Piazza S. Martino, where Dante's wife and children still lived without his evincing any desire to see them, as also those enemies of theirs, the Sachetti family, of which one was to be the novelist and poet who acknowledged Boccaccio as his master.

Here Boccaccino carried on his trade for twenty years with several partners, one being a brother, though not the Vanni he was with in Paris. A deed,† however, exists relating to the sale of another house which had come, like this one, to Boccaccino through his marriage, and at which his son passed much time during the impressionable years of his childhood.

This other property of Margarita's was out of town in the *podere* of Corbignano, which is partly in the parish of S. Martino a Mensola and partly in that of St. Maria a Settignano.‡ How much and for how long the place was occupied by the family cannot be ascertained. Most

* Boccaccio plays with her name also in *Filocolo*, calling her Garamita, when the reference is obvious.

† Dated 1336.

‡ This house to-day is identified with an existing one in the same locality, rebuilt, but with fourteenth century features, which is known as *Casa di Boccaccio*.

Florentines of any standing had a farm in the country as well as a house in town. It was the practice for the peasants on the farm to fetch in country produce regularly and to carry back in their empty carts a load of rush-sweepings and manure from the home in the city.* For Boccaccio, the stretch of country along the Affrico, and beyond towards Maiano as far as the Mensola, was the background of childhood, as Naples and not Florence was to be the background of youth. In the earliest of his books he describes, freshly as through a child's eyes, a little hill upon which he must have played. Darkened with the scrub of evergreen trees, the soil was strewn with a wealth of minute shells, which somebody told him were those of "marine snails." Boccaccio, unlike Voltaire, found no difficulty in believing that shells found far inland might be marine.

The Casa di Boccaccio stands moreover within sight of that more splendid house to which the young men and women of the *Decameron* first make their way from the deathly stench of Florence, and the serene landscapes of those ten introductions—of which Shelley has said that "here is the morning of life stripped of that mist of familiarity which makes it obscure to us"†—are all within walking distance of it. In the two pastoral romances that Boccaccio was to write, the Affrico, and the Mensola with its tributaries, gush and sparkle as the Ayrshire streams do in the songs of Robert Burns. The author even uses their names for his nymphs and shepherds. It is surely by their waters that he sets down his three young girls with hair and faces dappled by the shade of leaves in sunlight—

> "By a clear well, within a little field,"

in a poem that is like a Renoir painting.

* See Strozzi's *Archives of State* (*2a Serie.*, *Carta* 6).

† Letter to Leigh Hunt, 27 September, 1816.

Water, fresh and glancing or salt and glittering, dances in many of Boccaccio's happiest passages. In his fourteenth Eclogue, written under the twin shadows of middle age and bereavement, he has pictured his dead children as citizens of a blissful half-pagan, half-Christian paradise and has provided "wondrous waters sprinkling all about" and "drawing in their course full many a bough" —an earthly flow if we compare it with the glassy, apocalyptic river conceived by a contemporary English poet for his dead daughter's heaven.*

In heaven itself, for Boccaccio, there could be no lovelier stream than the Affrico or the Mensola. He refers to them in his prose and his verse with the special lingering which tells of childish intimacy.

* Vide *The Medieval Library* (Vol. XIII), for the anonymous English poem "Pearl," and Boccaccio's Latin eclogue "Ad Olympiam" with introduction and English version by Sir Israel Gollancz from which the translation in the text is taken.

III

CONSIDERING what Florence was, and what Boccaccino, it is not surprising that the childhood of his first-born was mainly unhappy. The boy was not to have long to play and to look about him at Corbignano, nor was he to have the education for which he thirsted from an early age. His attempts at literary composition began when "as yet he hardly knew the alphabet."* He showed aptitude and eagerness in his first schooling under Mazzuoli da Strada, whose son Zanobi, two years Boccaccio's junior and later to succeed his father as schoolmaster, was his class-mate.† But, as the son of a usurer, he was destined to be removed, while still in the elementary stages, from all that then came under the heading of *Grammatica*, in order that he might apply himself to *Arismetrica*. That is to say, instead of proceeding to Latin rhetoric, science and dialectic, he was to learn to add figures and to keep books, to practise the new art of bill-discounting,‡ and the robbery that was termed money-changing. The *Quadrivium* was needful for those who would follow letters. But commercial arithmetic was the preliminary to that mystery of usury which Dante has described as man's avoidance of earning his bread by sweat or honest skill, thus "condemning Nature in herself and in her follower, by placing elsewhere his hope."|| The Florentine

* *De Genealogiis*, xiv.

† In Boccaccio's *Eclogue*, xiii, Zanobi is referred to as "Stilbone."

‡ Double entry, an Italian invention, was not widely practised until the fifteenth century.

|| *Inferno*, xl, 109–11.

merchants were alive to the importance of an early start in the race for the florin, and they lost no time in bringing their sons into the life and labours of the counting-house. As a writer of the century said, "He who to-day has no money is a mere beast, and he who has is held to be the best man, so it is wise for every man not only to be careful of what he has, but to add to it as much as he can." In this way, Boccaccio, born a poet, was in his own estimation deprived of the right of being made one, and, from infancy, he was introduced to the cult of capital and directed to regard private gain as the chief end of life. One result was that he hated his father.

Boccaccio's childish wretchedness was twofold, and his father was doubly involved in it. The boy's passionate love of learning had been sacrificed to the god of gain at the outset. While naturally modest, even to excess, he was never submissive to what he hated, and he could be unforgiving. There is evidence that Boccaccino was a kind parent. But kindness in those who rob us of our heart's desire may even aggravate the loss. Perhaps, too, the father's natural disappointment was part of the son's suffering, for he was an affectionate child.

His further misery was wholly concerned with his affections and was caused by the strong dislike shown to him by his stepmother. At the time of her marriage, Margarita had perhaps tried to make the best of what she could not avoid. But no love arose between her and her stepson; and when, after seven years of barren marriage —a long period of reproach for an Italian woman—she at last produced a son of her own, her detestation of this other became uncontrolled. Boccaccio was eight in that year—the same in which Dante died—and he soon found that he was regarded as an interloper in the family circle. In his first book, which was designed to win the sympathy of a woman who was herself said to be of irregu-

lar birth, he has expressed his feelings in the form of a dream.

He was, he says, in his father's house, at peace and by rights, a "simple and desirous" child, when two ferocious bears, their eyes glaring with hate, sprang out to kill him. Fortunately he was able to fly (in the person of a shepherd named Idalgos) from the threatened spot to other paternal possessions which were at a safe distance from the murderous pair.

Whether he thus sums up many years and events, or writes out of the memory of a single disclosure, followed perhaps by a genuine nightmare, he must as a child have seen hatred in the eyes of his stepmother—reflected thence in the eyes of his little stepbrother. Things may have been so bad that Margarita demanded the boy's removal. At any rate, removed he presently was to Naples, where his father had important business connections. At Naples he would be out of the way, and peace would be restored at home.

There were excellent reasons for this removal which had nothing to do with the domestic situation. Soon after Boccaccino's return from Paris, in spite of the encouraging death of Henry VII, conditions in Tuscany were not without anxiety. Ugoccione da Faggiuola, lately Henry's captain in Genoa, came with Visconti support and a thousand mercenaries—the first of the terrible "Free Companies" to enter Tuscany—and King Robert's brothers proved no match for him. At Montecatino, in August, 1315, Philip of Taranto, who was just then the King's representative in Florence, fled, leaving his younger brother, Pietro of Eboli, and his own son, Charles, dead on the field. Many leading Florentines would then have broken with the Angevins, but the Bardi, the Peruzzi and the Acciajuoli bankers prevailed. The Angevins owed them too much money. The alliance, upon which

they therefore insisted, was strengthened by the marriage in Florence of Charles of Calabria with Catherine, the sister of Frederick of Austria, who was the new Pope's imperial candidate against Lewis of Bavaria. Robert replaced an objectionable governor, Lando da Gubbio, by a Tuscan noble, and sent a Catalonian General, Raimondo da Cordona, to help the Commune against Ugoccione. Troubles, however, were not at an end for Florence. Raimondo was better at raising war money than at casting down the enemy. The Pope sent his legate, Bertrand de Poiet—who was also his reputed son—ostensibly to oppose "the Great Serpent," Matteo Visconti, but really to make a bid for the recovery of the lost Papal States, while de Poiet proved himself to be a worm in conspiring for his personal advantage. Thus, for the first time, the issues between Guelph and Ghibelline were confused by the Papal intervention for territorial gains. Nothing could have been more discouraging to those who called themselves Guelphs because they claimed the freedom of their Commune. To make matters worse, a far more dangerous enemy than Ugoccione appeared in his supplanter, Castruccio Castracane, who beat Don Raimondo out of hand, bribed de Poiet successfully, and allied himself with Lewis of Bavaria, who had defeated Frederick of Austria at Muhldorf in 1322, and would soon march south in search of money and the symbolic crown at Rome.

"A brave and courageous young gentleman," Machiavelli calls Castruccio, "and fortunate in all his undertakings." The Florentines needed no Machiavelli either to praise the pale, blond, long-haired Castruccio as superman, or to point out that he was unimpeded by either virtue or good faith. Brilliant from boyhood and very ambitious, he had acquired great wealth in England, besides military tactics which he had exercised in the fields

of France and Lombardy. At the age of thirty-three, after two years of meditation in one of Ugoccione's dungeons, he had emerged a perfected instrument of vengeful self-glory. Having put Ugoccione underground he became the terror of Florence. "The calamities which he imposed," to quote Machiavelli again, "the depredations, imprisonments, ruines and burnings are not to be express'd; having nobody to oppose him, for several months together, he went where, and did what he had a mind to, and the Florentines thought themselves lucky (after such a defeat) if they could save the City." Before long he would reach Prato and encamp at Signa, try to drown Florence by damming up the Arno, and organize a race between naked prostitutes just outside the Florentine Porto da Prato on the feast of St. Francis. Then for once the citizens felt obliged to shut their shops.

But while Florence was harassed, Naples still basked under political skies as clear as those of her natural heavens. What wars she had were remote, and fortune was to favour her when, for a time, her security was to be threatened by Castruccio and Lewis in formidable combination. She was rich and glorious. She had a university and a Court which was the heir to that which had surrounded Frederick II at Palermo. In social graces more than a century in advance of any other Italian city, she drew to herself the purveyors of intellectual and material fineries from every quarter. The youthful Petrarch, studying at Bologna and looking round for ways of escaping the paternal career of the law, could not have shown more prudence than by seeing in King Robert the likeliest patron a poet could secure in all Europe. He drew tribute from more than half of the Italian communes, including those of Piedmont and some in Lombardy. Since the death of old Matteo Visconti* he had been

* In 1322.

not merely Papal Vicar in Italy, but also Vicar of the Empire. He was Lord of Provence and had the ear of the Pope and the King of France.

For Boccaccino the importance of Naples centred about the Ruga Cambinorum where, by the consent of King Robert's father, a flourishing branch of the Bardi Society had been established. He was now an outstanding agent of this firm, had constant dealings with the Neapolitan office, and could boast many business friends—probably relatives also—in the thriving colony of Florentine merchants who, honoured and prosperous, occupied the quarter at the Porta Nuova near the sea-front. This meant friends at court besides. Robert, in the character of royal merchant, was in the habit of receiving money-lenders in person and on the same friendly terms on which he welcomed professors of learning, astrologers, painters, poets and diplomatists. It was, therefore, good policy for a Florentine money-lender to settle his son early in a place where many Florentines felt themselves more at home than they did in their native city, especially when that was subjected to so many anxieties. In three years' time the Bardi were to advance over £3,000 for the private expenses of Charles of Calabria as Robert's filial representative.

The family problem, the threat by Castracane, and Giovanni's deplorable desire for a learned education were all strong arguments for the boy's immediate removal to Naples. At ten years old he had mastered, under da Strada, the rudiments needed for a mercantile career along with the minimum of Latin. Unhappy and embarrassing at home, he would become only too happy at school if he remained with da Strada long enough to acquire the higher learning. But, presumably, he was still malleable. Six years in the family of a reliable Florentine merchant in Naples would meet the case. He would find Florentine

companions of his own age, and would acquire a working knowledge of *Arismetrica* (instead of the dreaded *Grammatica*), with other useful information in the course of a daily office routine. It was a common enough arrangement. Giovanni could not have it both ways. If he blamed his father for curtailing his Latin, he must at least be grateful for the trouble and expense which set him far and favourably from home. He is, indeed, reproachful and grateful in one breath. Again his father was trying to be dutiful according to his lights.

He left in mid-December and followed the less usual of the two routes—by way of the Etruscan hill-towns, crossing the Apennines at Il Sangro, fording the Tiber and the more dangerous Volturnus, and entering the Mediterranean capital by Teano and Capua. The easier Francigena–Roman road was infested with bands of robbers bred by a Rome without a Pope, and at least one Bardi agent had been murdered while travelling that way. Although the country round Siena and Perugia was in a state of war, marauding soldiers were less fearful to the merchant-traveller than brigands. Moreover, the Sienese and the Perugians were then allies of Florence. In the dead of winter military operations were practically at a standstill. The Italians had as strong a prejudice against midwinter as against midsummer fighting, a fact to which the fighting men of a country ever at war with itself owed the opportunity of healing their wounds and cooling their tempers. Indeed, civilians could hardly have carried on their lives without this relief.

The merchants who rode out from Florence, with the small boy mounted among them, had a journey of eleven days before them. Like the Canterbury Pilgrims they told stories—some of them perhaps the same as Chaucer's—to beguile the terrors and tediums of the road. When at last they drew up for the customs' officers at the Castello

Capuano Gate of Naples, Giovanni, his head full of anecdotes, merry and romantic, derived from the streets or from the Provençal singers, had fallen asleep. He dreamed that on his entry a smiling girl, dressed all in green, took his hand and kissed him. In ecstasy he returned her kiss, and she said tranquilly, "In this place you are going to find good luck and happiness." The woes of Florence were behind him. He rejoiced with all his "simple and desirous" being.

NOTE

The date of Boccaccio's first leaving Florence is disputed. Many say that he did not leave until his sixteenth year. All depends upon the interpretation of autobiographical passages. Considering his own references to his extreme youthfulness, and the childish quality of the dreams and narratives relative to his early Neapolitan life; considering the poverty in his highly reminiscent work of boyish memories of Florence; considering that he speaks of only a single apprenticeship "to a famous merchant" before he changed commerce for law at the age of sixteen; finally, considering the disturbances in Florence, which were serious between 1320 and 1328, the year 1323 seems the more likely. Mr. Edward Hutton in his *Life of Boccaccio* puts forward good reasons for accepting it, though elsewhere he submits the later date without, however, giving reasons.

IV

WISE men, ancient and modern, have said that by our seventh year we are furnished with our characters, and it is common experience that, between our seventh year and that fourteenth when adolescence comes to plague us with a new nebulosity, we receive our most powerful conscious impressions. With characters already formed (we know not how because we cannot remember) we enter a second condition which, compared to the first, is as colour or substance to outline. For we then acquire our imaginative stock, our inner landscape, which will accompany us till death as faithfully as the temperaments with which we were born. The psychologists of Boccaccio's time called these two first periods *infanzia* and *puerizia*, and Boccaccio, who knew this, says that he came to Florence before the end of his *infanzia*, and that he left Florence for Naples while his *puerizia* was still in progress.*

There is not often so clear a break during either period in the life of an individual. Petrarch, when removed from Italy to Provence, was accompanied by his family and was, accordingly, protected from the shock of his changed surroundings by the cocoon of family life. But Boccaccio was transported not only bodily but alone. The most cursory study of his works and his ways reveals that he was profoundly affected by the infantine removal from the arms of his French mother to the untender hands of his Florentine stepmother, who left him in no doubt as to his bastardy even before he could grasp its worldly significance. The suggestion that he never outgrew the

* *Ameto*, "Nella mia puerizia."

humiliation to his pride or the outrage to his affections is not an exaggerated one. As to his second transportation, if different theories are held as to its date, there need be no guesswork about its results. The widely accepted view that he did not leave Florence until his adolescence, obliges lovers of this most reminiscent of writers to ignore a clear line of demarcation. He never forgot his childish impressions, but these are only of the hill-sides, streams, tiny shells and wolfish eyes at Corbignano. The villa gardens which he uses to frame and decorate his *Decameron* are seen with the eye of the mature artist who looks with a purpose. He gives no sign of adolescent knowledge of Florence, recounts no Florentine festival nor early Florentine love-affair, and loses few opportunities of expressing a detached distaste for Florentine ways. But about Naples and the life of that "delightful city" he never tires of telling in phrases that are full of boyish warmth. If Boccaccio was made in Paris and in Florence, he was nourished in Naples.

To the tender eyes of a child, even a sleepy one, the first glimpse of the broad Via Capuana, lined either side with palaces new and restored, and thronged with a population in which Europe rubbed careless shoulders with Africa and the East, was an excitement never to be forgotten. Marred by no adolescent consciousness of inadequacy in himself, his early impressions were supplemented by years of knowledge before they were described. But his repeated accounts of the place, written long afterwards, make it evident that he loved it from the moment he entered it.

Even if he had not left Florence so gladly there would be nothing to wonder at in the little boy's wholehearted embrace of the southern city. At all times she had possessed a beauty that was both sensual and spectacular. Virgil, who had his grotto near by, had called her "dulcis

otiosa," and Constantine—who had seen more of the world than Virgil—pronounced her to be the very crown and rose of his vast empire. The ancient Parthenope might well claim a magical origin, pointing to her bronze horse, her brazen gnat, her castle built upon an egg, and her portentous sculptured heads that uttered guidance over one of her gates. Vergilius the sorcerer, who had conjured her up, had also, it was said, discovered the secret of perpetual youth. From being the centre of leisure and letters of the Græco-Roman dominions, and the favourite plaything of beauty-loving Nero, she had dwindled with the fall of Rome into commercial insignificance beside Amalfi. The Saracens, the Normans and the Hohenstaufens in turn had treated her with contumely. Conrad had completed her ignominy when he threw down her walls and trampled on her splendours. Even so, she had remained with her intransigent loveliness upon her curving coast, and under Conrad's conquerors had risen into a new magnificence of bloom. The Angevins had made it their business to rebuild the cathedral,* enrich the university founded by Frederick II, and erect splendid churches, castles and palaces for the return of noble Neapolitan exiles like the Brancacci and the Carraccioli, and for the occupation of the great French barons, who brought with them their Provençal customs. The life of the villas also, round the sweep of the Baia shore and in the delicious bays beyond Falerno at Cuma and Pozzuoli, was renewed as though it had never faded. At the time of Boccaccio's arrival these places were "so sweet and pleasing that their equal is not to be found under heaven."†

Festivity was perpetual. Tournaments were held in the great open-air theatre—"common and ancient place for many brave pastimes and rare spectacles,"† and in the fashionable city square of the Correggio. There the King's

* Completed in 1316.

† *Amorous Fiammetta.*

many nephews (to his sorrow he had himself only one legitimate son alive) jousted without shedding blood "before the admiring throng."

The young princes of the blood—sons of Duke Philip of Taranto and Duke John of Durazzo—were still friendly rivals. Their mothers were very great ladies.

The Angevins were a blond race, and Boccaccio, who had chestnut hair, gazed appreciatively at the royal youths, whose yellow locks "fell upon their glittering shoulders but were bound on the crown by a fine circlet of gold or a garland of new leaves." Their jackets were of purple and crimson, "shot with gold and embroidered with pearls by Indian hands." The cavaliers wore green surcoats (a Moslem survival) or mantles of azure, while the women, who looked on, sat crowned with flowers and radiant in their full-sleeved, pleated bodices "curiously sewed with fine threads of shining gold." Their names were like music—Sancia, Cantelma Cantelmo, Catherine de Courteney, Agnes de Perigord-Talleyrand. Catherine walked lame, like her Valois father, but limped imperially in a manner befitting the titular Empress of Constantinople and the ambitious mother of a large family for whom princely provision must be made. No less ambitious for her brood was Agnes Durazzo, sister of Cardinal Talleyrand. She had inherited her mother's beauty but was none the less an empress in her own right. Boccaccio remarked upon it later in his *Amorosa Visione*. He rejoiced also in "the baby dolls of the piazzas"—"God be praised who made them! Oh, how beautiful they are!"*

Neapolitan pleasures were full of variety, and there was "no going thither without a merry mind, nor abiding

* Letter in the Neapolitan dialect to F. Bardi. It may be remarked, as another argument for his early arrival, that whereas, when writing in Tuscan, he always uses the literary, never the street, language, Boccaccio was fluent in the Neapolitan *argot*.

there without great feasts, jollity and pastime." In the winter the city offered highly cultured joys of art and social converse. King Robert employed painters, architects and musicians from France, and all parts of Italy. In spring one attended the ordeals of the Courts of Love, at which the youths and maidens competed in beauty and in wit. Summer brought feasts with music and dancing and long loaded tables in the woods or on the hill Barbarus. Under the great trees in the palace gardens, where the fountains were of red porphyry, ladies and gentlemen strolled at leisure listening to themes of love. "One lost one's heart," writes Boccaccio, "over sweet words," and "all these delights both old and modern, cannot but greatly recreate the minds of those that never saw them before, who for their pleasure and solace go many times to visit them." Another Florentine who was a churchman, described it more sedately to Petrarch afterwards as "a country made for poets by nature and by art. You would find everything that can flatter the senses conveyed by sea or by land."

The inexhaustible summer playmate was the sea. People took baths for beauty, for health, for enjoyment. They "ploughed the marine undulations" in rowing-boats, accompanied by singers and stringed instruments on their way to picnic on one of the islands.* They fished with lines, paddled among the rocks to catch shellfish, danced on the sands, swam in the pools of the caves. Some of the bathing caverns were not so secret but that the boys could find hiding-places from which to watch the girl bathers as they swam in the clear green waters, "stripped to their sleeveless white satin under-shifts" and revealing, as they played, "the hidden delightsomeness of a swelling breast." That Boccaccio was one of these boys

* In *Amorous Fiammetta*, to divert his lovesick wife, the "loving husband" takes her to the islands of Pitycusa and Nisida that are "full of rabbits."

may be taken for granted. He inserts a similar fresh-water description in one of the *Decameron* stories.* Here the first Angevin King of Naples, is seen as a magnanimous hero. He looks on while "two young maidens, each perhaps fifteen years old," fish for his dinner in the royal ponds, wading in with pole and net. Their golden ringlets, crowned with periwinkle flowers, fall round their shoulders, and their dresses "of finest linen, white as snow upon their flesh"—are "close-fitting as might be from the waist up, but below the waist ample like a pavilion to the feet." These garments, when the girls wade out victorious with their catch, "cleave everywhere close to their flesh so as to hide scarce any part of their delicate persons." The King "scanned each part of their bodies so intently that, had one then pricked him, he would not have felt it." He felt, however, "stir within his heart a most ardent desire to pleasure them, whereby he knew very well that, if he took not care, he would grow enamoured." How he did grow enamoured, yet put his own desire second to his desire to pleasure the girls by giving them the young husbands they wanted, is the substance of this charming tale. In Boccaccio's day the grandson of Charles the Victorious was King of Naples, but Venus, far more than the pious Sancia, was its gracious queen and goddess, especially in the summer and where there was water. "One only thought how to amuse oneself most delightfully," says Boccaccio, and "more than one who came thither a Lucrece returned a Cleopatra."

Although so gaily delivered over to the senses and the imagination, Naples was not yet depraved. Material corruption there was, of course, and the usual quantum of vice and violence incidental to all great seaports, while not a few cruelties lurked behind the thick stone walls of the palaces. Manfred's son Conradin, last of the Hohen-

* *Decameron*, x, 6.

staufens, had been imprisoned for fifty years in a dungeon of the Castel dell' Ovo before he died there the year before Boccaccio's birth. Matilda of Hainault, Princess of Achaia and King Robert's cousin, only because she refused to marry his brother, John of Durazzo, had been incarcerated in the same grim jail since 1318, and she was not to die until 1331. But considering the ages these prisoners attained, their so-called dungeons were perhaps not ill-appointed. Again, morals might be lax in Naples, where every fashionable young married woman took lovers as a matter of course, but the atmosphere, benign and youthful, compared favourably with the cynicism of contemporary Avignon. The Norman and Provençal blood had produced a breed of handsome, intelligent men and women. The King had wise counsellors and humane magistrates. But he saw no cause to earn for himself the title of saint which had belonged to more than one of his family.* His portraits† show the face of a man who likes to see people enjoying themselves, and he did not permit one mistress to deprive him wholly of other irregular embraces. Sancia, his wife, whose barrenness was ascribed to her Franciscan tenets, had refrained six years before, on the Pope's advice, from divorcing him; and she made it a rule that even married couples should abstain from carnal indulgence while occupying guest chambers at Castel Nuovo. But Robert's illegitimate son, Charles Artois, was a powerful noble, and other illegitimate children were honoured members of society.

Thus things were balanced. The domestic life of the

* Besides his uncle, the great St. Louis, there was his elder brother, St. Louis of Toulouse, who should have reigned in Naples, but preferred to take the vows of poverty at the age of twenty-one during the wedding celebrations of his sister, Bianca, to the King of Aragon. He was canonized by John XXII in 1316.

† So-called portraits of the period are unreliable, but Simone Martini's picture in San Lorenzo Maggiore is probably as faithful as it looks.

palace was simple, but Robert's feasts made those of the Roman Saturnalia mean by comparison; he took delight in garlands of ruby and emerald, in rings and brooches, cups and ornaments; his public occasions were decorated with scarlet cloth of Ghent, with samite, and with damasks woven after the Oriental fashion—largely purveyed by Florentine tradesmen. He also wrote a treatise on *The Beauty of Poverty*, and transcribed the best available moral maxims for the use of the young. Pleased to be acclaimed as a philosopher-theologian, he loved to preach sermons on every subject, and—in the teeth of the Pope—he protected the Franciscan Spirituals against persecution, as he did the Jews. He had married two royal Princesses of Aragon in succession* and all the Aragons were extremely religious. At the same time he did not share the extreme Franciscan contempt for learning, and he did not forget that St. Thomas Aquinas had occupied a cell in one of the Neapolitan convents, or that the school of medicine at Salerno was famous throughout the world. His other school at Bari was equally celebrated, and both were channels for Jewish thought and Arabian science. Andrea d'Isernia, the great jurist, who had applied Roman law to the remnants of feudalism, had died in 1316, but his able grandson now ruled as a judge, as did the illustrious Sicilian, Jacobus Pizinga. Old Bartolommeo da Capua, greatest international lawyer of them all, who had advised his grandfather, was still alive and full of wisdom. Naples was not, like Florence, "a divided city,"† but Guelph from the throne downwards, including citizens of noblest birth. Petrarch and Boccaccio were to live to see it torn by faction. But since the year of Boccaccio's birth Robert

* First Violante, sister of Frederick of Sicily, then her cousin Sancia of Majorca, whose brother, afterwards King of Majorca, married Robert's sister, Maria. Another of Sancia's brothers became a Franciscan friar.

† *Inferno*, vi, 61.

had reigned in peace, and Boccaccio's arrival fell in the period of his greatest glory.

Boccaccio's master was a colleague of his father's, probably a member of the Bardi, certainly a Florentine. Boccaccio deliberately conceals his identity, calling him merely "an eminent merchant." By an arrangement common at the time, the boy lived in his house and served him daily in the office in return for bed, board and fatherly care. Apart from the little further general education that could be picked up, the apprentice spent his days fetching and giving change, posting the ledgers, counting the tallies, weighing money, adding accounts on the abacus, and distinguishing good coin from bad. That is, he studied practical arithmetic "for six irrecoverable years."

He was, however, freer to look and listen than if he had been under his father's control and subjected to his stepmother's hostility. The merchant had a good standing. Writing many years later Boccaccio claimed that he was on equal terms with boys of his own age who belonged to the best families. Their nickname for him was "poet."

"Strangely enough," he says, "before I knew the proper kinds and numbers of feet in a verse, my acquaintances in spite of my most urgent protest were all calling me poet, a name I have never really deserved to this day."

His father visited Naples in the autumn of his fourth year there. Boccaccino's business was important. Lewis of Bavaria was at last about to descend upon Italy, and King Robert's son, Charles of Calabria, who was then his supreme governor in Florence, was no match for Lewis's active ally, Castracane. The King wished to withdraw his cherished heir from the seat of danger, and the Bardi who had furnished the extravagant Charles with money throughout his residence in Florence, would now provision his forces on the less dangerous marches of the

Abruzzi. One Florentine bank, the Scali, had already failed.

Boccaccino soon discovered, if he did not know already, how Giovanni hated business, and how "without a word of advice or instruction from anyone," he delighted, "above all other things, in reading and studying and trying, with all my might, to understand poetry."*

Poetry! When there was the interest to be gathered from 900,000 florins advanced to Charles of Calabria within nineteen months, and when the mints of Florence were threatened!† Boccaccino "continually resisted and condemned such a pursuit." Giovanni would continue with mercantile arithmetic, and to stir his ambition he should be presented in person to King Robert.

To the monarch any agent of the Bardi was "our familiar and faithful," and Boccaccino was particularly welcome at this critical moment. Accordingly his son, born in the same year that Florence had granted her lordship to King Robert, was assured of a gracious reception.

The boy was presentable—"In person large and strong," wrote one who knew him.‡ "Despite excessively full lips his mouth was beautiful; his face round, his broad nose flattened above the nostrils. His chin was cleft, and when he smiled he was extremely handsome. He was jocund, merry of aspect, and in his speech pleasant and human—and he delighted very much in conversation." In the reputed portraits he has a short neck, a broad forehead with level eyebrows, somewhat heavy but well-proportioned features, a sensual mouth and observant eyes. If we may judge from the description of the young lover's

* De *Genealogiis*, xiv.

† The Papal forces under Raimondo di Cordona had been badly defeated that February at Monza with the help of Galeazzo Visconti.

‡ Filippo Villani.

budding moustache in *Amorous Fiammetta* he was not dark, for the down on his face is there called golden. But this, perhaps, is a touch of fiction.

If Giovanni could have known of Robert what he was to discover in a few years' time, he would have searched with even keener purpose than he now did, the long-nosed fleshy face of the King, who, in his forty-ninth year, was not quite so wise as he was proclaimed to be by those learned men whom he encouraged. But the young student of poetry looked his fill at the patron of poets and was more than ever determined "to pursue the art with the utmost zeal. Had not Robert the Wise commended poverty above riches? What did "the money-makers know of any beautiful thing, but only how to fill their pockets?"*

Other introductions followed. Boccaccino stayed nearly a year in Naples managing the Bardi office in the place of a man who had not given satisfaction; and while he refused to allow his son to cut short his apprenticeship, he did his best for him socially.

His return to Florence synchronized with the death of Castracane—of exhaustion in the battlefield. Lewis of Bavaria had failed in Italy and was back in Germany. The Visconti were worsted. All this in those twelve months. But almost immediately after Castracane's death Charles of Calabria met with a fatal accident when out hunting near Siena. His wife, Marie of Valois, produced a posthumous child—a girl. It will be remembered that Robert had married Charles at an early age to Catherine of Austria, herself one of twenty-two children, but she had died childless. Then Charles had taken his cousin who was also half-sister to Catherine de Courteney. She, it was said, had first had to display herself naked to prove that she had not inherited her father's crooked

* *Corbaccio.*

body. But the only son born to Marie had died in eight days, and now she was left a widow with two infant daughters. Robert, in the year of his greatest political triumph, was deprived of his dearest hope. The babes, Giovanna and Maria, were his only direct heirs. That same year, which saw the death of Galeazzo Visconti and of Charles IV of France, his counsellor, Bartolommeo da Capua, died also. A Valois, Philip VI, ascended the French throne. But from then onwards Robert declined as man and as ruler.

V

When Boccaccino revisited Naples, two years later, he was the bearer of a letter from the Signoria to King Robert, touching the supply of corn from Apulia.

With a countryside not yet recovered from Castracane and Lewis, and the port of Pisa closed to her merchants, Florence was threatened with famine, and riots were feared. Robert had already intimated that he could not stir in the matter of Pisa. He was, he said, too old and too tired. It was further rumoured that since the death of his son a change had come over his character, making him at once more religious and meaner about money. Failing the port of Pisa the Florentines had been driven to use the small, shallow creek of Talamone to the south-west of the Sienese Maremma in the Tyrrhenian Sea. In Dante's day much money had been vainly spent in trying to deepen it. It was a deadly place where the merchants died like flies. But corn had to be brought to Florence, and the Bardi must see to it that it was brought with profit to their bank. Boccaccino was the go-between.

Giovanni, now aged fifteen, had finished his apprenticeship that year. But he refused to become a merchant and his worried parent was told by the boy's master and by all his friends that he would never make one. "It appeared by various clear indications that I was more suited to literary pursuits."

Boccaccio was able to smile as he wrote those quiet words towards the end of his life. But it was no smiling matter at the time, and even later there is an echo of his youthful bitterness; for he adds, "if my father had only

been favourable to such a course. . . . I do not doubt that I should have taken my place among poets of fame. But while he tried to bend my mind first into business and next towards a lucrative profession, it came to pass that I turned out neither a business man nor a Canon lawyer, and missed being a good poet besides."

A Canon lawyer! This was the paternal solution. Failing merchandise and usury, here was another "good way to get rich." If Giovanni was so fond of learning, let him "study for holy orders whereby he should be well-to-do." If he had a quick tongue and a love of words, let him "lend out for hire" his vaunted wits.

So it was arranged. Six more irrecoverable years were to be wasted under a teacher as eminent in his own line as the master merchant had been. Giovanni was forced to submit, although to him the study of Canon Law was only a degree less hateful than the study of commercial arithmetic.

Of late years the supremacy of the Canon Law had been challenged by the Civil jurisprudence, which now attracted the better minds. But as it grew more contemptible, the Canon Law grew ever more lucrative. All manner of cases came under its jurisdiction, and bribery swelled the profits of its practitioners. Boccaccino knew this to his cost. Next best to being a merchant or a usurer was to be one who preyed upon both merchants and usurers under the mantle of the ecclesiastical law. The Church still claimed wide temporal power. She also obtained much revenue by cancelling excommunications. The Canon lawyer throve in careless Naples almost as well as in litigious Florence. But with Boccaccino's French connections and his Guelph clients, Avignon was, perhaps, the best place for a young man with a French mother and a quick wit to pile up money. The dependence of the French and the English Churches upon the Holy See

brought endless business there, and three years after this date Boccaccino was to represent the Bardi in Paris.

Boccaccino's son, writing in his old age, has recorded what came of the decision. "I wasted almost as much time as before . . . and so tired of the work that neither my teacher's admonition nor the authority of my father, who kept torturing me with ever-renewed orders, nor the pleas and importunities of my friends, could make me yield, so great was my one passion for poetry."

But at least he could now advance his Latin, and he had increased opportunities for other studies deemed essential to that for which his passion was "no sudden thing, but rather a disposition of long standing." He went "headlong into this pursuit." "As to the other professions, though they interested me, their charm was not compelling, and I therefore followed them not."

In the first year of his release from the merchant, he attended an informal class conducted for eager youth by the old Genoese court physician and astrologer, Andalone del Nero de Gianno.

Andalò, as he was affectionately called, was "accounted the most learned man alive." Aged seventy, when Boccaccio first took part in his "astronomical conversations," he had been ambassador to the Emperor Alexius Comnenus of Trebizond, and when young he had spent some time with King Hugo of Cyprus. He knew the world, life and young men's hearts as well as he knew the movements of the Heavenly Spheres upon which he had written a treatise. Giovanni made it his business to transcribe this.* The "noble and venerable" astronomer had drawn from his own long experience the belief that irremediable calamity comes only to those who invite it by their actions. He was packed full of stories and information. If it is his successor, Dionisio (Petrarch's Parisian

* Boccaccio's copy is in the Laurentian Library.

friend who afterwards became Robert's astronomer royal) to whom Boccaccio refers at least twelve times in his works as *Calmeta*, and once at least calls "his reverend father," it is Andalò who figures as his heavenly father, Asylas, in the beautiful Fourteenth *Eclogue*.

> "Worthy was he, gentle, of ancient faith,
> A noble type. God grant we meet again."

Therefore he shares that radiant paradise with Boccaccio's children, while the real grandfather is described for us as "that horrid spectacle, a cold, miserly old man," as one who "strove to tear gold nuggets out of a mountain-side with his bare fingers," as a practitioner of that which was "an offence to God and man," and as a parent who had forced his son to waste twelve years "of irrecoverable time." It was from Andalò's festive and tranquil belief in free will that Boccaccino's natural son drew the strength to repudiate Canon Law as he had repudiated money-changing. Andalò was his spiritual father. And when, four years later, the good astronomer died full of honours, he lost a parent as well as a powerful protector.

Within the next few years in his pursuit of learning Giovanni made many other distinguished acquaintances. Paul of Perugia, Robert's librarian (whose ill-conditioned wife destroyed the *Collectanea* that was his life-work) gave him access to the royal books, and though poor Paul was a noted picker of other men's brains, Boccaccio paid him reverence. Paolino of Venice, who was Bishop of Pozzuoli, inspired less liking and no respect. Yet Boccaccio listened while he laid it down that Nimrod, the Babylonian, was the inventor of poetry.

Barlaamo, "first Greek scholar in the Western world," who had taught Petrarch the Greek alphabet, condescended to encourage him; Giovanni Barrile, the justi-

ciary, and Barbato of Sulmona, the chancellor—two other men who admired and were to know Petrarch—took notice of him. From the Count of San Severino, from the travelled Bolgaro of Ischia and Constantine da Rocca (treasurer to Sancia) he heard stories of distant parts and of King Robert's youth and ancestry. There is no record of his having met Giotto, who was summoned to decorate the Castel Nuovo in 1330, or Simone Martini, the Siennese artist, who afterwards painted Laura's portrait for Petrarch. But he has expressed his admiration for Giotto, as one "from whom fair Nature hid no secret,"* and he must have known both men well by sight and repute.

There were seven "famous teachers" of Canon Law in Naples, but Boccaccio again conceals the name of his master in a useless learning. When he was seventeen, however, the poet and great doctor of Civil Law, Cino da Pistoia, who despised all Canonists, came for two years to Naples. At the end of that time he left—as did Giotto—because of Robert's meanness. But Boccaccio sought him out. He introduces one of Cino's poems into his own first considerable work.

Not that many of these eminent persons were seriously cultivated by Boccaccio during the first year of his legal apprenticeship, when his studies were scrappy as well as miscellaneous. Ovid, that "greatest of all poets, who shows how the sacred fire of Venus may be made to burn with care even in the coldest heart" still deeply engaged one whose heart was at no time cold. Nor did the conviction that a career of money-making cannot be followed without sin interfere with his delight in the spectacle of life as lived by the jeunesse dorée of Naples. He had in a strong degree the pictorial eye for such a spectacle, and the senses which it was calculated to stir. Therefore he consorted chiefly with youths of his own age. Among

* *Amorosa Visione* 4. Giotto is praised also in *Decameron*, vi, 5.

these were two gay southerners—Jacopo Pizzinghi and Niccolò da Montefalcone, and three Florentines—Francheschino dei Bardi, Mainardo Cavalcanti and Niccolò Acciajuoli. Of these, Acciajuoli was to be the most significant in his life.

Boccaccio had, of course, already fallen in love more than once, and had written verses to girls. Beginning as a Platonic lover he had quickly become a classical one. In either role he wooed as a poet.

The first girl that took him was fair, the second, dark. She whom, in *Filocolo*, he calls Pampinea, was his "white dove," and the other, Abrotina, his "black starling." He tired of the dove, and the starling tired of him, but not before he had presented literary compositions to each. There are traces, too, of other girlish figures, one of them a "green parrot."

In all that Boccaccio was to write of love—and he was primarily a writer about love—he was to be contemptuous only of those lovers that are insincere or mercenary. His own boyish adventures were neither of these things. If they were light in retrospect, they were not, for that reason, even in retrospect, without charm. In some of them he evidently suffered keenly. In all of them he gladly learned something of woman and of himself. To none of them—given, in the beloved, that good faith which he always had himself—did he ever refer without tenderness, if also at times, with humour. His conclusion was that love is the only lasting magic in the story of our human world; his conviction that it ought to be the magic most available to the common man.

He records his own first experiences in loving once more, in dream form. Sick with the loss of his loved one and weeping with self-pity, he says that he fell asleep on his bed. In his sleep his dark jilt and the blonde one he had jilted, come together at his bedside to watch his tears

and laugh at him. Full of misery he reproaches them. Are they not themselves the cause of his weeping? Is this their return for all his efforts, literary and other, to please them? He tells them to go away. It is a good picture of a boy lover whose vanity has been hurt. Then it goes deeper. For, after having laughed at him the more, the girls tell him that, though he does not know it, his love is not truly for them, but for another who has not yet appeared. Waking up at this he relights his lamp for company. But presently sleep overcomes his blessed youth again, and this time not two but three girls stand beside him—his white dove, his black starling, and another, more lovely and lovable than either, wearing the same green dress and the same gay smile as the girl who had welcomed him to Naples with her promises six years before. Pampinea and Abrotina introduce their companion to him. "This is she," they say, no longer mockingly, "who is to be the true and lasting ruler of your heart."

VI

KING ROBERT, as everybody knew, had been in his youth of an amorous disposition. During the festivities attendant upon his coronation at Avignon, his fancy had been caught by a young Provençal lady, Sibilla Sabran, whose husband was the Count Tomaso d'Aquino.

Tomaso's house had produced that other Thomas, "the Angelical Doctor," who had shed glory upon the University of Naples, and the family had further important connections with Robert's kingdom. Tomaso's mother had been a daughter of the original Pipino, and it was her nephews whom Petrarch would later cause to be released from their well-deserved imprisonment. His father, Adenolfo, Count of Acerro, had been burned alive in 1294 by Robert's father, and his possessions handed over to the Prince of Taranto. But the year before his coronation, Robert had permitted the exiled family to return, and later he ennobled three of them. One he made Governor of Ferrara in the year of Boccaccio's birth. Tomaso and another he kept near him by the bestowal of high places in his court. His affair with Tomaso's wife was conducted so discreetly that Tomaso did not know that one of his younger children was perhaps not his, but the King's, until Sibilla felt constrained to tell him so on her deathbed. Not long after the disclosure, he died himself, and the little Maria of doubtful paternity, who bore his name, was consigned for her nurture to the ancient but very fashionable Benedictine Covent at Baiano near Naples, which Boccaccio calls "the convent of the

Prince of Heavenly Birds."* More regularly it was known as that of S. Michael, the Archangel.

Under the saintly wing and the royal eye, the small official orphan found enough companions in her own situation to keep her from feeling singular. But she thought seriously for a while of taking the veil. Sometimes later on, when making conversation, she referred to a heavenly vision in which a saint had appeared to her announcing her vocation. As her beauty increased, however, she came to doubt the message.

Her convent was that sort where the girls were encouraged to look their best for callers of the other sex. If they were sufficiently endowed with money and good looks they were soon regarded in Naples as desirable wives. Maria was fully equipped. Her shoulders were "white and delicate," her "softly rounded" childish face "all radiant," her hair golden and fine as silk. Her "starry" eyes "matched those of the peregrine falcon," her "tiny sweet mouth showed a pair of lips that shone like rubies," and she had an emphatic little nose. Above all, she had what her lifelong lover calls "the bold taste of the first mother."

Even allowing for the eyes of a lover and a poet, Maria may be assumed to have had considerable beauty, intelligence and wit. When she was fourteen she selected from several suitors a young man of title and "of gracious fortune." Boccaccio refrains from naming him, but there are indications that he approved Maria's choice as "a most absolute (in my opinion) and perfect gentleman." She married this young gentleman when she was about fifteen, and came out to a welcoming world.

Festivals became graced by her presence and, to many, incomplete without it. The Neapolitan connoisseurs of

* Boccaccio may not have been joking. Dante calls both angels and devils "birds" (*uccelli*).

beauty did not fail to glance up at her balcony as they passed along the street, and her husband's house became a centre of attraction. She had the arts of dress and conversation. Unlike most Florentine ladies,* she could read. She knew French and Italian, even a little Latin—unless her knowledge of Ovid was confined to a few translated passages of the *Ars Amandi*. She professed a love of poetry and was versed in the Courts of Love.

Marriage was an essential condition for that life in the world which she required for the exercise of her nature. But by the time she was eighteen she was ready to agree with Boccaccio's mature verdict that "it is pleasanter to be free than to be nailed to a block with irons, and there is a bond called wedlock wonderfully fretting . . . which no file can break asunder."† Vivacious to pertness, but discreet, clear-headed and with a courageous deportment, she walks everywhere in Boccaccio's writings.

He never tells us if she had children. Barren marriages were rare. If it had been left to Petrarch or to Dante, we should not know that Laura and Beatrice were both prolific. These high-souled lovers preferred to take certain things for granted. Boccaccio, on the other hand, reveals so many facts about Maria that, if she had children, it is surprising to find him give no hint. He does suggest that her husband loved and was proud of her.

Nothing of all this was known to him, however, when, at the age of eighteen‡ he first saw her on Holy Saturday in the Church of S. Lorenzo.

Fresh from his recent experiences of jilting and of being

* Delli, the Florentine writer on women's education, disapproved of reading as a feminine accomplishment.

† *De Casibus*. (Story of Orpheus and Eurydice.)

‡ See note at end of chapter.

jilted, and assured as he was that love was now finally behind him, he had felt safe in selecting for the Easter occasions a temple that was favoured by women of fashion. To his religious duties there he could add purely æsthetic pleasures, and, accompanied by several of his more frivolous young friends, he might reckon on opportunities for his wit at the expense of wealthy worshippers who took the sacrament from "a successor of him who first girt himself humbly with the cord, exalting poverty and adopting it." S. Lorenzo, besides being the church of the saint who was grilled for love of God, was a Franciscan oratory.

Boccaccio's repeated attempts to convey the scene, in prose and in verse, show how deeply it was engraved on his heart. It appears in the *Filostrato*, in the *Ameto*, in one of the *Decameron* stories and—from the woman's point of view—in *Amorous Fiammetta*.

Staring about him he saw suddenly that which made his heart "begin to throb so strongly that he felt it in his slightest pulses; and not knowing why nor yet perceiving what had happened, he began to say Ohimè, what is this?"*

Appropriately, but also cunningly, she was dressed for the death of Christ in black from head to foot, except for a white veil and garland. According to Florentine customs she ought to have concealed her face as well as her breast with her veil and cloak, and the veil ought to have been of opaque silk. But she contrived, without any show of immodesty, to let not only her milk-pale cheeks be seen, but her round forehead, and some of her hair, which was "so that the world holds nothing like it to be seen under heaven." Long before this, St. Bernard had noted the trick when he deplored the wantonness of widows—"the forehead is uncovered and the cloak is

* *Amorous Fiammetta.*

thrown back so that the cheek is seen, and how she arranges it on her forehead, just like a courtesan!"*

She was tall, says Boccaccio, and slender, "And all her limbs were well proportioned to her height; her face was adorned with beauty celestial, and in her whole appearance she showed a womanly dignity."†

She showed also a quality "somewhat disdainful" in the gesture with which she removed some of the folds of her mantle still more from her face and, "with her arm put the crowd a little aside, as if to say, 'one may not even stand here'."

There and then the stricken law-student thanked Heaven for at least "setting happiness before his eyes," whatever might be the consequences, and he gazed fixedly, "twixt man and man" at the white-garlanded girl until she noticed his attention. Then she drew her veil partly across her face—but only partly. A glance enabled her to take in both Giovanni's youthfulness and his adoration.

When she shielded her face he moved to a pillar directly opposite, where he could see her better, and there he stayed without moving till the end of the choral service that was "compact of sweetest melody." Only once more did she look at him again, discovering him in his new place with a swift regard, searching, but full of becoming gravity.

As the service ended he was among the first to leave the building, and he stood outside by the door through which she presently emerged into the Easter sunshine. Already he had questioned his friends as to her identity,

* In justice to Maria it must be said that some latitude was allowed, even in Florence, to married women, and that Naples, where everybody ignored the edicts against luxurious fashions, was freer than Florence.

† Simone's alleged portrait makes her very youthful, almost childish—with a self-possessed, determined little face, straight golden hair (fine rather than abundant) worn simply on her shoulders, eyebrows delicately plucked and pencilled, and a small crown set on the back of her head.

but they could tell him nothing. Maria was not notorious.

She was, however, known. So, by next day her admirer had learned, probably from the well-informed Niccolò Acciajuoli to whom he confided his feelings, what was commonly spoken of her.

For the Easter Sunday rejoicings, after a sleepless night, he went again to the ten o'clock service at S. Lorenzo. So did Maria.

This time, for Christ's rising, she was dressed in green, with her jewels, and her natural beauty was enhanced by art and by her own good taste. On her hair was a gay garland of spring flowers, and her childish head was all exposed. We must believe Boccaccio—if in our own way—when he says that he now recognized her as the girl, dressed similarly in green who had welcomed him to Naples in his dream as a small boy. He further identified her as the unseen tyrant who had been laughingly prophesied by Abrotina and Pampinea, in his adolescence long ago—the other day. Both were the same, and both were Maria. He had encountered "that Love whose strength even the gods could not resist," and, like his own Cimon, he was turned by it from a beast and a booby into a man and a poet.

Thanks to his starlings and blackbirds and parrots, he was not entirely a novice in the arts of love, and his head, stuffed with romances as it was, knew much that was practical concerning the nature of woman. Hopeless though this courtship might seem, therefore, he set about the siege of Maria's heart with all the dexterity at his command. Here Acciajuoli came into play as the original of Pandarus in the *Troilus and Cressida* romance. Boccaccio, who invented this character, saw him not as the sly comic old sensualist and lover of money, created afterwards by Chaucer as the go-between, but as a youthful

conspirator in living, who "gives all for his friend." Who more suitable for this purpose than Niccolò? Handsome, square-headed Niccolò's address matched his energy and ambitions, and he helped his friend to meet Maria. He, better than any other, could tell us how Boccaccio, after twelve desperate days, first managed to sit and talk with the lady of Aquino in the comparative privacy of a small room.

The room was the parlour of the Convent Sant' Arcangelo to which the girls who had been brought up there often came to gossip with the nuns, and sometimes to give audience to admirers on trial before these were judged suitable for more intimate or formal invitations.

The interview was encouraging besides much else. Boccaccio found that Fiammetta had lovely hands, eyes that could be teasing as well as queenly, and "a flowing eloquence." Also she could blush. When she did so he was bewildered and delighted by the mingling of snow with roses in her face. Another point was that she greatly admired those works of Ovid which had come her way, while she took delight in all romantic literature. She was, further, in herself a demonstration that "more than others the perfect lady hath a stronger desire to be loved and taketh delight in loving." Maria was one of Dante's "ladies that have intelligence of love" and, if to win her seemed more than ever impossible, she made it plain that although her official father was related to St. Thomas, saintliness was not an invariable characteristic even of his noble family. Pure, long, humble and faithful love might, in her eyes, transcend every difference in station and claim its reward at the last. For this, five years of devotion seemed a mere nothing to her visitor. She mentioned five years as a reasonable period for testing devotion.

Then, or soon afterwards, he told her that his birth resembled hers in some particulars. He, like herself, was

the fruit of love, as compared with humdrum, mercenary marriage. His mother, like hers, was French. Who will blame him if he exalted poor Jeanne de la Roche's social position to increase the similarity and bring Maria nearer to him in thought? Then, or soon afterwards, he also touched upon his own love of literature and his dreams of becoming a great poet. Rinaldo d'Aquino, Maria's kinsman, was the author of the *Lament of the Crusader's Beloved*,* one of the earliest and finest poems written in the vernacular. Naturally Maria suggested that her young visitor might write, especially for her (and also in the vernacular), "a little book in which the opening of love, the courtship and the fortunes of two lovers even to their death shall be told."

It was not a bad beginning. Boccaccio, full of fear and trembling, despair and hope, took her suggestion as a command, and he went home to begin writing the first of European novels.

NOTE

The first meeting with Fiammetta introduces another controversial date. It is often put five or six years later. The choice here is based partly upon the extreme youthfulness of the lover Boccaccio describes in the church scene as narrated in *Amorous Fiammetta*, partly upon the following considerations. Fiammetta's appearance in his life is linked closely by him with the disappearance of his earlier loves in his dream of the three girls. This is what we should expect in the circumstances. Shakespeare's psychology when he makes Juliet follow close on Rosaline's heels is sound. Further, the earlier date makes the encounter coincide with Boccaccio's first discovery of Dante and of Petrarch, which took place about that time, and perhaps led him to put—in imitation of Petrarch—the scene in a church and on Easter Saturday, although it did not

* *Il Lamento dell'Amante del crociato*, to which De Sanctis gives high praise.

necessarily occur on that day. Finally, the stretch of six years without a hint of any other love affair, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, which has to be accepted if the later date be allowed, is harder to believe of Boccaccio than the prolonged Platonic service of his lady which goes with the earlier one. For an examination of other supporting circumstances, see Edward Hutton's *Life*. All his arguments strike me as sound.

VII

He had always loved poetry. Now he was dedicated to the Muses. "Out of a happy wood and towards me moving came a nymph with a green wreath round her hair, and she said to me, 'I am she who makes eternal the name of him who follows me. And I am ready to love: rise and come with me.' And I, already worshipping her, rose; and having come from Hell, entered into the festival of Love."

The beginning was easy. Walking from the Heavenly Bird's parlour to his own lodging he had time to decide upon his subject. He would depict for Maria the loves of Florio and Blanchefleur, tragic lovers of Oriental Spain. Their legend had attracted a French poet of the thirteenth century, anonymous author of some of the best of the Carmina Burana. This version was known to Boccaccio, but not, he could hope, to Maria. *Filocolo* (*Philocholus*)* he would call it—"Labour of Love." Apuleius would be his model, and it would be in prose. A man, however, may believe himself doubly dedicated by an experience. Under a new lordship his rough soul may be rough no longer. He may determine to know, "what power splendid words"—his own, not another's—"have to move human hearts," particularly the heart of his beloved. Nevertheless, an untrained mind and unpractised hand, will take longer to discipline than a savage soul when it comes to performance in the arts. *Filocolo* was not finished, for ten, perhaps fifteen years. It was, however, finished, and is dedicated to Maria with untarnished affection.

* Making a bad mistake to start with by taking the word χόλος (anger) to mean effort or labour. But Dante's philology was not much better.

Boccaccio was doubly handicapped. Because of his curtailed education, he lacked "the instruments by which the conceptions of poetry are to be wrought out—I mean, for example, the precepts of grammar and rhetoric, an abundant knowledge of which is opportune, and without which, however deeply the poetic impulse stirs the mind to which it is granted, it very rarely accomplishes anything commendable."* His consciousness of this was a discouragement, and it was something worse, for it obscured other avenues to literary attainment, which obscurity was the greater for the intellectual confusion of his time.

One thing was clear to him. He must achieve a poetic education, though "without a master." This was not easy with his conception of education. For years to come he would be bound to voluminous legal studies that had little bearing upon literature and less upon love, and he had lost his heart to an exigent beauty who expected to be followed and worshipped for a long term of probation in the fashion set by the Troubadours—a fashion which demanded time and thought.

Boccaccio's self-chosen friends and other sources of literary knowledge have been already mentioned. Probably it was not until after the meeting with Maria that he began seriously to explore their educative possibilities. Even so, he did not at once settle down to regular study for his own purposes. From his eighteenth year to his twenty-first he struggled by fits and starts with Florio and Blanchefleur, wrote poems that were fuller of emotion than of art, neglected law as much as he dared for the reading of romances, and plunged into the fashionable life of Naples in Maria's train. He met young Charles of Durazzo and other high personages. His radiant descriptions of the city and its surroundings belong to those three years, in spirit if not in execution. They have the breath

* *De Genealogiis*, xv.

of youth and of love, and they contributed powerfully to the intensely visual "love of Nature" which distinguishes the Renaissance painters and poets.*

His literary inheritance was both rich and poor, both stimulating and baffling, both exhausted and of an untried freshness. He never wholly escaped from this confusion, nor from what one historian calls "the inexhaustible wealth of indirectness."

If it had not been for Paul of Perugia and old Andalò, his access to books would have been much inferior to that of a boy of twelve in a council school to-day. The typical Italian home contained a few volumes of accounts and of law, known as "books for using," possibly also two or three Latin classical works. Efforts by the Church Fathers, with some rough paraphrases and ill-informed excerpts from Aristotle and Ovid translated into the vernacular, provided, in addition, the small number of "books for reading." Scarcely anybody owned a collection of manuscripts large enough to be called a library —professional subjects apart. Petrarch, though a famous bibliophile, did not in his lifetime assemble more than two hundred "books," for which he had to employ a long succession of inefficient copyists; and his peasant manservant, who had learned to distinguish certain authors by their bindings, would hold a precious volume to his breast, "softly murmuring the author's name" as though it were an incantation. He knew, perhaps, that his master was taken for a magician because he read Virgil, who was popularly held to be "the most imposing of astrologers" because he had foretold the birth of Christ. Indeed, like most of the great pagan writers, Virgil was known only in fragments, and he was used chiefly as a seer, from whose

* From Naples, in the late fifteenth century, came Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, from which came Sir Philip Sidney's—and a host of other works not so named.

pages counsel might be elicited by means of a pin at hazard. Petrarch's father showed himself to be a rare man by his possession of a work by Cicero. Boccaccino certainly knew no more of the great Roman stylist than his name. The lay world had put its own construction upon St. Jerome's advice that one should choose between being a Christian and a Ciceronian. The Wise King Robert's knowledge of the classics was considered remarkable, although it included little more than some of Seneca. Ovid alone survived (mainly in bad translations) in the popular esteem. And this was because, besides being "very pleasant and delectable," he provided useful text-books for teachers of *Grammatica*. Even so, he was rarely available in completion to the private reader; and before Boccaccio could quote at length from the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ars Amandi*, and imitate the *Heroides* in the letters exchanged between Florio and Blanchefleur, he probably had to make laborious duplicates of those works for himself from borrowed copies. To the end of his life he was seldom able to afford amanuenses, and practice made him an exquisite copyist.*

In the royal library and elsewhere at Naples, however, he had a chance which he used with ever-increasing diligence. Naples had retained a certain tradition of Greek and Latin learning when these had died out elsewhere, Duke John III had fancied both the secular and the sacred classics, thus anticipating even Frederick II of Sicily and helping to establish the later Neapolitan reputation for culture, which embraced also much Oriental, Jewish and Arabian lore. Aristotle's translators (through the Arabic Averrhoes) as well as his commentators, expositors, and Christianizers, were almost all of them connected with

* He was the first to collate ancient MSS. for mutilations and corruptions. Among his surviving copies are the fourteenth and fifteenth books of Terence, then a little-read author.

Naples. And although his *Poetics* were not yet recovered, he was regarded as "the master of those who know." In addition to the philosophers, the schoolmen and the Church fathers, whom an eager student might have found in any university city, Boccaccio could study at Naples better than elsewhere, the literature of Spain, Sicily and Provence, which had gravitated there since the time of Queen Eleanor, who had been granddaughter to William VIII of Poitou, the first of the Troubadours.* Elaborately formal as this was, whether in the *langue d'oc* or the Sicilian Court dialect, which, for a time, had caused all poets to be known as "Sicilians," it had been created to the sound of the lute and was far from being devoid of elegance. It had contained some true and some austere poets, like that Arnaut Daniel who wrote:

> "I am Arnaut who gathered air
> and with the oxen chase the hare
> and ever swim against the stream."

Good and bad successors these must have had, whose work Boccaccio came to know. The survival of the Courts of Love in Naples was bound to produce at least poetasters.

For the wide knowledge he acquired of curious lore of many sorts—medical, zoological, astrological and religious—Boccaccio had to thank King Robert's disposition, which turned to such books for solace in the years after he was stricken by the death of his son. Robert collected these assiduously and to the exclusion of classical works. But what counted more than all the rest for an aspiring poet was the "sweet new style" of the Tuscan writers, who, as makers both of verse and of prose, had begun in the later thirteenth century to eclipse

* In his *Dark Ages*, W. P. Ker traces to Duke William all that can be called modern poetry.

the older schools. First in Bologna, mainly by way of learned compilations in the vernacular, and later in the Tuscan towns, most of all in Florence, these had by now established the dialect to which Dante had given ascendancy in Italy. There were dictionaries and chronicles, books of mottoes (one of the most popular being by Paolo di Ser Pace, a man from Certaldo), and all manner of compilations. "Treasuries," "gardens," "banquets," commentaries and treatises on language abounded. There was as yet no prose fiction, but the foundations were laid, and Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Convito* were written. Poetry of a new kind, known at first as "scientific," had led the way, and joy had broken in, wooing the ear and discovering the possibilities of the vulgar tongue. With theology, "science" and legal theory, the Tuscan verse had engaged the interest of lively minds that earlier had been obliged to content themselves with the lives of the saints and of the cavaliers, with homilies and visions. There was a pre-occupation with language, with form and with philosophical content never known till then.

Cino da Pistoia, arriving in Naples in the same year that Boccaccio first saw Maria, knew all there was to know about the Tuscan writers, and the learned lawyer was himself a polished poet with "an affectionate soul,"* and a fine ear for the newly discovered music. He had played his part in developing the language in grace. He was the lover of Selvaggia, who had, he said, made him a poet—without, however, transforming his outlook.

Through Cino and others Boccaccio thus became acquainted with the wonderful new literary growth of which Guittone of Arezzo may be called the root,†

* De Sanctis' expression.

† Dante in his arrogance had despised Guittone as one who "always chose words and expressions that resemble the speech of the populace," but he admits him with the two Guidos as his "three Guides" in *Purgatorio*, xi, 97.

Guido Guinicelli of Bologna the stem, Guido Cavalcanti a strong branch, and Dante the surpassing flower. Guinicelli it was who wrote a *Sonnet to Lucy* that was as new a thing on earth as Wordsworth's poems to a girl of the same name, albeit it was in no other sense Wordsworthian—

> "And a snake's head stricken off suddenly
> Throbs never as then throbs my heart to hold
> Her body in these arms."*

—and from him came the famous line which Chaucer translated "for Pitie slippeth soone in gentil hartes," but Guinicelli called it love.

There was poetical form and language for Boccaccio to study in Cavalcanti, who, while he retained something of the Troubadour tremolo, had put virility into Tuscan verse, and when he came to write out of his own heart, as he did in his *Ballad of Exile*, he achieved a serene and sober melancholy never compassed by Petrarch. There were fervent expressions in the speech of the people in the erotic hymns of Jacopone, the Franciscan monk of Todi, and in the sonnets of Folgore of San Gemignano. Brunetto Latini, Dante's teacher, had expounded Aristotle and Ptolemy in Italian verse, cramming in as many facts as his lines would hold. Cecco Angioleri of Siena, the black sheep of the flock, had scoffed, calling them all "singers of rectitude and indignant souls." But he was the first of them to proclaim naturalism without metaphysical or didactic afterthought. Dante deprecated Cecco severely, but Boccaccio must have enjoyed him.

Above all he set Dante as his dead master, worthy a lifetime of worship without hope of emulation. And next to Dante came Petrarch as his breathing model, to whose perfections he gladly sacrificed every earlier effort of his own.

* Rossetti's translation.

Meanwhile he wrestled with his 'prentice tale, never guessing that he was the first to attempt realistic psychological representation in Italian prose—and therefore in modern letters. Painfully, as he went along, he forged his own language for the benefit of "enamoured youths and loving maidens." It is his poorest and his longest work. Into a maze of episodes he introduced all he had picked up of mythology and astronomy. He tried to imitate Dante and succeeded in being as tedious in allegory as any of the medieval mysteries. He achieved dullness as well as pretentiousness. He was intolerably discursive. Yet there is more in his first Labour of Love than an awkward display of ill-digested learning. For the first time a modern author applied vernacular prose to the task of describing scenes and incidents of courtship.

With "Thirteen most Pleasaunt and Delectable Questions" put by Maria, for whom he invented the name Fiammetta, Boccaccio described a contemporary Court of Love, and in doing so he created the germ of the *Decameron*. Imitative and clumsy, he yet introduced a new form and a new prose, and he enlivened it by impudence. The *Filocolo* is a monument to the powers of literature and of love, proving that the author spoke truly when he said that he was "called to this profession by God's will" and would "stand fast in the same," while "Love a long time in his heart had its dwelling-place." But here also was a serious lover who could laugh. It is pleasant to record that in time the book met with considerable success.*

* An English translation of the *Thirteen Questions* was made by "H.G." (Henry Grantham or Humphrey Gifford) in 1566. One of the questions is whether a virgin, a widow or a wife makes the most satisfactory mistress. Others, equally interesting, are more ingenious.

VIII

THE course of love did not run smooth, but it ran long and far. It led from Naples to the Third Circle of Paradise, and took Hell, Purgatory and Florence on the way back.

Its outline, however, is as simple as that of most loves viewed externally. For five years Boccaccio manifested devotion without reward, if also not without encouragement. Now and then he tried to free himself, without success. Coming of age as he completed his term of law study, he did, however, defy his father's plans for him. From then on he became a man of letters.

He remained in Naples. During the first year of his comparative freedom, perhaps longer, his father was far away representing the Bardi in Paris. Such a position was well remunerated. Therefore, whatever Boccaccino may have felt, he was able to support his son. Boccaccio permitted himself to be supported, though it is probable that he earned something by copying manuscripts. In the summer of his twenty-fourth year he became Fiammetta's promised lover. Late that autumn he won her as his mistress.

This held for over two years. Boccaccio's possession of his lady marks the profound distinction between his love and the loves of Dante and Petrarch, who were obliged, as it were, to spin their stories in solitude out of air.

Throughout the first five years of alternating hope and despair it is not to be thought that he led a celibate life, or even that Fiammetta expected of him a feat which

neither the young Petrarch nor the middle-aged Dante seriously attempted.* Those biographers who have considered it as essential to the scheme of dates here chosen, have been obliged to find another scheme to obviate its improbability. In fact, in the fourteenth century such things were conveniently understood. So, although we hear no more of them, perhaps starlings and parrots were still on the wing, and, while he was bound to Fiammetta alone, Boccaccio did not necessarily let them all fly by him.

His bondage, even in the matter of time and strength, was hard enough, but he felt no temptation to wait upon any other woman. At first, and for a long time, so humble an admirer could hope to see little of his lady except from a distance or by haunting her house, garden or church-goings, on the chance of a smile or a word. But he was a diligent and astute lover. He cultivated the good graces of Fiammetta's husband, of her friends, relatives and servants, and, in time he was invited to parties, especially in summer when she went to a family villa in the country, or to Baia for the bathing season. It was then, taking part in woodland walks and bathing picnics in the golden weather, that he noted how "the most honest gentlewomen, and of best account, disposing for awhile their womanly modesty and shamefastness, did use in all their merry meetings and sports an unwonted kind of unbridled liberty and irrequisite familiarity, and did more lasciviously assemble together in those places (privileged perhaps for such wanton pastimes) than anywhere else. And," he adds, smiling, "I was not only of this opinion, that with less stain to their honours, in those

* Guido Cavalcanti rebuked Dante even for his later "unfaithfulness" to Beatrice, but perhaps he referred to Dante's marriage. For his many other irregular affairs Beatrice in heaven rebukes him, but gently, and his shame is but momentary.

places in that company, and at those times they might do it."*

From the same experiences dates surely the further observation that "a woman can remain pure in the midst of corruption and every horror and vice as a ray of sunlight remains pure even when it falls on a filthy puddle."†

He would not have been Boccaccio, however, if he had not accumulated further kinds of learning during those years on the fringe of fashion. A woman might be a pure ray of sunshine, but what of woman's silly vanity, everlasting chatter, selfishness, jealousy, unscrupulousness? What a fate is that of husbands, "who in their blindness marry that they may escape from sorrows, or are induced to marry by others who would draw them hence? Nor do they perceive that they have issued out of one tangle into a thousand, until the event brings experience, but without power to turn back howsoever they repent?"

This last is from a tirade against marriage in his *Life of Dante*, a late book, and there are others in earlier books which are not mere echoes of the sanctified attacks upon woman by medieval writers. Fiammetta's lover looked at marriage and at women, and he decided that, as things were, wives were suitable only for "wealthy fools . . . noblemen and peasants." These he advises not to "believe anything their wives tell them unless there is proof," because women, in addition to their other faults, are inaccurate. For wedded wife he preferred "philosophy, who is a far better bride than any other."

Boccaccio was not a self-deceiver. He preferred to deceive Fiammetta's husband—no doubt with the utmost sympathy for his misfortune. This he proceeded to do

* *Amorous Fiammetta.* Bartholomew Young's translation, 1587. The somewhat obscure last sentence should probably read "I was not alone in this opinion," etc.

† *De Claris Mulieribus.*

—given suitable intimations by Fiammetta—on the first opportunity.

Before coming to an incident, which he has described repeatedly and with gusto in widely different books, we may profitably glance at the conceptions of love which Boccaccio inherited.

They were of mixed ancestry. Both "Platonic" and romantic love had entered the arena of European ideas by the gateways of Spain and Provence from Arabia and Persia. The dedication of himself to a poetess-princess of Cordova by Ibn Zaydun, the Moorish poet of the eleventh century, had a significance that was as foreign to Europe as was that of chivalrous knighthood. Both were mystical in a sense and a connection unfamiliar to the West. What was more, their mysticism conflicted with the Western mysticism. The medieval knight had been a plain soldier, the medieval husband had sought a wife that he might own her as a chattel, and passions outside wedlock were gratified with simplicity. Again, the erotic pagan poetry had been opposed by that Christian asceticism of which Augustine was the most powerful early exponent and Jerome the most active spirit. To the finer spirits of an Empire that had grown not merely corrupt but vapid, such asceticism had come like fresh air. One can hardly read without strong sympathy of the exodus from Rome to Egyptian and Palestinian hermitages, or of friendships like that between Jerome and Paula, the descendant of the Scipios and the Gracchi. But as soon as the impulse turned into an ideal of conduct, it had ugly results. Marriage remained necessary for the continuance of the race and as a lesser evil than burning. But love was damned. Although countless common men and women (monks and nuns too) made their beds and took no notice, yet they did not escape corruption by the ideal.

Matter was vile. Man was vile because he was part

matter. To save his spiritual part, which alone was precious, he must be purged, as far as lay in his power, of his material part. And as no matter was so obviously matter as that which related to the reproduction of the species, an offended God might best be appeased by sexual renunciation. From that to intellectual renunciation was only a step. Horror of sex was accompanied by a disgust at all merely human processes. One result of this was a startling callousness to mental as well as physical pain. Augustine treated his mistress of more than ten years' standing, who was the mother of his children, worse than if she were a dog.

For Augustine sexual virtue was entirely negative. From that we soon proceed to find life negative. In nineteenth-century Italy Leopardi's mother is an exaggerated but logical instance of this finding, and countless lives have been warped in a less spectacular manner by the doctrine of the worthlessness or the absurdity of the only world we know. Leopardi's mother rejoiced in the deformity of her son and regarded with envy those parents who lost their children in infancy. Leopardi himself became "incapable of experiencing any emotion simply and naturally" unless it were self-disgust. Yet she was a sane matron and he a gifted poet with a sharp sense of beauty and a loving heart. Like Œdipus, but for no crime against nature, humanity was asked to tear out its eyes before the spectacle of itself. If sly, unthinking nature had not been stronger than any ideal, the great ascetic thinkers would have smothered life as the dust of Vesuvius smothered Pompeii, and with life the power to think even spiritual thoughts. Fortunately, besides the heedless common man, and besides the avowed rebel or rascal, there have always been some—and these usually denied the title of thinkers—who have opposed man's perjury against nature. Writing avowedly to amuse,

such men may lack the assurance of the seer who issues commands or entreaties. Yet in their debonair assertion there is a more stable truth than in all the noble-sounding declarations of the rest. Rabelais is one such writer. Boccaccio is another.

The new impulse from the East, which showed itself most noticeably in the romantic attitude towards women and the cult of knightly courtesy, was anti-Christian in its essence but it did not attack religion. It ran alongside. With its power of life that was almost like the power of nature, the Roman Church seemed to be now on the side of man's awakened desires, now against them. The monasteries which kept the manuscripts of ancient Greece and Rome safe, let them also moulder in neglect. The Crusades sanctified a channel for the knightly spirit. The ideals of the Virgin and of Christ the Bridegroom became informed with eroticism. The Church condemned and upheld almost equally all those things which we understand as the lust of the eye and the pride of life. The conception of woman as the Circe who brutalizes men was amended with the view that a loved woman might redeem a man and transfigure love. She could be the medium between him and God. She could be—especially after she was dead—science and intellect personified. Beatrice was the redeeming philosophy by means of which the flesh was subdued by the mind and spirit. For was it not love that made life and moved the sun and all the stars? Dante may claim an almost complete success in creating such an apotheosis, but even Dante once or twice lets a cry escape him cursing one-sided love; and he was, Boccaccio assures us, a persistent fornicator of a low order. As for Petrarch, he lamentably failed to reconcile the conflict in himself between natural and ideal love; but he did at least depict the rebellion of the senses and the imagination, and he described the natural movements

of the heart. Besides being in the direct line of the Troubadours, he was busy rediscovering the pagan classics.

But what Dante and Petrarch shied at, Boccaccio humbly and gaily accepted, namely, that sensual love is the heart of life and the crown of nature, while at the same time it has aspects purely comic. Seeing women, not as men chose to imagine them, but as delightfully or shockingly themselves; gaining possession of his beloved as neither Dante nor Petrarch did; and losing that possession with the full humiliation that can accompany such a loss, he sounded the first note of naturalism in a modern language and a new note in any language. Literary historians never fail to point to Boccaccio's inferiority as a poet to Dante and as an artist to Petrarch. But it is to him that we owe most. To Dante and Petrarch we trace the view that all but a parcel of women, unworthy the name, are pure and passionless creatures, who, with reluctance, in return for marriage settlements, vows, and the selfless honour of motherhood, may be persuaded into sacrificing themselves to man's incomprehensible lust. This interesting reversal of the medieval view was deeply implanted in England and elsewhere for many generations. It was a saddening and a confusing view, from the consequences of which we have not yet quite escaped. But Boccaccio's stories of love can never have confused, saddened or falsified a decent human being. They are too full of smiling common sense.

IX

His Neapolitan inheritance of courtly love was not without merits. He found it laid down that love was in the first place sensual, in the second illicit or adulterous (marriage having no place in it) in the third secret, in the fourth difficult. To these should be appended, as natural corollaries, that it was in the first place also sacred, in the second lyrical, in the third disciplinary, in the fourth friendly. Love could not be wanton, because it was devoted; and it could not be venal, because, while the man was alike servant and champion, the woman was mistress and friend. It was, in fact, a highly intelligent theory of which the loyal practice demanded character on both sides. With the shining, if incomplete examples of Dante and Petrarch before him, Boccaccio perhaps demanded more of his own performance than even Fiammetta did, with the lutes of the Troubadours still trembling in her ears. But whatever his standards, he was determined upon possession if it might be. After some months of encouragement from Fiammetta in that direction, it happened that her husband, having business to attend to in the neighbourhood of Capua, was absent from home.

Boccaccio was informed—by whom if not by her?—that his opportunity had arrived. There was, however, further etiquette to be observed. Till the last moment things must at least appear to be impossible for the lover, and in the lady's surrender there must be no air of willingness. She must seem to be vanquished by forces against which none but a Lucrece could find a remedy. It would

seem that Fiammetta was more strict in such matters of procedure than in some of the fundamentals of romantic love.

Boccaccio acted with proper dispatch. He bribed her "nurse", a woman in whom we may find the original of Shakespeare's confidential women servants in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. Half laughing, half in tears, the servant helps to conceal him in her mistress's bed-curtains while the lady, in careful ignorance, goes to bed and to sleep. Wakened by his pleading presence, she plays the part of a virtuous wife taken by surprise. To her protests he opposes the threat of instant suicide, for which he has a dagger convenient. But he reminds her, never more impressively, of his dreams in which she figured as the being who was to bring him happiness. Presently, without alarming the household, she fulfils those dreams.*

So he became her accepted lover in the late October or early November of 1336, and this remained undiscovered except to confidants on either side. In *Amorous Fiammetta* the heroine exclaims, "How he loved my room and with what joy it saw him arrive!" This, more than any passage of comparable length, marks the difference between Fiammetta's lover and the lovers of Beatrice and Laura with their interminable poetic progeny. We see in it that acceptance of reality and that feeling for daily life which give its quality to Boccaccio's best work. Here is the touching truth of the terrestrial lover as compared with the celestial. Laura's room did not rejoice when Petrarch entered it, however much he may have admired and trembled. Beatrice gave her embrace in the unfurnished

* Boccaccio has described the scene at least four times in different disguises which vary and contradict one another in points but are alike in breathing delight and experience. The character of the nurse appears in *Amorous Fiammetta*. There is more than one sign that Shakespeare was familiar with this book.

air of a lodging in Paradise. And while those ladies dazzled and blessed with their smiles, neither a murmur nor a giggle ever passed between them and their adorers. The loves of Dante and Petrarch were impassioned, but were wilfully severed from love's natural root. Hence we find their reappearance as wilted flowers in the poems of countless "affectionate shepherds," imitators of Petrarch in Italy and in England. Thomas Watson two and a half centuries later, in his highly derivative "Passionate Centurie of Love," is obliged to omit the passion and invent a mistress for the sake of his metres, instead of the other way about. He has to excuse his poems as "idle toyes proceedinge from a younglinge frenzie," and his introducer, Lyly, wisely noting that "Achilles painted the Phenix by hearsay not by sight" vainly hopes that "as false glasses shewe the fairest faces, so fine glasses amend the baddest fancies." Watson, of course, plumes himself upon his delicacy. "Although Venus be my verse," he boasts, "yet her slipper is missed out." With a few exceptions the slipper is omitted down Petrarch's long line until that line culminates in Tennyson. But Boccaccio knew Venus closely enough never to forget that she wore slippers.

Celestial lovers have, however, the advantage of being uninterrupted. In the winter of 1337–8 Boccaccio, returning from a trying journey (perhaps from Capua, where his father was about to make certain financial arrangements for him which required his occasional presence), found Fiammetta's manner altered. She made difficulties about their meetings and, when he displayed jealousy, she protested. She still used her power to charm him but refused to be dictated to. Desire alone restrained in him the impulse to break with her then and there. Thus they continued until the summer, when she forbade him to follow her, as he had done on previous holidays, to Baia.

He did go to Baia, but only to see her in the distance. When she came back, things grew worse for him. About that time he came to know that he was not her only lover. There is even the suggestion that she had accepted one whom he had reckoned his friend. His several accounts conflict in some respects. But we gather that Fiammetta had no intention of confining herself to a single lover. She would love in her own way or not at all. Probably she offered Boccaccio a similar latitude. In one of the most spirited of the *Decameron* tales* he gives the daring but winning portrait of a lady whose nature was of this overflowing kind, and we suspect that a gallant, golden-haired, essentially innocent, and extremely witty Fiammetta was his model for Madonna Filippa. But he was young in Naples. The breaking of their intimacy was drawn out for many months, and if it was she who had brought about the conditions, there is every indication that he put a term to them. He did so in anger and humiliation, but not without hope of a change of mind in his chosen mistress. Knowing all, he still loved her.

In many passages of his books, as in four or five sonnets, a ballad and a madrigal, he laments his lot and he curses Baia. He would have had the name of Baia perish. But its beauties and the beauties of Naples live in his lines as never before or since. In the *Filostrato* the most splendid verses are those in which Troilus, betrayed, revisits every scene of his happy love: in *Amorous Fiammetta* the light that sometimes is on sea or land illumines everything upon which the forsaken woman looks.

For a time Boccaccio was shattered. To Dante's verdict, that the keenest suffering is in the remembrance of lost bliss, he was able to add a rider that the loss of a known good may be easier to bear than the loss of an illusion.

* 6, vii.

Now he saw that Fiammetta's eyes had been "false" as well as "starry." She had betrayed him and love. Yet almost in the same moment he will have it that her soul is "the chastest that ever was in woman." He is torn between obscenity, the desire for death, and the determination to win her again as never before.

The sobriety of his few allusions in letters has a hint of exhaustion that touches us more nearly even than his artistic expressions. One thing alone he was sure of. His love for Fiammetta could not remove. This being so, do what she might, she was for ever his—not his unpossessed lady, not his ideal love, but his Fiammetta. He had bent all his nature to serve her, and she for a time had given him full delight. She could never become, as Beatrice to Dante or Laura to Petrarch, either an intellectual mistress or a mere personification of love—not were he and she in heaven, unless in heaven "love was not." The last he ever saw of her, she being unconscious of his observation, she was seated at some pleasure party with a garland of red flowers round her blonde head. Beautiful as an angel she looked, and small scarlet flames seemed to flicker from her garland. But she remained an earth-born angel, human as himself.

Boccaccio makes no mention of what his father was doing for him or about him these four years. Old Boccaccino had at last discovered, to borrow an image from Sir Thomas More, that one might as well try to collect milk from a he-goat in a sieve as persuade Giovanni to become a money-maker. And Giovanni's imprudent and hopeless love-affair had not made things easier for his parent. This parent must have been relieved when he learned that Maria d'Aquino was finished with his son. But he had affairs of the purse that may well have excluded his son's affair of the heart. In short he had become a poor man. In the autumn after his son abandoned law he had

still been a rich one. In the summer of his son's happiness he had resigned from the Bardi. Fourteen months later the Bardi Bank failed. Boccaccino, who had stood guarantor for a Certaldo man in some business deal, found himself obliged to sell some of his small remaining property to pay a debt of 100 florins.

Exactly what brought about the crash, in which other Florentine banks as well as the Bardi were to be involved, is obscure. In Tuscany a war against Petrarch's host, Mastino della Scala, for the possession of Lucca had prepared the ground for a financial panic in Florence, and when Venice made a separate peace many fortunes were seen to be irrecoverably sunk. Under Castracane's depredations Florentine money had tended to flow into Naples rather than the other way about, and many merchants had removed both themselves and their capital there. We may see in Boccaccino's sale of the Corbignano estate in 1336 an early sign of his uneasiness. His later financial arrangement for his son at Capua, which was completed in 1338, was perhaps more shrewd than affectionate.

The major blow to the Florentine money-merchants was a double one, coming from England and from France. It is an ironical, if not a unique fact in the history of finance, that the Italian bankers furnished both these countries with money in their long war, and that Edward II had gone to the trouble of recommending his own bankers to the French king and to Louis of Valois as well as to the Pope and Cardinals. But war is war, and those who furnish arms to both sides at once do not invariably carry off the spoils. Philip VI, in desperate need of cash, turned on the Lombards to pillage them. Edward III, worried by Scotland and owing the Bardi and the Peruzzi alone over a million florins, defaulted. Being detained for his debts in France in the third year of his reign, along with

the Earl of Derby, he had repaid the Bardi for financing his expedition there, but he had done so by borrowing from yet another Italian house, the Lucchesi. Back in England the following year, he accepted the Bardi's offer of £20 daily for twelve months, assigning to them in return all the English customs. Accordingly they had acted as his war-time merchants, handling his revenues and his wools and deducting their own expenses. But the wool trade under war conditions was highly speculative. Hence the Bardi had invited private investments at home and abroad. Suddenly they found themselves in a tight corner and unable to answer the calls of Christendom's capitalists. Everybody in Florence fell under suspicion of bankruptcy. Peter of Aragon defaulted also. There was famine in Tuscany, followed by epidemics. In 1339 the sun performed its centenary eclipse in the sign of Cancer, always a presage of calamity.

In excusable irritation Boccaccino asked his son how, by the life he was leading, he hoped to earn money. All he got in reply was to be asked, with the irrelevant logic of youth, how such a consideration would have affected Virgil or Ovid.

To such rejoinders the natural response is a box on the ears—which, presumably, would have acted no differently upon this poet than it would upon the poets he named. There are signs, however, that Boccaccino loved Jeanne de la Roche's obstinate son. Therefore, instead of cutting him off with a lira in his twenty-sixth unproductive year, he had bought the produce of a manor at S. Maria Maggiore, a village near Capua, which manor appropriately belonged to the Church of S. Lorenzo in that place. Giovanni was to be at the trouble of supervising and collecting his profits on the holding, which was no doubt worked on the finicking *mezzadria* system of a half-share with the peasants who did the work. If effi-

ciently managed over an average year, Giovanni's returns were reckoned at twenty-six florins. It was the barest pittance.

Boccaccino was detained in Florence. His wife had died, and her jointure, for some reason, passed with her. His son's comment upon this was that it served his father right for having deserted Jeanne de la Roche. But we trust that he confided his judgment merely to the world at large, sparing his parent's harassed ear. What he felt far more than the loss of his stepmother was the absence from Naples of Niccolò Acciajuoli. Niccolò had gone for three years to Greece to recover large properties there for the Taranti family, and if his departure—occurring at the time when Fiammetta first yielded herself to his friend's arms—was not immediately bewailed, it created a sad blank when she was there no longer. In moments of hope it seemed to Boccaccio as if Niccolò's presence might have saved the situation. There was, moreover, a different reason for missing him. His influence in Naples was already considerable. And Boccaccio found that, when mistress and money desert together, friendships, once thought to be independent of the conduct of either, grow scarce. Old Andalò was in heaven. Dionisio Roberti, who had arrived only in 1338 from Avignon (where he had been acting as King Robert's Provençal Seneschal), was old as well as eminent, and while he was a precious link with Petrarch and a well-disposed person from whom one might garner scholarly help and hope for patronage, there could be no great intimacy between him and a young man who lacked his earlier acquaintance and had still to make his own mark in the world.

In his new solitude and for reasons of economy Boccaccio went to live in the country. His retreat was rough. It was also poetic, for he lodged at Piedigrotto under Mount Falerno and above Posilipo, where lay the bones of Virgil.

Here, on the slopes that form the northern end of the Bay of Naples overlooking Baia, he adopted perforce a simpler way of living than Petrarch ever dreamed of. He did not pretend that he enjoyed dressing and eating like a peasant.

Patronage of some sort was offered him by Duke Charles of Durazzo. The Duke seems to have asked him to write a poem. After an attempt, however, Boccaccio begged to be excused on the ground of his agitated condition. Agitated he was, but the subject of the poem, doubtless dictated by the Duke without regard to his attainment or his tastes, probably accounts for his refusal. Instead he threw himself into serious study. He appealed with success to Roberti for directions in his studies, seeking when possible to verify authorities quoted in his reading. And from Paul of Perugia he got help in classical mythology. From both men he must have borrowed books. Assiduously he explored (in the originals, in translation, or in extracts) works by Virgil, Ovid, Martial, Apuleius, Plautus, Lucan, Fulgentius, Catullus, Theocritus, Moschus, Achilles Tatius and Statius—of this last especially the *Thebais*, which caused him serious stumbling.* He ransacked Northern French tales and Provençal verse narratives equally for examples and for subjects. He studied Brunetto Latini's "Little Treasury," hunted for form and deep meanings in the Tuscan poets, and searched Dante and Petrarch for the secrets of poetry as though these were the scriptures and poetry the bread of life—as who shall say it is not? "Poets," says Boccaccio, "are really men of wisdom." Either Barrile or Roberti encouraged him to write to Petrarch, and Petrarch replied, adjuring him, above all things, to study Virgil. Until then Boccaccio had failed alike in admiration and in knowledge of the Mantuan. Now, making a bonfire of countless verses of his own, which were unworthy of one whom

* The *Silvæ*, of the same Neapolitan author, had not yet been recovered.

Laura's lover had deigned to notice, he swore over Virgil's grave to devote himself to poetry. Almost as much as Petrarch's servant he had regarded Virgil as a wizard. He looked all the more in the *Æneid* for the difficult heart of truth which he believed should underlie, in true poetry, equally difficult allegory. His study was a voyage of discovery of his own ignorance.

Before coming to Piedigrotto he had already begun a second book leaving the first unfinished. Working upon this in his new surroundings he started a third, finishing neither.* Both were epics in Tuscan verse, this being a new experiment in language. They were in the eight-line stanza, having two alternate rhymes for the first six lines followed by a rhymed couplet which introduced a third rhyme. The *Ottava* with only two rhymes had been used by the Sicilians, and as it was a singing metre it survived in a rough form in the people's songs called *Rispetti*. The *Terza rima*, on the other hand, had been the heroic measure of the Middle Ages, but modified by Dante it had acquired a capacity for supple satire and comment which made of it an instrument for what one may call prose-thought, and it could compass comedy as well as tragedy. Boccaccio's technical invention, afterwards perfected by Ariosto and Tasso, was to use the eight-line stanza but to add a third rhyme to the two already existing, thus combining the *Ottava* with the *Terza rima* for the purposes of epic. Complete mastery did not come to him. But his examples have a magnificent freshness, and all the credit of the initiator is his.

Each book was dedicated to Maria d'Aquino. He might well say "Thou art my muse: I have proved it and

* The precise order of Boccaccio's earlier books cannot be discovered as he worked upon several over a long period. A complete research into his sources has not yet, I understand, been undertaken, but there are traces of all the authors mentioned above.

know it." The second begun—which was the first in verse—was designed to bring her back to him and so to "restore his life to its first self-confidence." His title, *Filostrato*, signified to him *Man Vanquished by Love*, with the underlying theme that love is the discipline of man's soul. "Everyone without love," he holds, "is lost, whatever his condition." He found his subject in the Trojan legend. From the time of Nero, who had been fascinated by Troy, all writings concerning that place had found an audience in the south of Europe. The twelfth century Troubadour monk of Poitiers, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, working from an enlarged—now vanished—edition of those fictitious authors known as Dictys and Dares, had written the romance of Troy, and the "History" of Troy had been undertaken by the Sicilian, Guido Colonna, disciple of Thomas Aquinas and tutor to Philip the Fair. These and other efforts had usurped the *Iliad* in medieval taste. Boccaccio, in his need, fastened upon the pale and sketchy indications of the love episode between young Troilus and Criseide. Into this he poured his own feelings, his conviction that between sensual and Platonic love there need be no exclusiveness, and his delicate, despairing sympathy for Fiammetta's nature. He tells her in his dedication

"I have sought in the old histories what personage I might choose as messenger of my secret and unhappy love, and I have found Troilus, son of Priam, who loved Criseyde. His miseries are my history. I have sung them in light rhymes in my own Tuscan, and so when you read the lamentations of Troilus, and his sorrow at the departure of his love, you shall know my tears, and sighs, my agonies, and if I vaunt the beauties and charms of Criseyde you will know that I dream of yours."

* Lydgate's *Troy Book* is mostly a paraphrase of Colonna's dreary effort. Gower uses stories from it in his *Confessio Amantis*, and Chaucer refers to him as a writer on Troy.

When finished, the *Filostrato* was to be a splendid invention, quick-moving and full-rigged, bearing a cargo of reality in its rough-hewn hold. It is an heroic epic in which the figures are unheroic men and women, an exaltation of love and life above riches, a novel in verse that can soar and plunge. Everything in it is new except the crude framework which is composed from 106 borrowed* lines, while Boccaccio writes 5,598. From what was originally no more than a shadowy incident told with a sneer, he created one of the world's love-stories which has fascinated great poets and compelled a thousand readers to fall under the charm of a heroine whose virtue was frail. "Have I thee in my arms?" Boccaccio's lovers exclaim when at length they come together. "Do I dream or art thou thyself? My love, can it be true that I am with thee?"—questions which some may find more touching in their whispered authenticity than anything we can detach from *Romeo and Juliet.* Yet Boccaccio will hold up the very first scene of delight by a discourse against the love of money.

"Money-lovers will say Love is folly compared with money; but they will lie. They do not perceive that in a single hour they will lose themselves and their money, without having known in all their lives what joy is. May the gods make them sad and give their gains to lovers."

If you find no enjoyment in such interruptions, condemning them as inartistic, you are no Boccaccio-reader. He is, as one of his friends annoyed him by saying, "a man of glass," and if you delight in him you delight in his transparencies. Probably he wearied Fiammetta with bedroom discourses which she found ill-timed.

The other epic in the octosyllabic stanza, the *Teseide*,

* Chaucer uses 2,730 of Boccaccio's lines, condensing them in his translation to 2,583, and adding 5,656 of his own.

was written "to please Fiammetta" while he is "thinking of past joy in present misery," and he leaves her to guess whether he is himself represented by Palamon or by Arcite, though there is no doubt that none but she is Emilia, the blonde sister of the Amazon Queen, who plays in the garden of the prison unaware that she is watched. His hope is that she will understand him to be Palamon, who wins because he has invoked Venus, whereas Arcite has called merely upon Mars. As Boccaccio says at the end of a little tale,* that is much later and far more entertaining than the *Teseide*, "Now long live love, and perish war, and all that wage it." He never forgot to maintain that "poets are friends of peace."

The story of Palamon and Arcite is, if we except the dedication to Fiammetta, the only readable part of this immensely long and tedious effort of over 9,000 verses written in heroic emulation of the *Æneid*. But it was into this part, which he conjured from nothing, that the author put his personal experience, especially his experience of jealousy. De Sanctis has said† that Boccaccio sees things too minutely to write a perfect epic; that he lacks "depth and idealism" and dwells upon externals. Perfection is not Boccaccio's achievement. Yet only those whom Thomas Watson calls "malicious high foreheads" will question that Boccaccio looked to some purpose into a woman's eyes. Here is his description of Emilia's eyelashes:

"Above all they were very black indeed, and thin . . . so that one could see the whiteness between them. . . ."

It was this alertness to detail that later enabled him to tell "correctly" the first "real and true love-stories" of Europe in the moment when he was trying to give us an

* *Decameron*, VII, iv.
† *The Medieval Mind*, vol. ii.

epic. That Europe was quick in recognition is proved by the immediate fame of even the *Teseide*, which went into many translations—in French, in Greek, in English, and in Italian prose—during the two hundred years that followed.

But none of those three books was to be finished in Naples, and their unfinished state was rough and unsatisfactory, though the congenial subject of *Troilus and Cressida* enabled Boccaccio to leap forward with a strong foretaste of mastery. So far his writing, like his omnivorous reading, was mainly by way of preparatory study and to redeem, as far as might be, the "irrecoverable years." At intervals he set out on tours of inspection, which were troublesome, to the *podere* of the Capuan farm. Or he visited Naples for literary material, or to get the news from one of his few remaining friends, or to survey again the stations of his love, so that he saw the Neapolitan scene with different eyes while not forgetting any of his first impressions. Steadied by two years of honest application, he was able to see Fiammetta, if only in the distance, without being overthrown.

But troubles of a different sort in Florence encroached upon him in his retreat, and he was forced to leave it towards the end of 1340, less than three months before Petrarch arrived at Robert's court. The death of his half-brother, Francesco, whose birth had helped to drive him away, helped to call him home again after all those years. His father was left solitary as well as poor. Other children of his had died in the severe epidemic of 1340. Aged sixty and embittered, he begged his surviving son to come and live with him. Although this was the last thing that son wished, he obeyed. He might disapprove of and even detest his father as an individual, but he could not refuse so plain a duty. "We ought," he says, "to learn to bear the yoke of our fathers, and should honour with the

greatest reverence their trembling old age." Also, Boccaccino, while making his request, stopped the provision of the Capuan farm, so there was not much choice but to make a virtue of filial duty.

Travelling northward in the same severe season as he had come south, Boccaccio accordingly returned for the first time to the place of his childhood, which he never ceased to hate. His father now lived in the Santa Felicità quarter across the river in a house he had bought seven years ago in the year of the Arno flood, when three of the four bridges, including the old Roman one—the original wooden Ponte Vecchio—had been swept away and Giotto had returned from Naples to repair the damage and beautify the town.

It was the home, says Boccaccio in his *Ameto*, of a "cold uncouth, miserly old man," bereaved of everything by the justice of Heaven—a dark, dumb and dismal dwelling, where complaints were the only conversation and a laugh never rang out. Life outside was soon to be as bad and worse. It might have been of Florence rather than of the sad goddess that Lydgate wrote:

> "Princesse of woo and wepynge, Proserpyne,
> Which harboroweth sorow even at thyn herte roote,
> Admyth this Bochas for a man of thyne."

Part III

LIGHT

I

He had arrived in time to see the reversal of a prosperity that Florence had enjoyed for more than ten years since the death of Castracane. During the absence of Lewis of Bavaria the city had been built up with more energy than ever. Giotto, at his death, had been succeeded as master of works for the cathedral, by Andrea Pisano who had hung the first great bronze gates in place, and he in turn was followed by Talenti who discarded Giotto's plan for the spire, finding it "German and antiquated."* Gaddi, Passavanti, Arnoldi, Simone Martini (back from Naples) and the Orcagni brothers stand out as others who put into stone, metal and paint the energy which has made Florence what she is. None the less old Boccaccino's financial troubles were symptomatic of a troubled State.

The Florentines at that moment were about to pay heavily for two blunders made by the advice of a leading citizen before the Emperor left Italy. Firstly, when King Robert had refused to help them against Pisa, they had asked help of Lewis of Bavaria who had sent them a handful of troops and installed a Vicar in Tuscany. This had displeased their Guelph allies. Secondly, they had failed to seize the offer made by Lewis's disbanded and unpaid German horse to sell Lucca to them for 80,000 florins. Their neglect here was in contradiction of their usual policy, and they were the more annoyed when a Genoese picked up the city under their noses for less than half this

* Interesting when we remember that the spire of the Badia, one of the loveliest in Florence, is the work of the German, Arnolfo de Cambia.

sum. Over the following years, in which they tried to take Lucca by force, they incurred a debt of 450,000 florins, and in spite of a military victory and the payment of money on account to Petrarch's patron, Mastino della Scala, (into whose hands Lucca had meanwhile fallen) they were cheated of their prize. Lucca, by treachery, was occupied by the Pisans, with the Visconti as a growing menace behind them.

Allying themselves with Venice, the Florentines took Padua from della Scala, and, as the city did not wish for liberty, traded it to Petrarch's other tyrant friend, Carrara. Then it was that Venice deserted to della Scala, who had been robbed of Parma by the Visconti, and Florence was left in a dangerous situation, not the less that she was one of the very few remaining free towns. Capponi says that "many barons and prelates and rich Neapolitans withdrew the money they had placed in the Florentine banks."

After the epidemic and famine of 1340—in which 15,000 Florentines died—the city had suffered from a class war, and a small group, contrary to the Commune's custom, had invested power in an outsider. There had been fighting, with much bloodshed, on the bridges between the artisans and the Bardi and Frescobaldi following. This man, who was called Agobbio, was removed by King Robert, but not before, seeking domination, he had bribed the artisans by banishing the two magnate families. His term of office, harmful to the Commune as a whole, created the first symptoms of class-consciousness in the workers, who were later to call themselves the Ciompi.

In their exile, the defeated magnates inevitably allied themselves with the dispossessed nobles of earlier date, and their plots had come to centre about the person of Walter of Brienne, who, sixteen years earlier, had acted acceptably enough for twelve months as Charles of

Calabria's vicegerent in Florence. By adroit conspiracy Walter's return was now brought about.

Styling himself the Duke of Athens, he had married a daughter of Philip of Taranto by his divorced wife, Ithamar Comnena, and therefore he claimed a doubly royal descent. Machiavelli calls him "in every respect contemptible," Boccaccio "an artisan of crimes and a contriver of treasons." Robert himself had such grave suspicions concerning his shady kinsman and former representative, that, upon hearing of his Florentine post, he wrote him a letter of solemn warning.

The people, having nothing against Walter in the past, and being ignorant of his connections with the exiled magnates and nobles, received him willingly after their recent sufferings. It augured well that the mean-looking, little dark-skinned man with the long thin beard took up his quarters modestly in the S. Croce Convent, a place dedicated to civil liberty. They gave him power of administration in the city under the Government, and made him Captain-General of the forces against the Pisans, who had beaten them shockingly the year before.

He came in August, 1342, and left just within the year. But that year is one of the most ignominious in the story of Florence.* Learning from Agobbio's example, he tried to curry favour with the baser sorts by means of lavish treats for themselves and confiscations and executions elsewhere. Against the protests of those responsible in the government he got himself popularly proclaimed ruler of Florence for life, and he was carried in triumph from his convent to plunder and occupy the Palace of the Signoria. In so doing he had the support not only of the rabble but of the Peruzzi and their business associates, the Acciajuoli—one of whom, Agnolo, was

* Boccaccio gives his account of Walter's "uncouth story" in *De Casibus Virorum*, which English readers will find in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.

their Archbishop. To flatter the Ciompi he gave them a meaningless Consul and a standard with a lamb painted on it.

But he was no sooner installed at headquarters with his dissolute French soldiers than he made peace with the Pisans instead of fighting them, recalled the Bardi and the Frescobaldi, whom the Ciompi feared, confiscated the bills of patriotic merchants who had paid for the war, jealously persecuted the very nobles who had helped him to his place, ruined the Guilds, Frenchified the fashions to the point of vulgar absurdity, encouraged his following in ugly licence, and nominated three favourites—only one of them a Florentine—as his henchmen in oppression.

The city was laid under "as many slavish laws as she had citizens,"* and the execution of the laws was unmerciful. Liberty became the exile, and "innumerable anxieties"* took her place. Citizens of any class dared scarcely whisper their thoughts. One of them, old Bettone Cini, who spoke in public against the monstrous taxes, had his tongue torn out in such a way that he died of it.

That Walter overdid it was his own undoing. Cini's fate roused every section of the Commune from discontent to action. The Ciompi, though they were still pandered to, saw themselves cheated of power. Plots were formed throughout the city, at first among people of different ranks and parties, then in correspondence. The Bardi and the Frescobaldi and the "naturally well-meaning" Archbishop Agnolo—as Machiavelli calls him—were all involved.

The Duke, informed of this, planned to slaughter 300 of the leading citizens by summoning them to an alleged Council, but they stayed away and he was nervous at the moment of undertaking mass executions. For a month he and the malcontents avoided each other's traps. Then

* *Amorous Fiammetta.*

one day, gathering to the sound of a bell in the Old Market, the Florentines declared themselves. They threw open the prisons, looted the Governors' houses and formed a provisional government—half people, half magnates—with the Archbishop at its head. Messengers, whom Walter dispatched to the Market from the Palace where he and his soldiers had barricaded themselves, were either killed or won over by the crowd.

From the Palace, when his abdication was demanded, he begged for a truce. Secure in their triumph but afraid of offending King Robert, the Florentines, who filled every inch of the great Piazza below, consented on one condition. He was to throw them his Governors who were with him. These were Baglioni of Perugia, Cerrethieri Bisdomini, and William of Assisi. After some parleying, during which Bisdomini and Baglioni managed to slip away unseen, Walter said that he would do as they asked. With William of Assisi was his son, a handsome boy of sixteen who had no part in politics. Perhaps Walter hoped that the lad's presence might incline the mob to mercy. It did not so happen. The people satisfied their fury, especially upon the innocent victim. In the Square of the Commune's freedom they tore him and his father to pieces, and they ate the pieces.

It was the feast of St. Anne, 26 July, 1342. The day has been held sacred in the City of the Lily ever since. Eleven days later, having been concealed by the ever prudent Archbishop, Walter unharmed was conducted to the Casentino, and there forced, under threat of being taken back to Florence, to sign his abdication He proceeded, *via* Venice, to Naples to enjoy the 400,000 florins amassed in Florence during his stay—having been careful to send the money away well in advance. The Florentines passed a statute which promised 10,000 florins to the man who would bring them Walter's head. Walter

survived however until the battle of Poitiers, when, it is said, he was despatched by a Florentine hand.

To scenes like these Boccaccio had come from the city of "beauty, noble blood and worth," of "gay words and good examples," where Fiammetta's room had welcomed him, at least for a time, and where he had acquaintances who loved learning for its own sake. His comparative friendlessness in Florence upon his return may be noted as yet another indication that he was a mere child when he first left the city. If he had been as much as sixteen he could hardly have felt so exiled as he declares he did. Within three months we find him writing to Acciajuoli bitterly as from a strange place—"I can write nothing here where I am in Florence, for if I should I must write not in ink but in tears. My only hope is in you, and you alone can change my unhappy fate."

By this letter, sent before the trouble over the Duke of Athens, it may be that he hoped Niccolò could help to restore Fiammetta to him, but more certainly the appeal is for his own restoration to Naples. Dionisio Roberti had just died, whereby he lost his chief hope of Neapolitan influence, but Niccolò was a rising man in the kingdom. Rather he was *the* rising man.

Born three or four years before Boccaccio, it is said, and out of wedlock, this extraordinary young man had not left Florence for Naples until he was twenty. Hence, though the two had both attended da Strada's school, their friendship originated in Naples. His grandfather had been among the first of the Florentine traders in Naples, where he had sold fine cloth and feathers to King Robert's grandmother. One of his uncles, an associate of the Peruzzi Bank, had gone as an envoy along with the Bardi to Naples to offer King Robert the government of Florence when Henry VII was threatening. Two years later the Emperor had executed him, with seven of his kinsmen, at

Poggibonsi after a victory there. Niccolò was therefore orphaned in the year of Boccaccio's birth. Square-headed, ambidextrous, hard, ambitious, energetic, realistic and with a genius for finance, he was the very antithesis of his unworldly friend. But Niccolò must have been charming when young. At eighteen he married a girl of the Spini banking firm. At twenty-one King Robert appointed him tutor to young Louis of Taranto, whose father, Philip, had died that year, leaving Catherine de Courteney a widow with three sons, of whom Louis was the second. Soon Niccolò was Catherine's secretary and factotum to the Taranti family. It was frequently said, though not with truth, that Catherine was his mistress in a double sense.

The Acciajuoli and Peruzzi Societies, once inferior to that of the Bardi, then did a heavy trade in wine and Apulian grain, besides lending huge sums to England. Niccolò, now a leading partner in the Acciajuoli bank, prospered in all he did. His visit to the Morea had greatly enriched the Tarantesi and enhanced his reputation. He received large grants of lands in Greece and became recognized as a force in Naples, although few can have guessed how high he would climb. Boccaccio regarded him with something like adoration as his dear and efficient Pandarus; missing him in absence "as Penelope Ulysses or Dido Æneas." Niccolò loved nothing but himself, his family as part of himself, and money as his prime necessity.

In Boccaccio's second year in Florence this friend came there with Barrile, now Provençal Seneschal, to convey Robert's sanction for the Duke of Athens's appointment. How far Acciajuoli was implicated in the Duke's plans, history does not say, but events suggest that he was not ignorant of them. It is noteworthy that the Acciajuoli Bank was not involved in the general financial failure until two years after the Duke had turned traitor to most of

those who raised him to power. It thus remained solvent almost four years longer than the Bardi. The Duke's connection with the Taranti will be remembered. Later on, when he had become a man with a price on his head, the Taranto steward did not forget this, but pleaded for him successfully with the Pope.

A second concern of Niccolò's in Florence was the foundation of a burying-place for himself and his family, which would command public attention, it might be hoped, long before it was occupied. He had chosen a commanding site out at Galuzzo. Besides his relative, the Archbishop, he could claim an uncle who had taken Franciscan vows. Piety and family pride were thus alike gratified by an impressive sepulture, and another Florentine architect was enabled to produce a masterpiece. The tomb, which would be contained in a monastery, was dedicated to S. Lorenzo, after whom Niccolò's eldest son was named.

Boccaccio helped his friend to draw up the deeds for the Certosa, which is to-day one of the sights of the Florentine countryside. Niccolò's visit, with its Neapolitan news and its account of the new Laureate from Barrile (Niccolò had not as yet seen Petrarch), was the keenest pleasure he had experienced since his return. Existence, however, had been already eased by his father's taking a second wife—again for money—in the person of Bice di Ubaldini de Bostichi, a lady of that famous house, who seems to have been well disposed towards her stepson. A son, Jacopo, was born of the union just when the Duke of Athens was at the height of his naughtiness. Accepting Giovanni's call to poetry as best he might, the mollified Boccaccino installed him in an apartment, or "half-house," in the San Ambrogio quarter near one of the gates. This was shortly before Christmas, when Giovanni was still in his twenty-ninth year.

He was working harder than ever before, and if he was not yet able to write cheerful letters, there was joy enough in many pages of the books which he produced fairly quickly during the next few years. These books form the body of his Italian work, with the exception of the *Decameron*, for which he was already collecting material without any definite idea of how he might put it to a good use. At the same time he continued his Latin studies, and he assembled facts of the most diverse kinds for later encyclopædic works.

One of these—the *De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium*—he actually began when he was in his thirtieth year, having obtained patronage for it from King Hugo of Cyprus. As a member of the de Lusignan family Hugo was related to the Angevins, who had bought from his family the title of King of Jerusalem. He had been a friend of Andalò del Nero, and old Boccaccino had arranged a loan of money from the Bardi for his daughter's marriage. From one of these sources, or from other friends whom there were in Naples, Forli and Ravenna, this patronage was secured.* But Boccaccio never met the King, who is said to have been "virtuous, gracious and devout," and he did not get the length of writing the dedication until fifteen years later, at which time Hugo was obliged to abdicate, dying a year later. The book was to be Boccaccio's life work. A compendium of ancient learning and legend, it was to summarize for the men of the Renaissance the critical and creative ideas of ten centuries. Further, it was to contain the first modern definition and defence of poetry, and would incorporate directly autobiographical passages which are among

* Salutato in his *Epistolario* has a story that Boccaccio owed Hugo's patronage to the astrologer, Piero Dagonari of Prato, but this is doubtful. Boccaccio addressing Hugo in his dedication says: "From your exalted position you have chosen me, as one supposed to enjoy deep and wide erudition in such matters, to be the author of this vast work."

the most delightful Boccaccio ever wrote. "In reading it," says Saintsbury, "an Englishman might excusably think that he is reading one of our own Elizabethan critics." He might have added, "poets or lovers." Our earliest cyclopedist, Bartholomew Glanvil, compiling his *De Proprietatibus Rerum* in the thirteenth century, made a good effort, but it did not occur to him as to Boccaccio to sum up the liberal arts in the phrase—"The source of Poetry has ever been the bosom of God."

At the same time he began also an Italian history of the Tartars, who had engaged his interest in Zibaldone's *Miscellany*. But with this he did not persevere. Instead, he worked upon the three books he had started in Naples, and he began four more, finishing one of these quickly. It was his way to write many books concurrently, turning from one to another as he felt disposed. But on occasion he would run off the whole, or almost the whole of one, setting the others aside. The history of the Tartars was the only book he neglected to finish.

For a time in Florence he put away all his Neapolitan beginnings to write the *Ameto*. Entirely Florentine, this is sometimes called *The Comedy of the Florentine Nymphs*. Examined closely, it is a collection of stories told by seven women known to Boccaccio who do not love their husbands. In form it is a pastoral romance—prose interspersed with passages of verse—in which elements of Ovid, Theocritus and Dante make an odd blend. The theme is the triumph of Nature, in the shape of Love, over Nature, in the shape of the barbarian, with the result that all the arts and all knowledge come into being.

A young hunter, Admeto, finds a lovely nymph, Lia, asleep in the woods near Florence. As he gazes at her his heart has a new experience. It fills with tenderness. No longer can he follow his cruel trade, no longer look at other nymphs with a concupiscent eye. If Lia will take

him for her love, he will become a harmless shepherd. Lia plunges him naked into a fountain, from which he emerges a man instead of a savage. He makes his obeisance to Venus as

> "The light of heaven, threefold and one,
> The beginning and the end of everything."

Lia then introduces him to the circle of her friends and their shepherd lovers, with whom he comports himself well. They all sit in the shade talking and singing until Lia decides to accept Admeto, when each nymph tells the story of her life. The stories have been said to "reek with the profligacy of the ancient world."* They are certainly free. Fiammetta is one of Lia's circle, and, as her lover, Caleone, the author makes his usual autobiographical entrance, giving us hints about his parentage and childhood, and repeating for us the particulars of his conquest of Fiammetta—this time told by herself.

Unhappily, one of the literary questions of the time was whether poets meant what they said, or something else, or both, and agreement had been reached on only one point—that poetry, being an exercise of the soul, aided by immense learning, ought to be as difficult to understand as possible. All must be confused by allegory. Thus Fiammetta is forced to represent Hope, and Caleone Despair. As a work of art the *Ameto* is not wholly successful. Yet it has a virginal freshness and is idyllic, realistic, rural and comic by turns.

The well-conditioned nymph Agape, who represents Charity, explains her marital unfaithfulness by a frank exposition concerning the biological failure of marriage with an elderly spouse (her lover is a priest in hearty prime). The old woman Acrimonia and her husband are

* Pastor Von. *Lives of the Popes.* This critic adds that Boccaccio "preaches pretty plainly the gospel of free love."

genuine old country people. Boccaccio, trying to recapture the lost tranquillity of pagan times, discovers some of the simple unnoticed beauties of his own. He writes the first Arcadian idyll of the modern world and at the same time hints at the begininngs of modern biography.

His next book, the *Amorosa Visione*, is full of similar faults and virtues. Unlike the *Ameto* it is written in the first person and in rhyme—the metre being the *terza rima* of the *Divine Comedy*. To the end of his life that overbearing work was to block Boccaccio's view of his own values.

Meditating upon his love, the author falls asleep, and dreams that he is stretched upon a desolate beach. To him comes a lady who offers to lead him to supreme bliss. They go together to a castle which has two entrances, one straight and narrow leading up a steep stair, the other a gate giving upon a luxurious garden. The first requires that all earthly joys shall be laid aside before entry. Over the second is written:

> "Riches and dignities and every treasure,
> All worldly glory in abundancy
> I give to him who steps across my sill."

The lady guide points to the less tempting entrance, whereupon Boccaccio very reasonably asks what harm there can be in earthly joys so long as one distinguishes good from bad. Besides, why not experience everything, and repent of one's errors in time for absolution? She replies that, while temptations are easy to find, they are not easy to withstand, and that sin frequently outruns capacity for redemption. Persevering upwards, now with the additional help of two damsels, one in red and one in white, he is conducted on a tour of several picture-galleries. In one we find Homer, Dante, King Robert and old Boccaccino, as examples of good and evil, the last two

being typical of Avarice. In a second are paintings of fortune in human experience. Here the exhausted tourist, on being told that there is yet time for him to retire downstairs, feels inclined to do so until from a window he catches sight of another garden full of lawns and playing fountains, like the grounds of the Castel Nuovo in Naples. And there, among other Neapolitan beauties, sits Fiammetta. He uses this opportunity to describe yet again the story of his love, his service, and his triumphant possession, while Fiammetta tells him that he must serve her truly, and to that end must follow the stern dame laboriously upwards. She consents, however, to let him rest awhile and play with her beside the earthly fountains upon the earthly grass, while the heavenly chaperone obligingly marries them. This ends the book, which is dedicated and inscribed by means of the most elaborate acrostics to "Madonna Maria, my lady whom I will ever serve," and to "Dear Fiammetta, for whom my heart still burns." In addition he works in his own name, as well as a sonnet, both depending upon the initial letters of his lines.

The *Ameto* and the *Amorosa Visione*, together with the *Filocolo* and the *Teseide*, are the surviving productions of Boccaccio's apprenticeship to letters. Rewriting his *Filostrato* at intervals, he produced a finer work than any of these others, but it was from these four that he learned to write, and in three of them we find the *Decameron* in embryo.

NOTE

Neither the *Ameto* (first printed in Rome in 1478) nor the *Amorosa Visione* (Milan, 1521) has ever been translated into any other language. They were, however, popular, and freely circulated abroad.

II

His next book, the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*—called in English *Amorous Fiammetta*—is as different from those that preceded as from all that were to follow it, the only resemblance being that it, too, is a new sort of book. Written in Florence during those same years of his first return there, the scenes are nevertheless Neapolitan, and, for all we know, its daring conception dates from the months at Piedigrotto which were inwardly so stormy and outwardly so uneventful. Indeed, this is more likely than not. For to a young writer overwhelmed by the struggle with the material of literature, as Boccaccio was, and crushed by the weight of tradition, the theme, when it first occurred to him, may well have seemed at once too simple and too singular for serious treatment. But the productive years in Florence, accompanied as these were by intensive reading and study, gave him the strength to embark upon the first psychological novel which the modern world can show. In it he blunders through the framework of conventions, which hampered him far more than they did Dante or Petrarch, stumbles upon the prose tale of plain contemporary life as he knew it, and sets his direct experience before us shorn of allegory and symbol, as if to say, "I am sorry, readers, but this, after all, is the little best I can do." At last, like Shakespeare's mistress, he "treads upon the ground."

Not that even now he escapes wholly from irrelevance or from the display of an erudition too hurriedly acquired. He still divagates into needless mythology and history in the humble belief that without such trappings no book

can be worthy of attention. He is still verbose and elaborate, and this book, like the others, was begun under the influence of Ovid, the obvious literary "source" being the *Heroides*, in which deserted women lament their lot. But all these things are trifling excrescences in a story which speedily resolves itself into an analytical and surprisingly modern prose study of a married woman whose lover has forsaken her.

The *Fiammetta* is, moreover, a study from the woman's point of view; and if the germ of this innovation may be found in the narratives given to the nymphs in the *Ameto*, it is none the less striking when found in extended prose without the apology of symbol. Against the sharply remembered background of fashionable Naples, Boccaccio portrays the naked hopes and fears, the jealousies, strivings, and ultimate resignation in the face of defeat, of a woman whose love lasts too long. The background, enhanced by the dual vision of happiness and misery, is brilliant. But it fades before the intensity of an all too human experience. Even the figure of the loved one fades. Fiammetta herself is the burning mountain.

There is here, it will be noticed, a double transposition. We not only see things through the woman's eyes; it is also the woman who is betrayed, not the man. That Panfilo, Fiammetta's lover, is Boccaccio himself is indicated by such details as the re-marriage of Panfilo's father in Florence, the news of which is wrongly reported to Fiammetta, so that she thinks of Panfilo as the bridegroom. Maria d'Aquino may have made a similar mistake in fact, conveying her reproaches and gibing at his unfaithfulness. But Panfilo is the shadow of a man who never appears otherwise than in retrospect in the story. Fiammetta holds the interest, and we feel that, besides embodying all that Boccaccio knows of a loving woman, she includes him in herself. We may go further and say that

Fiammetta is more a portrait of Boccaccio than of Maria d'Aquino. She certainly approximates more nearly to Patient Griselda and the many other faithful women in the *Decameron* than to the gaily rational and faithless ones of whom Maria d'Aquino is surely the prototype.

But beside Fiammetta two lesser characters rise as fresh creations in literature, and in a sense they have more individuality by reason of their smaller stature. These are Fiammetta's nurse and Fiammetta's husband, both unnamed. If the first might have stepped out of a Shakespeare play, the second is pure Tchekov. Sensitive and stupid, kindly and crass, he is the loving mate of real life of whom the onlooker can hardly think what to think, though he knows him like a brother. For the first time in the world a writer has thought of treating the deceived husband as neither tragic nor a figure of fun.*

What now most concerns us in Boccaccio's life is that, with the *Fiammetta*, the obsession of his feeling for Maria d'Aquino, with its raptures and torments, disappears from his longer writings. Henceforward his abiding love for her is expressed only in his sonnets, ballads and madrigals, and these also are informed by a new peace. Enriched by love, never forswearing it, he has accepted the situation.

The book which followed it, the *Ninfale Fiesolano*, begun in Florence in 1342 and finished in Naples four years later, is dedicated to her also, but quietly, and she has no place in the poem, which is a short, mature and exquisitely singing idyll, smelling of Flora and the country green. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that, without her disturbing bodily presence, the poem is pervaded by the love which she has once for all evoked, a love now purged of all rancour as well as of earthly hopes. Indeed,

* Of all Boccaccio's Italian works except the *Decameron*, the *Fiammetta* has been the most read and the most widely translated.

the *Ninfale* was the deepest tribute Fiammetta's lover had as yet paid to love, for in the very act of resigning the personal sweets of love he announces with quiet confidence that from true love, however it may be ruined by circumstance, nothing but good can come. The poem is a hymn at once to nature and to love.

The story is simplicity itself, and for the first time Boccaccio wears his learning lightly in verse, incorporating it easily with his singing theme. Affrico, a shepherd, loves Mensola, one of Diana's votaresses. Mensola, in sorrow at having broken her vow of chastity, deserts Affrico, who kills himself on the banks of the stream where they had consummated their loves, so that to this day it flows in his name, watering the country through which it goes. Mensola, when she has given birth to their son, Pruneo, is turned by Diana into another of the little Corbignano rivers that still lives. Virgin Diana has that much of pity for those whom simple love has overcome. Affrico's parents, rustics of the barbarian age, regard Pruneo with the same affection they had felt for their son. For the first time parental affection is treated sympathetically by Boccaccio, and the theme enters modern poetry also for the first time. It does so with a welling up of simple emotion which is one of the secrets of the author's charm. There are no barriers between his heart and the hearts of his readers.

Pruneo is the seed from which human progress comes. It is he who guides Atalanta in the destruction of the rude old world that gave him birth, and in the building of cultured Fiesole which brings civilization without transgressing the immutable laws of nature. The symbol is present, but only as we find it in old and perfect fables.

Some have read into the story that the author had a love-affair with a nun. In the same way these have held that there must have been a human original for the

nymph, Lia, in the *Ameto*. It is the natural instinct to look for real events and persons in Boccaccio's inventions, and both Lia and Mensola encourage this attempt.

We know that about this time, submitting himself to the inaccessibility of Maria d'Aquino, Boccaccio found a mistress who, over a term of years, bore him several boys and girls, particularly one girl of captivating charm, whom he called Violante. Through his well-connected stepmother of the Bostichi, he came to know young women in Florentine society, such as Emilia Tornaquinci, Lothera della Tosa and Sismonda di Francesco Baroncelli. But although he admired these and delighted in their lavish confidences, their gossip and their gaiety, he followed none of them as a substitute for Fiammetta. And as Lia is the most countrified of the *Ameto* nymphs (as well as the only one unidentified) and Mensola the most remote and rural of all Boccaccio's pastoral characters, we may take it that these two are really one, and that she was the country girl, of a lower class than his friends in the city, upon whom his choice fell for bodily and emotional solace. He himself is Admeto as well as Caleone in the *Ameto*, and he is also Affrico in the *Ninfale Fiesolano*. But, as Affrico, he is a divided and released creation who has died for love, yet lives on as a lover. It follows that the mother of Violante and his other children—the woman whom he later calls Fusca in his *Eclogue to Olympia*—is at once Lia and Mensola. She it was, then, who introduced him to tenderness as lover and as parent, while Fiammetta sits far off, renounced but crowned and responsible for his happiness. Considering how autobiographical Boccaccio is, we may conclude that Fusca must also be kept in mind in the reversal of order in the love story of *Amorous Fiammetta*. Whatever Maria d'Aquino might have thought of stray infidelities in a lover she had exiled, she would undoubtedly have regarded the taking of a

settled mistress and the procreation of a family as an encroachment upon Provençal fidelity.

However this may be, she—this Lia—Mensola—Fusca—is more to be envied than the other simple women who supplied Dante and Petrarch with a like solace in the same circumstances. If she was warm and gentle, as she seems to have been, her lover was aware of these virtues in her, choosing her partly because of them, and she was warmly and gently considered by him. She had in him one who did not fight against nature, but rather chose to honour it smiling, one who welcomed his children, treated them with delight and played with them happily. Naples was the scene of his passionate adoration, but the country near Florence became the setting for his placid idyll.

In the *Ninfale* he turned for the last time to Virgil and Ovid for inspiration, and he used material from Achilles Tatius, but here he is his own master. In the *Teseide* he had jerked along confusedly in their wake. In the *Ninfale* he attains what looks like careless freedom. There is no affectation, no irrelevance in its seven cantos, and these are written in rhymed *ottave* with a broken-backed metre (the *sdrucciolo* in the middle of the line and the lines running into one another) which his models would have scorned as unheroic. Rapid, easy and gracious, it approximates to the common speech, which was an innovation as well as a modest triumph. Imagery and vocabulary are both faithful to the subject. The rural family scenes, the landscapes, the meeting and the parting of the lovers—all are shot through with the shining tenderness, as of tears, which clothed Admeto in newness when he stepped out of the regenerating fountain. The crudeness and the cruelties of the flesh are forgone, but the essential voluptuousness of the flesh is none the less established as the foundation of all life and all nobility. In the *Ninfale* the figures move in the golden, open-air radiance that was later transferred to

canvas by the Renaissance painters, and than which nothing more satisfying to the heart and the senses has been produced by human artists. This is the first time we find it produced by words in a modern language.*

* Now generally admitted to be the loveliest of his longer poems, the *Ninfale* had no great reception in Italy when it was written, and it met with but moderate success elsewhere. There is an adequate, even a charming French translation by Anton Guercin (1556), but it never appeared in English dress.

III

FROM first to last Boccaccio found tranquillity essential to the good life, and he believed that tranquillity could not belong to those who, for any reason, are chiefly occupied in the getting of money. The spectacle of his father had induced this belief in him when he was a mere child. It remained his conviction in maturity, even when he was harried by the dilemma which a capitalist system imposes upon the very forehead of truth.

Upon entering his thirties he tried as well as he could to make peace with and for himself in an existence plagued by acute private disappointments and annoyances and by public catastrophes. His learned associates in Florence, have betrayed, by a patronizing note in their references to him, that they regarded him as a delightful, but somewhat inconsiderable member of their circle. They are apologetic, even a little contemptuous, when they call him "our dear Boccaccio." Here was one who embroidered upon sensual love as if it were a serious theme. He did not take public affairs or private successes with the same gravity as themselves. Although dutiful and industrious, his ambitions did not seem high. His works were for the common reader, even for women. In well-informed estimations they suffered by comparison with Dante's and Petrarch's.

A man like Boccaccio had to find some asylum from which to put forth the truth that was in him. There was nothing conducive to calm outside or inside his personal lot. From the autumn of Walter of Brienne's expulsion the coalition government under Archbishop Acciajuolo

worked moderately well (as such coalitions work after a dislocation) for about a year. But in ridding herself of a tyrant, Florence came near to depriving herself also of her six dependent towns, which all at once clamoured for freedom at her expense. In binding them to herself for the revenues she dared not lose, she felt obliged to import nobles into her government and other offices. A food scarcity which occurred at the same time encouraged a man of the noble Strozzi family to make a bid for Walter's vacant place. He took the first step towards this in the usual way by bribing the proletariat in his favour. He offered to sell corn to them cheaply. Was Niccolò, with his Apulian influence, behind this venture also? We know only that it nearly succeeded, and that, in failing, it was followed by a new outbreak of class war, with more bloodshed on the bridges, and a long, furious battle in the New Market and in the Via dei Bardi, just round the corner from old Boccaccino's house.

For, yet again, it was the Bardi and the Frescobaldi who had roused the anger of the artisans. The Frescobaldi yielded first, the Bardi after a long combat. Archbishop Agnolo, who before had sided with the magnates, now threw in his lot with the people, whom he helped to form what claimed to be a fresh government in virtue of a number of reforms which it not only proposed but instituted. Although the nobles were excluded from it, and the magnates in a numerical minority, it still consisted of higher, middle and lower classes, with most of the power vested at the top. Because it included the lowest people at the expense of the nobles, Machiavelli saw in it "the cause that Florence was stripped not only of all martial skill, but also of all generosity," and his estimate of the Archbishop resembles Dante's concerning "those who were so worthy and set their minds on doing good," whom he consigns to an eternal fate unpleasanter than that of Ciacco, the

glutton.* Later, Salvestro de' Medici, with a cleverness surpassing that of Machiavelli, perceived in the arrangement his chance of a benevolent dictatorship by appealing to the discontent of the *popolo minuto*, and setting them and the burghers, or *popolo grasso*, at each other's throats. But always and every time it was seen as a chance for gain by an individual or an upper-class section of the community. Nobody even dreamed of a political idea by which the people might govern, while all should be the people in equal effort and honour.

That Boccaccio conceived of this solution cannot be suggested. He was of his time and place. It can be asserted however that he was one of the scattered handful of Europeans who would wholeheartedly have welcomed it. The considerable experience which he had of policies and of rulers induced in him a strong and sceptical disgust that is as different from Petrarch's light-souled trimming as it is from Dante's wrong-headed, if noble, convictions. Boccaccio's scepticism was based upon his familiarity with the common people and his entire distrust of people in high places with whom he was equally familiar. These, he said roundly,† were to blame, not only for their own frequently unhappy fates, but for the shocking state of the world. The more he saw of the rulers of his day, the more he was sure of this. Later on, dedicating to Mainardo dei Cavalcanti a history of fortune, written ostensibly "with the object of teaching princes the virtue of wisdom and moderation by holding up to them the example of misfortunes provoked by egotism, pride and inordinate ambition,"‡ he declared that he had found "no emperor, king, prince or pope" worthy of his regard. His reading and his experience brought him

* *Inferno*, vi, 79. † In the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*.

‡ This paraphrase from the *De Casibus* is Dr. Henry Bergen's in his preface to Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (Early English Text Society).

to the same conclusion. "Shall I," he asked, "call the tyrant king or prince and obey him loyally as my lord? No, for he is the enemy of the commonwealth. Against him I may use arms, conspiracies, spies, ambushes and fraud; to do so is a sacred and necessary work. There is no more acceptable sacrifice than the blood of a tyrant."

Throughout life he would remain a loyal Guelph, which was the best thing available for one who was solid for the people as against Empire, Church or individual despot, however "benevolent"; and he was not decoyed, like Dante, into the blind alley of imperial ideals, or, like Petrarch, into the primrose path of self-aggrandisement by submission to tyranny. But there was more in it than this. He was sure that all strife caused by love of money or by desire for personal power was bad. Therefore he condemned war. Love, of which he was the champion, was an eminently peaceful occupation, civilizing those who took part in it, and combining well with learning.

His acquaintance was naturally cast among the better classes, but he sympathized with the people as much as he hated the mob and the snob, and he upheld magnanimity as the highest human quality, even as he condemned oppressiveness as the lowest. More and more he selected his men friends from among those who loved harmless study, and he slept with a woman of the peasant class. All he wished for his fellows was careless enjoyment of the gift of life, and all he asked for himself, being deprived of Fiammetta, was peace to do his work as far as lay in him to do it. He was alive to his own disabilities and rated his talents as modestly as he was content to live. Critics of his art could neither wound him nor induce him to forfeit his calling. But, being a poor man, he needed shelter as an artist.

He found it in a compounding of reality and dream. The reality has been already hinted at. It harmed no man

or woman. The dream was of an age which should resemble that pre-Jupiter condition in which Saturn of Crete ruled over a world wherein "no tears were shed." It was that "Golden Age" which he and Dante alike believed to be historical,* the age in which iron had not yet been invented "to enter into the body of man, nor had they any engines or devilish devices which (with great pity) might ruinate stone walls, and break iron gates in pieces." If there "was perhaps amongst them any little war, with naked breast and unarmed arm they fought it out, in which the broken boughs of trees and stones served them for pellets." Then, before the warlike and greedy Jupiter drove Saturn out, "Cupid was not yet born, whereby the chaste winds (violated afterwards with his poisoned darts, when he first began to fly with swift wings through the world) might live securely and free from all tormenting thoughts." "O, what a world it had been!" How different from "this present age, full of so many poisoned pleasures, unprofitable ornaments and shadowed pomp!" "Ah, I would the Gods had given me to such a world, the people whereof, content with a little, and fearing nothing, followed only their wild and savage appetites."

Here—with Petrarch but how differently and with how much more generous an air!—we find Boccaccio again among the first to give expression to what has become known as "the return to nature." This has taken many forms since then, and has laid itself open to much misunderstanding and to easy ridicule. Yet its assertion by Rousseau gave the soul to the French Revolution, and it still recurs powerfully in the baffled heart of mankind like a refreshing spring.

In England, twenty years after Boccaccio had sighed for Saturn's return, that other great though imperfect poet, the clerk of Cornhill who wrote *Piers Plowman*, was sus-

* See *Inferno*, xv, 96 and 112–5.

tained in his harsh existence by similar dreams for mankind. Unhappily married, treading "the muddy highroad of common life," he uttered the same cry of the heart. "Amiss he were made," he said, "who was not made for joy." Langland and Boccaccio alike looked behind and before for the destruction of that money-power which "made soap-makers and their sons knights for silver," while for silver the best blood in the land was mortgaged in the name of the nation's wars. The Englishman foretold the coming of a new age, in which

" . . . Kind-love shall come yet, and conscience together,
and make law a labourer. Such love shall arise,
And such a peace among the people, and so perfect a truth
that Jews shall ween in their wits, and wax wondrous glad,
that Moses or Messias, be come into this earth,
and have wonder in their hearts, that men be so true."

He was grim, plain and outwardly defeated,

"But blessed be Piers Plowman who toileth to tell
As well for the wastrel and the wench of the stews
And travailleth and tilleth for a traitor so sore
And for a true tidy man, all times alike."

The two voices are distinct as north from south, but the speakers are brothers. They were no more political than they were mystical. But, if not blotted out by Jupiter's engines manipulated by the silver of the soap-makers, mankind will at length condemn all policies which ignore them. The conception of full and equal leisure for the simplicities of being and the subtleties of making will then prove to have been no idle poet's dream. Meanwhile, for Boccaccio as for Langland, the vision of what human life might be, furnished a frail shelter in a furious world. It resembled Noah's refuge from the Flood rather than Petrarch's refuge from Avignon.

IV

FROM whatever materials Boccaccio constructed his ark of tranquillity, the floods around it did not subside nor did the weather grow less boisterous. Those were years of distress in Florence. The city was under a Papal interdict.* The havoc wrought by repeated misrule was followed by epidemics and want of food. A bad harvest in 1345 caused many of the peasants to wander from farms which no longer offered security, and the measures taken by the Government went only a little way towards palliating conditions that need never have come about. In the late summer of 1347 there was rain for four months, and the price of corn, already high, was doubled. "There was great hunger," says Morelli. "We lived on herbs and reeds and very bad they were; all the country was full of people who went about feeding on grass like beasts, and thus became predisposed to contract disease, nor was there any help for this." The poor were told that this was by God's will, and some received charity. The rich were advised by their doctors to "refrain from melancholy and gloom, refuse to think of dull sorrowful things, play, ride, amuse themselves, and be happy."

Boccaccio was obliged, for his own sake and the sake of his dependants, to seek a more substantial patronage than the distant interest of King Hugo. Author of two epics, an Apuleian romance, a prose pastoral, a long narrative poem and a prose novel, he had attained con-

* Inflicted because Florence was unwilling to pay the Acciajuoli creditors, this lasted from 1343 to 1347.

siderable reputation, but so far the Florentine Government had shown no greater disposition to employ his gifts than had his friends of the Neapolitan court. He was less accommodating than Petrarch. Money by way of Church preferment was ruled out for him by the strongest traits in his character. Matrimony—lucrative or otherwise—he refused as firmly as he did religious vows. As a stout Guelph, he hated tyrants. But he now left Florence and went to live under the protection of Ostasio da Polenta, who was the ruler of Ravenna.

There were several good reasons both for the recommendations necessary for his securing such protection and for its being less obnoxious to him than might at first be supposed. Unlike Petrarch's patrons the petty tyrants of the Romagna were not engaged in any conspiracy against the Florentine Commune. For many years, although it was a thorn in King Robert's side, as in the side of the Pope whom it constantly defied, the province had been nominally under Guelph rule. At the same time it resisted the Papal efforts to reclaim it as one of the Ecclesiastical States. Fostered in its resistance by poisonous marshes in which fortresses were impregnable, it had become more and more anarchic. But early in the Angevin struggles both the Bardi and the Acciajuoli had obtained a licence to ship corn, wine and oil from Ravenna (once the capital of Italy and still, in Boccaccio's time, a seaport) to Cyprus and to the Tarantesi dominions in Greece.

Besides this, the regime of the Polenta, though warlike, was not comparable in systematic oppression with that of a Luchino Visconti or a Gonzaga of Mantua, and Boccaccio could claim sympathy with the living representative of a family that had befriended Dante in his later years, as the Polenta had done. Further, if, as is likely, he had already formed the project of writing his hero's

life (and so of becoming the first modern biographer) the neighbourhood of the Polenta was the most likely one in Italy to afford first-hand information for this. Those Florentines who had been Dante's contemporaries in early manhood were mostly dead, but in the city where he had laid his angry bones many persons still lived who could report upon him in his maturity. Among these was his daughter Beatrice.

Ostasio maintained the family tradition in venerating the arts, and one of Boccaccio's duties, in return for bed, board and literary *douceurs*, was to act as a copyist for the Polenta library. That Ostasio was so enlightened as to interest himself in the secular classics at a time when Humanism was still in its cradle, is indicated by the fact that his protégé was set—or set himself—to translate Livy. How far this dreary task progressed does not appear. It was never finished.

The poet's own studies, his interest in Dante, and the presence of congenial friends in the town, alleviated a situation for which he had none of Petrarch's adaptability. Ostasio and Beatrice, however, were only two of his sources in the quest for Dante. He had relatives in Ravenna and he questioned anybody from whom he could elicit information. It was in this way that he learned what has given offence to many of Dante's English commentators, who have usually been men of high moral tone. For he heard that the divine writer had been grossly intolerant towards all whose opinions differed from his own, that he had been careless of the wife and family whom he had left in Florence, and that, to the end of his life, he was given to lechery. These things, declare the English biographers, cannot be true because they are undesirable as attaching to the portrait of a supreme religious poet. Such biographers, however, were not in Ravenna in 1346, while Boccaccio was.

He writes thus of what he heard:*

" . . . that for which I most blush in the interest of his memory is that in Romagna it is a matter of greatest notoriety that any feeble woman or little child who had but spoken in party talk in condemnation of the Ghibelline faction, would have stirred him to such madness as to move him to hurl stones at such, had they not held their peace; and in such bitterness he lived even until his death. And assuredly I blush to be forced to taint the fame of such a man with any defect; but the order of things on which I have begun in some sort demands it; because that if I hold my peace concerning those things in him which are less worthy of praise, I shall withdraw much faith from the praiseworthy things already recounted. So do I plead my excuse to him himself, who perchance, even as I write, looketh down with scornful eye from some lofty region of heaven. Amid all the virtue, amid all the knowledge —that belonged to this wondrous poet—lechery found most ample place not only in the years of his youth, but also of his maturity; the which vice, though it be natural and common and scarce to be avoided, yet in truth is so far from being commendable that it cannot even be suitably excused. But who among mortals shall be a righteous judge to condemn it? Not I."

Further on he speaks of Dante in respect of his wife.

"When once he had parted from her who had been given him as a consolation in his sufferings! never would he go where she was nor suffer her to come where he was, albeit he was the father of several children by her."

Boccaccio finds such faults undesirable in his hero, but he feels bound to admit them by "the order of things." And with the passage of time, students of Dante are find-

* The translation is by P. H. Wicksteed, who does not, however, attach to it "any authoritative significance whatever."

ing that Dante's earliest biographer is justified in these and other contentious points.

Upon the death of Ostasio, which took place that same November, Boccaccio went on to Forli, of which fortress town, along with half a dozen smaller ones also in the Romagna, Francesco degli Ordelaffi was lord. Ordelaffi, who professed great admiration for Petrarch and employed as his secretary one of the Laureate's friends, Cecco da Mileto, was probably urged from that quarter to welcome a stranded poet. Before they met, Cecco and Boccaccio had already exchanged poems in Latin and Italian.

But the captain of Forli was less noted for his love of learning than for his persistent contempt of Church and Pope, and for his prowess as a huntsman and a soldier. Boccaccio was not happy there, and if a date may be assigned to a letter from Petrarch tendering admonitions to him as a novice in the art of profitable subservience, we should put it in this period and place. It is not difficult to guess the content of the letter to which it is a reply.* Paraphrasing from one of the epistles from Horace to Lollius,† Petrarch shrewdly expounds the uses of protection and indicates the state of mind suitable in a protégé. If the recipient found it hard to practise the sage advice, he accepted the role of obscure junior as unquestioningly as did the Laureate that of the eminent Roman poet and horticulturist. Subservience, not modesty, was what went against his grain. Like Dante, Boccaccio found the bread of strangers bitter.

The poet had scarcely entered this wild crane's nest in search of his keep before he was involved in a conflict that had nothing to do with poetry. Many of his biographers have not been able to explain the next incident

* While Boccaccio preserved twenty-eight of Petrarch's letters to him, Petrarch found only four of Boccaccio's "thousand" worth preservation.

† Epistolæ ii, 3—of which more in a later chapter.

in his life without accusing him of either weak judgment or gross self-seeking. Before trying to clear him of these two faults, which are both so inconsistent with his character, it is necessary to examine into the causes which had made Naples a storm centre and brought about a violent division of sympathy throughout Europe. Not otherwise can we understand how Fiammetta's lover consented, in the winter of 1347, to re-enter her "delightful city" as the war correspondent of an invading army. For that is what he did.

Part IV

SHADE

I

ALTHOUGH, when Boccaccio was young there, the surface of life in Naples still preserved much true delightfulness, there had been for over ten years a rapid deterioration of health in the realm. The Angevins had established a stolen throne upon capital advanced by the Bardi and the Acciajuoli bankers, and Naples, where the old feudalism was merely underpinned by the new capitalism, had not that tough resistive and recuperative power which was so remarkable a feature of the more democratic capitalism of Florence.* Hence, the financial failures in Florence of 1339 and 1342, which were largely due to the French and English wars, were far more disastrous to Naples than to the more cynical city of the Tuscan money-lenders. The declension of Neapolitan court and official life was then made manifest and it was irremediable. Further, Robert owed the Florentine banks 10,000,000 florins.

Early symptoms of collapse there had been to discerning eyes even while the surface remained almost intact. The death of Charles of Calabria had afflicted Robert the more because his elder brother of Hungary, who could claim natural succession to Naples, had left both sons and grandsons, while his two younger brothers, of Taranto and Durazzo, had each full-grown, greedy sons.

In his chagrin the King had indulged ever more in febrile religious and astrological studies, encouraged the dominion of the Mendicant Friars, relaxed in his dealings with mercenary bandits (who were useful recruits for his

* One of the reasons why Charles Martel lost Naples to his younger brother, Robert, was that the Florentines refused him money for his wars.

wars to recover the lost province of Sicily) and theorized interminably upon the sovereign uses of poverty, while in practice he grew remarkably avaricious. As for the Mendicants, while they eschewed the appearances of riches, they loved power as much as they loathed learning.

This is not the place to go deeply into the absorbing story of the Franciscan Order, of its divisions, and of the political effect these had upon the world from the sides men took in the doctrine of evangelical poverty at a time when the Church was given over to luxury. The ferment threw up men as fine as William of Ockham in Surrey, and Michael of Cesena in Avignon (both excommunicated by the Pope and supported by King Robert), and men as detrimental as the fifteen intriguers under vows who infested Castel Nuovo and swarmed about Robert's heirs. It is enough to recall that both the Angevins and their kinsmen of Aragon had always evinced strong liking for the more extreme Franciscan theories, just as they had encouraged Jewish citizens. Robert's father had always opposed the Pope in protecting the Fraticelli of Provence, and Robert did the same for the extremer brotherhoods in Naples. During the formative years of his boyhood, when, with two of his brothers, he was detained as a hostage in Spain, his tutor had been that Arnaldo of Vilanova who declared John XXII to be Antichrist; and Arnaldo renewed his influence later as Sancia's domestic chaplain. One of the King's brothers and a nephew were vowed "Spirituals," as were two brothers and two nephews of Sancia, who was dominated by the Order to such a degree that she withheld unwelcome letters to its members from the Holy See and tried to placate the Pope with presents of apples. Thus the professors of poverty had grown powerful in Naples, especially after Robert's death, when he was wrapped in the habit which would save the wearer from more than a single year in Purgatory.

Did not St. Francis pay an annual visit to that place with the purpose of removing his little brethren? In this respect Robert had been firm in thwarting the man at one time his chancellor, whom he had placed in the chair of St. Peter—the man who, dying a multi-millionaire, was so logical as to brand as heretics all who declared their belief in the poverty of Jesus as an exemplar.*

Robert's chief concern, however, before his death, had been to secure his dominions to the heirs of his body. These were the little daughters of Charles of Calabria by his second wife (and cousin) Marie of Valois.

When he died, Giovanna, his elder granddaughter was sixteen, and her sister Maria two years younger. Joan, as she is usually called, merited her title of "the Beautiful," besides which she was gay, benign and full of character. Boccaccio, who had seen her dancing as a child at a party in Naples, speaks of her radiant grace and her golden Angevin hair.† She was Fiammetta's near kinswoman. A street song of the day calls her lovely, round-faced and jocund, and says that she was neither plump nor thin. Her portraits show a vigorous beauty.

While still of nursery age she had been announced as Robert's sole heir before a Grand Council in Castel Nuovo, all those present taking the oath of homage. If she died Maria was to succeed. The Taranto family tried hard to secure the two girls as brides for Robert and

* John XXII, petit-bourgeois of Cahors, was nearly seventy when he became Christ's Vicar. He was deformed in body, shrewd in mind and vindictive of heart. Learned in the Canon Law, such genius as he had was financial. He was the first to devise carefully graded money fines in the confessional, murder not being by a long way the most expensive crime. A contemporary said of him that the blood he shed would have dyed the whole Lake of Constance crimson, while the bodies of the slain would have bridged it from shore to shore. He died in 1334, aged ninety, leaving 18,000,000 gold florins and 7,000,000 's worth of plate and jewels. He did well by his sons and nephews.

† *Amorosa Visione*. Canto, xliii.

Louis. But, apart from differences which had taken place between their father and the King, the Pope would not hear of such alliances. The two girls, he insisted, must marry two of their other cousins, the sons of Carobert, Robert's nephew, the King of Hungary. Carobert, wishing to add Poland to his realm, had already promised his eldest son, Lewis, to the daughter of Charles of Bohemia, but in 1333 he brought his second son, Andrew, to Naples, and at another great public ceremony Joan was promised to Andrew. The boy was more than a year younger than the girl, but that could not be helped. Carobert's journey, with a great train which included his nephew, the Dauphin of Vienne, and two hundred horses from Slavonia, together with the costly reception in the South, was financed by the Bardi and the Peruzzi. All these things took place when Boccaccio was in Naples. If he was not present at the ceremonies, he took part at least in the public festivities.

The official betrothal was performed when the young people were in their 'teens, and the marriage followed as soon as it decently could after the deaths of the Pope* and King Carobert, which interposed within a short time of each other. (This was after Boccaccio's return to Florence.) Five months later King Robert had died.

The King's will was clear on every point. Andrew was under no circumstances to be more than Duke of Calabria and Lord of Salerno. If Joan died without heirs, her sister Maria would be Queen. Should Lewis, now King of Hungary, become free from his engagement to the Moravian princess (an impossible event unless she died), he might become Maria's equally subservient consort. Otherwise Maria must marry the heir to the French throne, the Duke of Normandy.

* Benedict XII, the more submissive and well-meaning successor to John XXII. He reigned for eight years without being able to undo any of the evils created by his predecessors.

If it had not been for Joan's fatal circumstances such an arrangement might have worked. It met with immediate popular approval in Naples and received the cachet of Clement VI, who, like his predecessors, would oppose nothing likely to keep Naples and Hungary under separate rulers. If it naturally gave less satisfaction in Hungary, this might be expected to improve with the birth of an heir male to Giovanna and Andrew.

But, regarding Joan's youth, Robert had further decreed that she should not assume power until she and Andrew had both passed their twenty-fourth year (he had himself not been crowned till he was thirty and had endured some years of responsibility) and that during the interim she was to submit herself to a group of persons dominated by Queen Sancia and named by him. With this group she was not to interfere. Her natural uncle, Charles Artois, fat and gouty, was associated with it, and all its members were Neapolitans with the single exception of Petrarch's friend, the Bishop of Cavaillon, who represented Provence. The absence of any Hungarian adviser emphasized the fact that Andrew was to be a cipher in a realm which was more than ever before under the Papal thumb.

Apart from galling the many who saw Andrew's claims to the throne as at least equal to Joan's, the long minority gave openings for intrigue to members of the Neapolitan royal family, who disliked the Hungarian alliance because it deprived them of their own chances of a throne.

Chief among these were the Taranto and the Durazzo families.

Philip of Taranto and John of Durazzo had pre-deceased Robert by some years, but before their deaths they had been in conflict with him and between themselves over territorial claims in Albania and Achaia. Niccolò Acciajuoli had settled this quarrel, with great advantage to himself and the Taranti, by buying off John. But the

rivalry between the widows was not placated. Both were deep in obligations to the Acciajuoli bank. Both were in accord in detesting the Hungarian alliances. But Catherine with her French, and Agnes with her Avignonese influence, continued to play alternately against each other and against Joan and Andrew. And Catherine had Niccolò, arch-schemer and money-lender, ever at her side.

With Robert gone, and a pair of children only nominally enthroned, these and other rival groups played against each other without control. To make things worse, crowds of Hungarians arrived, place-seeking and malcontent, indulging themselves in the greater freedom and culture of the South without forgetting the days when their fathers had lived there as by right in the days of Charles Martel. The Mendicant Friars also—one of them Andrew's private Hungarian confessor and tutor and Sancia's confidant—assumed a temporal power that agreed ill with their meek garb and malodorous bodies.

Petrarch, when he came upon his unworthy mission from the Colonna soon after Robert's death, presaged disaster from his post of observation in the Franciscan Convent of S. Lorenzo. "Heavens!" he wrote, "what a change has the death of one man produced in that place. No one would know it now."* He was blind to his own contribution to the Neapolitan confusion when he brought about the release of the three scoundrelly Pipini brothers, but he was properly offended by the important position of the Hungarian Court friar, Brother Robert of Mileto, who was a Cordelier. Naples was ruled, not by a king, but by this little monk, "fat, rosy, barefooted, with a shorn head and half covered by a dirty mantle, bent by hypocrisy more than by age, lost in debauchery whilst

* When Robert died, Petrarch compared him with Plato, and wrote, "Since he is dead flowers have lost their scent, apples their flavour. It is death to survive him." (*Eclogue II.*)

proud of his affected poverty, and still more of the real wealth he has amassed—this man holds the reins of this staggering empire and trots unquestioned through the privacies of the palace."* He wisely deplored also the danger of the Neapolitan streets after sundown, these being full of reckless young armed nobles, and the brutality of the public spectacles in which the best blood of the place was lightly sacrificed for the amusement of the onlookers. Andrew himself he found amiable and promising, Sancia a nonentity given to bursting into tears. Joan, who gave him office, he admired. She impressed him in their several interviews. But he saw her and Andrew as "two lambs in the care of a pack of wolves," —lambs who were by no means protected by the friar-ridden Queen Sancia. Sancia's removal from power shortly afterwards, when she retired to the nunnery of Santa Chiara, to die in a couple of years, can hardly be dissociated from the reports conveyed by Petrarch to Avignon, backed as these doubtless were by the testimony of the Bishop of Cavaillon.

As to the situation of the royal children, Petrarch never prophesied more truly. In 1345, two months after the death of Sancia, Europe resounded with the murder of Andrew in circumstances of the most revolting cruelty.

* Letter to Barbato of Sulmona. It is only fair to Fra Roberto to say that he strongly opposed the release of the Pipini brothers.

II

A MURDER, particularly a murder calculated in all its offensive details, is apt to aggravate family dissensions. The destruction of Joan's boy husband, which took place on the night of 18 September, 1345, in a manner that laid shocking emphasis upon his sex, created a widespread sentiment in favour of an innocent victim who possessed valid rights to King Robert's throne. It also precipitated all the bad feeling which for so many years had existed between members of the Angevin family. The Hungarian branch, long possessed by resentment and greed, set about to gratify its passions under the cloak of righteous indignation.

The course of human wickedness which preceded and followed Andrew's murder, forms a chapter of history as fascinating as it is horrid. Much of the detail must be omitted here.*

The game was one in which all the cards were court, and tricks, by way of matrimonial alliances, were taken by every player in turn. In the end, however, the rich pool was shared by the two cleverest sharpers at the table —Clement VI, premier matrimonial agent of Europe, and Niccolò Acciajuoli, Boccaccio's youthful Pandarus, who became Europe's premier financier. While Clement from afar picked up his gains out of each discord in turn, frequently changing his partners, Niccolò pursued a direct, if also an underground and waiting policy, on the spot.

* A scholarly account is afforded by St. Clair Baddeley's *Robert the Wise and His Heirs*, 1278–1352 (Heinemann, 1897). This I have freely and gratefully used.

Sometimes these two played knowingly into each other's hands. More often Niccolò foresaw the other's next move and made his arrangements accordingly.* The interests of both were similar, if not always in consonance.

Being approached by Elizabeth of Hungary and her eldest son, the new King, Lewis the Great, who had married his Moravian betrothed, Clement had early declared himself in favour of Andrew's coronation on equal terms with Joan, without, however, purposing that this should ever take effect. Joan, for her part, would abide by her grandfather's will, but she was forward in the interests of peace, demanding all possible honours for a mate whom she would never have chosen and liked still less after marriage. She begged, for instance, that Andrew should be made Prince of Salerno and King Consort of Sicily.† This was according to Robert's decree, should she die before her husband, but it irritated yet further the Taranti who claimed Salerno for themselves. Religious by training—perhaps also by temperament—and submissive to the Pope by tradition, she was generous, intelligent and highly educated, even in the law. She was, further, strong-willed, brave, apt in making quick decisions. Perhaps she was also amorous, although almost certainly this aspect has been exaggerated. But one need only read her correspondence with the Pope to suspect that, had her gifts been given a fair chance, she would have given the Angevin dynasty a fine ruler. She was incomparably a better character than her father and cleverer than her grandfather. But between the Pope and a group of Court

* Clement's letters to the hostile parties make good reading, being models of sapient duplicity. Niccolò's moves are made clear only by their results.

† Niccolò had done that for which King Robert had spent blood and treasure in vain—secured Sicily for Naples.

dignitaries, inheriting her father's crushing debts to Florence, and crippled by her youth, her sex and her childish husband, she had not the ghost of a chance. Cardinal Aimeric who, as Papal Legate, came to plague her, demanded repayment to Florence. Clement VI hastened to remind her that she held her crown only by the grace of the Holy See (a grace originally as fictitious as many of the Angevin claims) and that if increased ecclesiastical tributes were not forthcoming, together with all other obediences, that crown would be forfeit. She was attached to the corrupt Court group by strong ties of affection as well as by Robert's command. Sancia, who was her aunt as well as her stepmother, had always been good to her, and the Dowager Queen's religious prestige was great.

Chief among the Court group, after Sancia's retirement, was the remarkable Filippa, the Catanese, along with her relatives, each of whom had a stake in the realm.

This woman, as the young wife of a nameless fisherman, had acted as emergency wet-nurse to Robert's second son Louis, born on the battlefield, and her devotion, together with an attactive personality, had endeared her thereafter to the Neapolitan royal family. It is interesting to speculate upon the different course history would have taken had she suckled one of the Hungarian instead of one of the Neapolitan Angevins. *En secondes noces* she had married a handsome Ethiopian slave, whom a Court official, Raimondo di Cabannis, had bought from the Corsairs and reared as his foster son, giving the lad his name. The pair rose to eminence in the kingdom. Filippa's husband became Robert's Chamberlain, then his Seneschal. He died almost ten years before Robert, but his children and grandchildren made distinguished marriages, and his widow progressed from the sinecure of Honorary Governess to that of Royal Stewardess. One of her granddaughters was a lady-in-waiting to Joan. Robert's

opinion of Filippa is shown by the place he gave her with Sancia in controlling Joan's minority.

Here, however, his sagacity had yielded to his sentiments. Like so many trustworthy servants, this one in old age showed herself to be spoiled and unscrupulous while she remained devoted. She made many enemies, and the power given to her family was resented. Surrounded by plots in which she took part, she was an instrument only too convenient to the hand of the Taranto tutor.

Stephen, the third of the Hungarian princes, was still a young child, and, failing Joan, Niccolò was still bent upon marrying one of his charges to Maria. But Agnes de Perigord had the same design for her eldest son, Charles of Durazzo. By a series of bold and shady tricks, to which the Pope was privy, she kidnapped Maria who was only fourteen, into a wedding performed and forcibly consummated (with the connivance of the Catanian lady-in-waiting) behind the closed doors of the Durazzo Palace. The pair had already been publicly betrothed, but the premature and furtive marriage was a scandal which angered Joan and infuriated the Tarantesi, who had refused to attend the betrothal. The Pope was pleased to give it his dispensation after the event, Cardinal Talleyrand having doubtless sounded him beforehand.

Niccolò decided to profit by the offence given to Hungary and to the Queen. He found further opportunities for a superior hope in the presence of Cardinal Aimeric who curtailed Joan's power and drained her purse,* in the Pope's order that the Court group of Robert's choosing should be deprived of office, and in Andrew's frequently foolish and provocative behaviour, inspired by

* In less than a year full of mischief Aimeric was recalled to Avignon plus 19,000 florins, which was additional to immense sums for the board and lodging of himself and his suite.

his Hungarian supporters.* The more the realm was divided, and the more independent plots there were against Andrew, the better for Niccolò watching and waiting to take the Queen. Possibly he did not merely wait and watch. Within a year of Maria's abduction by the Durazzi, Agnes of Durazzo died—it has been said by poison. She left her sons to the care of Cardinal Talleyrand, and Maria's husband gave secret support to Andrew as against Joan, who had strongly condemned his marriage.

Then, just when things looked like taking a more peaceful turn—Joan being pregnant† and the Pope having dispatched clerics for her coronation, with Andrew as Consort—Andrew was murdered.

If there were not, as the outraged King of Hungary later declared, two hundred conspirators, there were many persons otherwise unfriendly to each other, who were certainly involved in the crime, and earlier there had been conspiracies which had failed.

When Andrew met his death, only one of the several killers was caught red-handed, and he was a tool of little account in himself—Andrew's Master of the Horse, who had a private grudge against his young master. Before the summary torture which preceded his execution and which was conducted by Charles Artois as Grand Chamberlain, this man had his tongue removed by his judges so that he might not blab.

After a holiday by the sea, Joan and Andrew had gone to stay at the hunting castle at Aversa, twelve miles north of Naples. Joan was in bed. Andrew was partly undressed, about to follow her. His Hungarian bodyguard were absent, having too copiously regaled themselves at supper.

* Andrew displayed a banner childishly insulting to the Neapolitans, and upon several occasions was reprimanded by the Pope.

† Maria had been before her, bringing forth, shortly after her own fifteenth birthday, a delicate male baby which nearly cost her her life.

While being prepared for bed by his devoted Hungarian nurse, Isabella, he left the room. It has been alleged that he was summoned on the pretext of important news from Naples. But Joan, in a detailed statement that reads like truth, told the Pope that he had run down to the garden, "unwisely and unsuspecting, boylike rather (as often, both there and elsewhere, at doubtful hours, he was wont to do) taking no advice, merely following the rash impulse of youth, not permitting a companion, but closing the door after him." She herself went to sleep. In some anxiety because of his prolonged absence, Isabella presently went with a light to look for the boy. She discovered his body in the garden, still warm but strangled and horribly served. It was she who roused the household.

His death delighted many people as much as it maddened every Hungarian. It delighted Niccolò more than it surprised him. The Pope seized the chance to say that he had always intended giving Andrew the honours which his Hungarian grandmother had visited Naples to urge. At first no suspicion fell on Joan, who was horrified but not heartbroken. Isabella stayed by her, and presently accompanied her to Naples, tending her through her confinement, which took place on Christmas Day.

But there is little doubt that some of Joan's relatives and nearest friends were among those who had plotted the murder. And, when time went on, when no attempt was made to arrest anybody except the negligible bravo, when Joan, after some betrothal parleys with Robert of Taranto, promised her hand to his brother Louis without waiting for a dispensation, and when the King of Hungary increasingly demanded righteous vengeance for his brother's blood, opinion hardened against the Queen. She had been known to express impatience with her inadequate husband whom she had never pretended

to love. Before King Lewis announced that he was coming with an army to Naples to see justice done, he had countless sympathizers even among those who were not Hungarians. In the Pope's presence the Cardinals fell to fisticuffs. England took sides with Hungary.

It was widely put about that the gold cord with which Andrew was strangled had been woven by his wife and lent by her for that purpose; that she had been the mistress of both the Tarantesi brothers, not to speak of several other notables; that the baby boy, whom she named Charles Martel,* was not Andrew's son—all of which gained credence from the better based suspicions against Catherine de Courteney and against the Catanesi family who were still countenanced by Joan. It was also noted that the suggested marriage between her and Robert of Taranto had broken down from her side precisely when Robert, with a strange *volte face*, had joined with Charles of Durazzo in a well-advertised effort to apprehend the murderers.

In this proceeding Charles of Durazzo appeared as the leader, being assisted by the noble Provençal Seneschal, Ugo del Balzo, who particularly hated the Catanesi as upstarts, besides which he had a hand of his own to play.

While Joan still lay in of her first-born, Raimondo the Catanese, Filippa's son, was arrested and tortured without pretence of a trial. Joan relieved del Balzo of office for this affront, which amounted to *lèse-majesté*. But not before he had extorted from his prisoner a number of names which were declared to include most of the Catanesi, Filippa among them. Charles Artois (married to Niccolò's sister, Andreina), to whom Joan had given the Grand Chancellorship four months before, and his son—though not by his Acciajuoli wife—fell also under suspicion. Niccolò, how-

* The Bishop of Cavaillon, who had fled the Kingdom after the murder, was obliged to return upon his tracks to perform the christening. The Pope was godfather.

ever, after appropriating his brother-in-law's wealth, saw to it that he was comfortably imprisoned in the Taranto castle.

There followed a prolonged orgy of torture, for which a stage was erected by the sea-shore for the better view of the public. Filippa's age and record spared her nothing, and in due time her head adorned one of the city gates as part of a peace-offering to Hungary. The mob was impressed and the Tarantesi safe. Charles Artois was spared to die in prison of the gout. His son Bertrand, who was yet another of Joan's reputed lovers, was quietly murdered.

Joan's protests to the Pope procured merely a pardon for Robert of Taranto and Charles of Durazzo. But Lewis of Hungary, declaring that the Catanesi were not more than a handful of those responsible, set out with his army to see to things himself. Or rather, as he was fighting in Dalmatia, he sent his illegitimate brother, a bishop, to prepare the way for vengeance and the conquest of Naples, himself promising to follow. Both he and his mother declared Joan to be guilty, and a host with her. Meanwhile, at the battle of Crécy Philip VI of France was defeated by Edward III of England, and, at about the same time, the French King's sister, Catherine de Courteney, the Taranto widow, died. She thus escaped the excommunication which Clement was about to pronounce against her for having protected Charles Artois.

On the day of her funeral a curious thing happened. Her eldest son, Robert, who until then had been living in the Castel Nuovo where Joan also was lodged, returned from his mother's obsequies to find the gates closed against him. The Queen's marriage to his brother, Louis, followed swiftly without the formality of the Papal dispensation. Such haste was well calculated by the man who made the marriage. Lewis of Hungary was further enraged,

but Clement smiled and gently chided. It was the financiers of the Apostolic Chamber who had taken the Queen.

Boccaccio, first in Florence and then in the Romagna but especially in the Romagna, was in the full tide of accusations against Joan. How strong that tide was is borne out by many modern historians who, knowing both more and less of the events than Boccaccio could then learn, have judged the Queen to be guilty, at least as an accessory. Bertrand del Balzo, the Chief Justiciary*, who was an unprejudiced judge if with natural leanings towards the throne, found that there had been three several attempts against Andrew's life, one of these involving sorcery, with Joan as a bewitched agent. There was further discovered an abortive earlier plot to kill Andrew by poison. People remembered rumours that Robert Catanese had been one of Joan's lovers.† The differences she had been known to have with Andrew were magnified and his foolishness forgotten. Boccaccio, writing later with mature judgment, calls Joan a "glory not only to her sex, but among sovereigns," but even so, he gently admits that she was "not al withoute vice."‡ Matteo Villani, in his chronicle, thinks that she was sometimes under the influence of magic philtres. He adds however, that Andrew often threatened her and others. Boccaccio says he was harsh and provocative as well as silly, but observes that he also was subject to harshness in his situation, and so had to suffer. The truth will never be fully known. But even Niccolò had to acknowledge that, at the time, the Neapolitan people high and low, were

* He was King Robert's brother-in-law, but one of his daughters had married the Dauphin of Vienne, and one of his sons a sister of the Tarantesi.

† Robert, who was on good terms with the Pope, was notably spared in the vengeance upon his family.

‡ Lydgate's translation.

prepared to obey the King of Hungary when he should descend upon them.

Both the Pope and Niccolò were at one in opposing the coming of Hungary. Hence Clement delayed looking into the murder for over a year after it was committed, and meanwhile arranged political marriages wholesale to heal the Neapolitan family quarrels and, if possible, to mollify Hungary. Joan's baby boy was betrothed to a baby girl which Maria had now borne to Charles of Durazzo. Two Tarantesi sisters were promised to Robert and Louis of Durazzo,* and Robert of Taranto was consoled with Marie de Bourbon, the widow of King Hugo of Cyprus's son. Niccolò received donations from all concerned, including the Pope. But Hungary was not stayed. He betrothed his younger brother, Stephen of Transylvania, to a daughter of Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, enemy of Popes and Angevins alike, and thus persuaded Bavaria into joining his forces for the punitive expedition to the South.

* These marriages never took place. Robert of Durazzo was killed at Poitiers.

III

Boccaccio's sympathies, to begin with, were strongly with the King of Hungary, as were the sympathies of most fair-minded men who heard of events from a distance, not to speak of many observers on the spot. He expressed his own views immediately in two Latin *Eclogues*,* written no doubt in the heat of the moment when his noble patron set out with 500 of his best horses and 1,000 infantry to meet the King on his way South. Even then, however, Boccaccio shrouded names and actions in classical allegory, "not wishing any to be clearly indicated as that this seems undesirable." But his opinions emerge. He laments the disaster to Naples of old King Robert's death, holds Joan to be blameworthy and proclaims the arms of Hungary as "most just." At the same time he told Zanobi da Strada,† to whom he wrote when on the point of leaving Forli with Ordelaffi to meet the avenging king at the confines of the Abruzzi —that his position is that of "onlooker and arbiter." His sympathies had been engaged on the face of things, but he still reserved the right to judge for himself at closer quarters when he would learn more than he could possibly know at present. "Hasti credence is roote of al errour," he says, if we may trust Lydgate, and one of his repeated warnings to princes and others was to be wary of judgments based on hearsay. As yet, he was not so fully alive as he later became to the calamities wrought

* III and VIII.

† Zanobi, his senior by one year, had succeeded his father as grammarian in Florence these ten years and more.

by such, but the letter to Zanobi hints at a native common sense far superior to Petrarch's worldly prudence.

The same letter reveals that he was obliged to go with Ordelaffi without much warning, for he had earlier begged his old classmate to lend him a manuscript of Varro so that he might make copies of it. Now, he says, the precious book will arrive to find him gone. That he later got hold of it and made a copy which he sent to Petrarch, favours the supposition that the Laureate had a hand in his Romagna appointment. At the moment, however, Petrarch was concerned less with humanism than with Rienzo, who was at the apex of his brief triumph as restorer of Rome. Nor was it only Petrarch with his sounding eloquence, but both the King of Hungary and the Emperor with deeds and gifts, who now lent support to the Roman prodigy, while their enemies likewise—Queen Joan, Robert and Louis of Taranto, and Charles of Durazzo, laid propitiatory gifts at the Tribune's feet of clay.

One more fact calls for notice in defending Boccaccio's behaviour at this point. Those of his biographers—Italian and English—who attribute both his first enthusiasm and his later change of opinion to toadying, have said that he revisited Naples before he went to the Romagna, and that while at Naples he was an eye-witness to the torture of the Catanesi in 1346. Accordingly he was, or might have been, better informed than he appears to have been when he marched in Ordelaffi's train. For then he would have seen Joan in person, spoken with Niccolò, and had the benefit of the Bishop of Cavaillon's intimate knowledge of the situation.

But, in fact, there is not only no ground for such a statement, there is Boccaccio's own word that it is not true. Of the Catanesi tortures he says carefully in his *De Casibus* that he "*nearly* saw them,"* and that while

* "*Quæ fere vidi.*"

he later saw much for himself, what he reports is largely from hearsay.* It must be, therefore, that when he left Forli in December, 1347, he returned to Naples for the first time since his departure as a rejected lover two years before King Robert's death. This is in full accord with his attitude as an "onlooker and arbiter," and it is further borne out by his telling us later that he learned of his daughter Violante's death "when he returned to Naples" —clearly implying that this was upon his first return there since her birth. Violante was five and a half—"an age when one goes straight to heaven"—when she was carried off by the epidemic which raged in Florence in 1347 and fell especially on women and children among the poor. This information, in conjunction with what he saw of the Hungarian and Teutonic soldiery in Naples, confirmed his view of what was most valuable in life. As for the deliberate vagueness with which, much later, he replied when questioned about his conflicting opinions, there is an explanation that indicates honesty. He has hinted at it himself. When he knew all, he came to regard his old friend Niccolò as far guiltier than Joan, perhaps as more guilty than any other actor in the catastrophe. But he did not yet know all.

Meanwhile the announcement of Hungary's onslaught had the effect of momentarily uniting the Tarantesi and the Durazzeschi. Under the threat of his coming Niccolò promised, should his plans succeed, to make Robert of Taranto co-regent of the kingdom.

Once more he had summed up the situation.

There was, he saw, no help to be had in Naples, either by fighting or by treating with the powerful Hungarian cousin.

Therefore, though he placed his eldest son, Lorenzo, with Robert of Taranto and Charles of Durazzo in

* "*Quædam auribus, quaedam oculis sumpta meis describam.*"

command of the armies, he despaired of their victory. The Neapolitans themselves were divided. Joan had been obliged to recruit her forces largely from the bands of mercenaries who were left masterless by the Emperor's death,* and these were no better than well-armed brigands who would sooner take Hungary's loot than depend upon payment from a queen who was forced to pawn her crown.† Already many had formed themselves into those "companies of adventure," joined by every kind of malcontent and unemployed fighting man which were shortly to become the terror of Italy, appalling even the tyrants who hired them. As early as 1343, one German *condottiere* had assembled "the Great Company" and had set an example of frightfulness by blazoning on his breast the motto that he was "enemy of God, of pity and of mercy." In spite of Papal excommunications, all the most powerful princes of Italy had rallied to the side of Hungary. Most important of all, the Florentines, who had sent encouraging envoys to Forli before Ordelaffi set out, turned a deaf ear to Louis of Taranto's supplications. Joan had announced her inability to repay her grandfather's debt of 10,000,000 florins to the Florentine banks. The French King would not stir a finger for his Neapolitan relatives. The Pipini brothers were as active underground in furthering Hungary against Joan as they were to be in compassing the overthrow of Rienzo. They did not forget that Joan had opposed their liberation.

* The Emperor's death had put an end to the marriage between his daughter and young Stephen of Hungary. For Charles of Bohemia, who was the King of Hungary's father-in-law, now stood alone in the field of imperial honours as the Pope's candidate. Edward III of England had wisely refused to succeed Lewis as Charles's rival.

† She did so for 3,000 florins to Jacopo, the grandson of King Robert's famous legal adviser, Bartolommeo of Capua, a distinguished citizen, said to be her lover. Jacopo later became Andreina Acciajuoli's second husband.

All this Niccolò knew or divined. Accordingly he gave his instructions to Joan that at a certain stage she was to throw up everything and make for Avignon. It was the only place where her life would be safe and the life of the child she was now about to bear to her new husband. Besides she owned Provence, and as a last card she could appeal to Clement's cupidity by pledging it to him for a nominal sum in return for his personal blessing and his proclamation of her innocence to the world. Clement could not afford to quarrel with his exchequer. Nor would he be insensible to the appeal of a young and beautiful woman in distress who was moreover the reigning representative of the Neapolitan Angevins with their Papal commitments.

By 15th December, Rienzo, escaping naked from the prison of S. Angelo in Rome, to which the Pipini in a day had brought his glory, was in hiding with the Spirituals of Monte Maiello near Sulmona, and twelve days later the King of Hungary was in possession of that place so perilously near to Naples. Within the month, Joan, who was alone in the Castel Nuovo, acted upon Niccolò's instructions and took ship to Provence with one or two faithful attendants, among them her Court Chamberlain, Enrico Caracciolo. A married man, as greatly respected in the kingdom as he was greatly connected,* these circumstances did not save Enrico from the rumour, soon set afoot, that he was Joan's accepted lover. Her frank manners and her exceptional beauty made her always suspect in this way. Less than a year before, Enrico alone

* Bernardino Caracciolo had been Archbishop of Naples before the death of Manfred. Enrico's father had been King Robert's Grand Seneschal. Another of the family had died in the service of Charles of Calabria in Florence, and two more had high estate in the Kingdom. A descendant, Tristano Caracciolo, one of the most distinguished chroniclers and biographical writers of the next century, author of *De Varietate Fortunæ*, evinced in his work a sense of tragedy rare among Italians.

had dispersed a mob, which had assembled outside his castle flaunting a banner with Andrew's corpse depicted upon it, while they shouted insults at the Queen. He had hanged the ringleader, a Hungarian tradesman, out of hand. Now he accompanied the Queen in her flight. It was enough for evil tongues.

Joan herself would have risked everything to stay behind in Naples. For in her flight she was forced to leave her son behind. The child was already interned by Ugo del Balzo in the fatal Castel dell' Ovo. But Niccolò—as usual—was right. The little Charles Martel could count on Hungary's mercy, as he was one of the prizes for which the avenger had come.* All that Joan could do of herself was to release her subjects, for their own sakes, from their allegiance to her. This she did.

Niccolò, who had held out as long as was practical at Capua, followed her in a few days. He took with him her husband, who was as clay in his hands, and threw the others to the Hungarian wolves. Possibly he guessed more accurately than they did what fate awaited them when he advised them to offer friendly submission to the King, their cousin. He and Louis travelled by way of Tuscany, where he hoped that the appearance of King Robert's nephew and the Queen's husband might attract popular support. In this he was disappointed. Florence closed her gates against them. But they were amiably entertained by his kinsman, Archbishop Agnolo, in the Val di Pesa, which was Niccolò's native place, and the cleric accompanied them, by way of Volterra, Porta Pisano and Beaucaire, to Cardinal Orsini's palace at Villeneuve-les-Avignon. Here, on 15th March, they were united with Joan's party. Within a short time, to the fury

* The child was conveyed to Hungary, where he was jealously cared for by his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth, who passionately hated Joan. But within a few months he succumbed to the change.

of victorious Hungary, Clement gave the fugitives a royal welcome in the Curia.

From then onwards things worked out better than Niccolò had dared to hope. For he can hardly have foreseen the calamity which overtook the world that April with demoralizing effects, nor how these would play into his capable hands. As it was, his own plans coincided admirably with those of the Pope. His success has been called "inordinate": it was certainly in great part ordained by himself.

After the Curial reception Joan parted with Avignon to Clement for 80,000 florins on the understanding that she would presently buy it back. With 18,000 of these florins she redeemed her jewelled saddles of green velvet pawned three months before. Her Taranto marriage was approved, and her innocence of Andrew's murder announced before a Grand Consistory, a verdict which met with the congratulations of Petrarch. It was promised that she and her consort should be crowned (though still within the conditions of her grandfather's will, giving no power to Louis), and in every way Clement treated her like a beloved daughter. He was a connoisseur of beauty and he had made an excellent bargain. He graciously acceded to Niccolò's request that he should revoke the advertised money reward for the head of Walter of Brienne, which was still current.

News was not long in coming of King Lewis's horrifying campaign. His soldiers had everywhere slaughtered and tortured the unresisting peasants. The Teutons in particular bestirred themselves to avenge the deaths of the Hohenstaufens. After receiving the cousinly homage of the Tarantesi and Durazzeschi he bade them sit down to supper with him at Aversa. At the conclusion of the meal the whole company was put under arrest, and, two days later, after a military tribunal, Charles of Durazzo's

head was cut off at the place of Andrew's murder. The four younger princes were sent to Hungary as hostages. Lorenzo Acciajuoli alone succeeded in holding out at Melfi, with which place Joan rewarded him. Maria of Durazzo, deprived of everything except her two infants, had to escape disguised as a friar. Marie of Bourbon, who was with her, was helped to Florence by another of the Caraccioli. Here the Peruzzi took her in.

It was now clear that Lewis wanted Naples quite as much as he wanted to wreak indiscriminate vengeance—perhaps even more. But presently he was confronted with that equally indiscriminating "triumph of Death," the Black Plague. He then felt that one may pay too dearly for a second kingdom. He had justified his coming by killing numberless innocent persons and it was time to go home. He would come again later for the throne. As it was, he was obliged to leave without so much as a ransom.

Meanwhile, so long as they cared to risk the new disease and the earthquakes which were its accompaniment, his captains, always out of hand, could combine the pleasure of murder and loot with the business of breaking down further resistance. What the King did not understand, although Niccolò and Clement did, was that between him and the Plague, Naples would presently be at one in clamouring for Joan's return. Even stout supporters were alienated by the execution of Charles of Durazzo. The dishonourable excesses of Hungary had turned his victory into a defeat.

IV

Boccaccio dissociated himself quickly and in horror from the avenging host when he saw what a "righteous war" amounted to in practice. Ordelaffi he never mentions again. He had closed that source of favour by his own deed, and he would never again lend himself to a tyrant patron. The two early *Eclogues* celebrating the justice of Hungary's cause had been written in good faith but in ignorance. It is to his later ones, and to some later writings in prose, that we must look for his judgment as "onlooker and arbiter." War had opened his eyes, and he acted accordingly—to his own detriment. Unlike Petrarch, he was not to receive any material benefits from either Joan or Niccolò, though he might well have done so at the hands of Ordelaffi or the King of Hungary, whom he now denounced. Once and for all he was sickened of wars—"just" or otherwise—of the princes who made them, and of all powers that could maintain their power only by the deprivation of those who had not raised a finger unless it might be in defence of their lives.

His experience as Ordelaffi's war guest marks a turning point in his life that is comparable with his first sight of Fiammetta, and it was a turning point which Dante and Petrarch never reached. Petrarch, in his way, was a pacifist, and he took part in many fruitless negotiations for peace, but it was left to the first European novelist, biographer, epic and pastoral poet to perceive that arms are justifiable only against the oppressor. Henceforth he thought none were worthy of being "in perpetual mynde

and remembrance," but those who found that "all ther joy and ther inward delight was for avail of the common profit."* Dr. Bergen, the English editor of Lydgate, is one of the few scholars who have noted this, besides marking the ironical circumstance that Boccaccio's French and English translators, not sharing his view, have twisted his words into flattery of the great whose joy lay wholly in private profit. Hence, in England, a work which had originated in hatred of princes was obsequiously inscribed by Lydgate to an English Duke, and the English rendering, made through the French of Laurence de Premierfait who had already softened it so as not to give offence, flatters the very class whom it was written to condemn. Lydgate is never rude, never scornful: Boccaccio is both. Princes, as Dr. Bergen points out, "made Boccaccio sick," and he chose them as his subject not to extol but to pillory them "for the welfare of the community." With Laurence and Lydgate the men of illustrious names are the heroes we are asked to pity because they fell. With Boccaccio they are the villains whose fall was well deserved because they sinned against their fellows. His heroes are the obscure who resisted tyranny to the uttermost—the man who died in prison for his firmness; the man who, failing in his attempt to kill a prince, burned off the hand that had blundered; the man who, rather than betray his comrades, bit off his own tongue and spat it in the face of power. These and these only did Boccaccio praise in a book which, wilfully falsified and misunderstood, lay on every princely and ducal table for generations.

After his experience in Naples Boccaccio hated princes and their wars for the rest of his life. He distinguished, however, between the prince and the person, especially in respect of queens. What he learned of Joan in Naples at the end of 1347 and later, led him to write that she

* *De Casibus*, Lydgate's translation.

had "suffered by the crimes of others, by flight, by exile, by the rude and barbarous habits of her husbands, by the envy of the great, by bitter and undeserved opprobrium, besides threats from Pontiffs, etc., against all of which she has borne up with a strong heart, and finally by her invincible courage has overcome them."* Although (in *Eclogue IV*) he accuses Andrew of harshness and provocativeness, he traces this to the fact that the wretched youth was in a preposterous position through no fault of his own. Also, he gives Niccolò credit for courage—credit he did not withdraw even when, afterwards, he formed the opinion that the friend of his youth was "the comrade of criminals."

It is unlikely that he saw either Joan or Niccolò in Naples before they left. The Plague, which suspended everything in a ghastly vagueness, from January to August at Avignon and from the spring to the autumn in most of Italy, is in itself enough to account for the gap we find here in Boccaccio's life. Brought, it was said, by two Genoese galleys loaded with merchandise from the East, preceded by epidemics of measles and smallpox which robbed Boccaccio of all his children, accompanied by earthquakes and other natural disturbances which swallowed whole villages, it was taken to be "the judgment of God," by which "the whole world was about to perish."

In Florence, it claimed six out of every ten citizens, among them Giovanni Villani, the historian; old Francesco di Barberino, author of the *Documenti d'Amore*; Andrea Pisano, and many other distinguished persons. Boccaccio's stepmother died of it. His father escaped, but succumbed to some other illness not long afterwards leaving a small boy from his last marriage. Siena and Pisa, where six out

* *De Claris Mulieribus*, which is dedicated to Andreina Acciajuoli, whom Boccaccio continued to respect. Tales that he had a love affair with the queen, or that she suggested to him the idea of the *Decameron*, are baseless.

of seven or eight perished, have not recovered from the Black Death to this day. At Trapani not a soul survived. At Avignon the disease on this occasion struck chiefly at the poor, but Laura was not the only well-born victim. Naples and the towns of the Romagna got off lightly with but two out of five taken, but Fiammetta was among those who were taken.

Florentine merchants laid their gold on the church altars to clear themselves of guilt and placate Heaven, or they threw it over the walls of convents, whence the convent dwellers flung it back as contaminated and useless. Apothecaries grew rich as usurers grew poor. The charitable 'Or San Michele overflowed with the donations of terror. Yet where ten ounces of gold had been, there was but one, for the Florentine mints were paralysed. There was callous licence and looting, but there were countless deeds of mercy. While the grass grew in the streets, and the doctors prescribed sugar and treacle pills and recommended cheerfulness and nourishing diet, the Brothers of the Misericordia went about their hooded duty of succouring the dying and burying the dead, and the government built new bakehouses, each of which produced 94,000 loaves a day giving twelve ounces to the poor. That same year St. Catherine was born in Siena.

To Petrarch and Boccaccio the Plague came when the premature old age common to most men of their time was already bringing "the usual array of discomforts," and—again in Petrarch's words—they "buried all their early hopes with their friends." At thirty-seven Boccaccio ceased to have any hopes in this world.

Although he continued in or near Naples he never saw Fiammetta again. If he had he would certainly have told us so. No doubt he sought for her in vain. But the last picture he gives of her is that one in which forever she sings and smiles with red flowers in her hair. Then she is

gone, and with her the smiling face of the city that was her background. As for himself,

> "... with these stings
> Of sorrow and with life's most weary load
> I dwell, who fain would be where she is gone."*

"Unless," he wrote later, addressing Dante, "the life of Paradise removes the blessed from earthly concerns so far that Love's forgotten"—

> "I know that where all joy doth most abound
> In the Third Heaven, my own Fiammetta sees
> The grief which I have borne since she is dead.
> O pray her (if mine image be not drown'd
> In Lethe) that her prayers may never cease
> Until I reach her and am comforted."*

* Rossetti's translation.

Part V

MOVEMENT

I

How and where Boccaccio lived through the troubled time between 1348 and 1350 he has never told. But in the summer of 1348, Niccolò, covered with honours from Avignon, returned to Naples with Louis of Taranto to find the people eager to receive their Queen again. Joan followed shortly in some state, conducted once more by Enrico Caracciolo, and accompanied by her sister Maria, each woman having a new baby girl born in Provence. Joan was then aged twenty-two. Boccaccio's description of her as triumphant over her enemies must refer to this period, for it fits with no other. It is accordingly most likely that he had stayed in or near Naples, and that his famous picture of the Plague, as this appears in the introduction to the *Decameron*, is drawn from Neapolitan experience.

Joan's triumph was to be short-lived. While Niccolò imprisoned Maria to keep her from being seized upon as a mate in the political game, the King of Hungary announced a second visit. He still held the four Taranti and Durazzi prisoners in the North to a huge ransom, he challenged Louis of Taranto to a duel, exacted promises from the Pope that Joan should be publicly tried for murder and deposed in favour of Maria, insisted that Maria should wed his brother Stephen, and then—when his own wife died—offered himself instead. Spared at least this fate, Maria was abducted by Ugo del Balzo as a bride for his eldest son, Robert, whereupon both he and Robert were murdered by Louis of Taranto. By the age of twenty-one Maria had borne four children, one of whom

was to marry the captured prince, Charles of Durazzo and, after he had murdered Joan many years later, to sit upon the throne of Naples.

Yet these were the least of Joan's troubles. For, so that she should be robbed of every vestige of power, Niccolò prompted her husband to accuse her of having committed adultery with Enrico Caracciolo, whom she had rewarded with the barony of Gerace for his good care of her. Both she and Enrico vigorously denied the charge, which, of course, was made privately. The mere accusation served, as Niccolò, and doubtless Clement, intended that it should. The device was common, of course, and favoured by the Church which denied relief to less exalted persons. On a trumped-up charge Philip of Taranto had divorced his first wife (while appropriating her wealth) that he might marry Catherine de Courteney, and Philip the Fair disposed of three daughters-in-law in the same way. Niccolò was merely concerned to make Joan a helpless figurehead to his ambition. Enrico, along with his nephew, was arrested, and he was deprived of all honours, including his position as Chamberlain.* This was given to Archbishop Agnolo Acciajuoli, who, with Joan's earlier, unforeseeing consent, had been created Chancellor of the Kingdom. The next step was to assign the Queen, under threats of public ignominy, to the guardianship of Agnolo. At a stroke, she was smothered as a ruler as effectively as, forty years later, she was to be smothered as a woman by the order of Maria's husband, last prince of the Angevin house. Louis of Taranto would be King of Naples and Sicily, and his tutor would have control of his every movement. Joan, according to promise, tried to redeem Avignon from the

* In the summer of 1350, while riding through the streets of Naples, Niccolò was attacked and wounded in the stomach by Enrico's younger brother. The wound was not mortal, and the youth who dealt it outlived both Niccolò and Louis of Taranto, to become Joan's Chancellor.

Pope by repaying all he had given for it. But Clement, who had never meant to keep to his bargain, refused her money, and so Avignon remained the property of the Holy See until the French Revolution. Thus Joan lost all say in Provence as well. The following year, having borne another daughter* to Louis, she was constrained to grant Niccolò large territorial rewards "for his consistent services." It is interesting that no suggestion of a love affair between Joan and Niccolò was ever made. Either he was consistently devoted to the wife of his youth, or—more likely—he had no concern with women save as pawns in the game for power.

Amid plots, counterplots and murders, this game went on. For a time Joan was imprisoned in the Castel Nuovo, and Louis tried to poison her at least once. But the wretched pair were united in fear when Lewis came once more upon the scene with 30,000 Hungarians and 15,000 Germans. Apart from the miseries inflicted, however, and the ruin of the Apulian cornfields, nothing came of this expedition save an empty peace. Having created anarchy, all the participants were glad to attend Clement's jubilee absolution at Rome. Boccaccio, whose father had appointed him guardian to the small stepbrother, Jacopo, returned to Florence, and the meeting between him and Petrarch with which this narrative opened, took place. While these two friends looked for hope to a remote past across the ruins of the present, they still had to address themselves to an immediate future that was no brighter for poets and scholars than for common citizens.

Sometimes in Boccaccio's room alone together, sometimes in one of the monastic houses in the company of four lovers of learning who were all they could assemble in depleted Florence, they sat to talk of political events

* Francesca, who died immediately after her parents' coronation two years later.

and of the neglected classics. In Verona, said Petrarch, they could have found only two other men sufficiently well informed to make such conversations possible, in Mantua or in Sulmona but one, in Perugia or in Rome, none at all. Elsewhere in Italy what few there were had lately died. The handful of living scholars huddled together like men shipwrecked. But the places where they huddled, like the Convent of the Santo Spirito in Florence, became the nuclei of the Renaissance.

The three worthy Florentines, besides Boccaccio himself, were Zanobi da Strada, who was as second-rate as he was industrious and place-seeking; Lapo da Castiglionchio, a clerk who professed a love of letters; and Nelli di Rinucci, the Prior of SS. Apostoli, whom Petrarch nicknamed "Simonides." To be a prior at that date by no means implied that a man was literate. But these few Florentines were judged worthy of talking with Petrarch, and of debating how joy might yet be restored to the world.

Petrarch had pride of place by general consent, and it was Boccaccio's delight to defer to him, so long as he might have his quiet joke and reserve certain of his judgments. He had long regarded the Laureate from a distance as "the present glory of the art of poetry, an eloquent and sweet-tongued speaker to whom the whole of philosophy is open and familiar. His prose, and his more extensive works in verse are so splendid, so redolent with sweetness, so loaded down with the bright bloom of his eloquence, so honey-sweet with rounded cadence, so pungent with the sap of his wisdom, that they seem like the creations of a divine, not a human genius." He now found that Petrarch's "actual presence far surpasses his reputation, so flowing and delightful his discourse, so gentle his manners," and he bowed down before him in readiness to serve and love him as immeasurably his own superior. Upon first reading the poems to Laura he had

destroyed all his own earlier poems. Now he did not dream of telling Petrarch that he had begun the book which he was later to call the *Decameron*. Although he had the natural good taste to prefer in his heart the Laura poems to the author's more ambitious efforts in Latin, he accepted, with regrettable humility, Petrarch's verdict that Latin was the proper language for the serious poet.

Boccaccio's humility, while it endears the man to us, had some ill effects upon him as an author. Petrarch was not unaware of this fault. "You are extremely modest," he afterwards wrote, "perhaps too modest, and wanting in proper self-confidence. You would do well to trust, for a time at least, more to your own powers. You may give utterance to truths of your own, perhaps very many, which will benefit not only yourself but others as well." This was very true. Unluckily Petrarch's spiritual eyes resembled those of his body, although, pedantically he was a good enough critic. He had not the faintest idea of Boccaccio's originality, nor of the sort of truths to which his friend's utterance was best adapted. Perhaps, too, there was beneath his suave exterior where division always lurked, an obscure envy of Boccaccio's wholeness—the grudge of the man who feels always the opposite of what he believes, towards the man in whom belief and feeling are one. Or was it simply that, as a certain churchman said of his hero Augustine, "he saw much but understood little"? It was Petrarch himself who remarked that "there are three poisons which kill sound criticism—love, hate and envy." But this was drawn from him by one who envied him. It can hardly have been his love that invalidated him as a critic of Boccaccio.

Boccaccio's love, on the contrary, prevented him from seeing that Petrarch was insensible to many things in literature, including Virgil's chief quality, which had made

him a poet in so far as he was one—the recognition of "the tears in things." Nor did he see that by reason of the same quality, which Boccaccio had more than had Virgil, together with the recognition of "the laughter in things," even his friend's laborious Latin works would endear themselves to a thousand readers who could not tolerate superior efforts by himself.

But literature is as strange in its workings as life. Out of these errors, forth from these immature but enthusiastic conversations by mature men, great things were to come for Italy, and through Italy for the world. They might waste their time in that vainest of vain tasks, arranging the classical and the sacred writers in their order of merit down the centuries. They were mistaken in putting Greek and Latin before the vulgar tongue for the progress of literature, finding, as they did, that to write in Italian was to "build on unstable earth and shifting sand." Petrarch, ignorant of Greek and, if the truth must be told, but an indifferent Latinist,* had false values of the classics which had an adverse effect upon scholarly standards for many generations, especially in England. Boccaccio's Latin would make men not yet born smile with pity over "this most delightful and charming Boccaccio of ours," who was "the self-styled restorer of Latin," and Boccaccio, after years of close application, certainly knew far less Greek than a Fourth Form public-school boy to-day. Yet, without these poorly informed ardours and endurances, the later Humanists would have lacked the necessary foundation alike of initial material and of popular interest. Petrarch and his friends followed a hundred false clues, but they were impassioned in their search for the treasures which had been lost by "the shameful indifference of the Middle Ages" and of their

* So said Lionardo Bruni (Aretino) 1369–1444. Erasmus also, while he gave Petrarch high praise, found his Latin impure and lacking in force.

own generation, "who added to their own disgraceful barrenness by letting the works of their ancestors perish, so robbing posterity of its natural heritage." It was as if an England had survived without more than ill-copied extracts here and there of the whole Elizabethan Age of poetry and drama.*

Cheerfully, of his own works when he was old, Boccaccio could say, "If I have not spoken well myself, at least I shall be the means of others speaking better.† But he did more. Even by his Latin works and by his Greek labours he, more than any other while feeling himself to be the very least, made Florence the centre of secular classical learning, and he made that learning a fountain of gaiety which it has never become in England even to this day.

* Petrarch says that Cicero and Livy would not have recognized as their own the stumbling copies of the fragments from their works then generally available.

† "Melius dicendum prudentiorem alterum excitabo." *De Genealogiis.*

II

THE Black Death had not called more than a momentary truce in the world's wars, but it left the world a different place. The debilitation was widespread but unequal—with unforeseeable results. Wealth was rapidly redistributed, and with it power. In England a period of prosperity, if not of peace, followed. The death of Philip of Valois in August of the jubilee year, after his failure to seize Calais, annulled the peace treaty which the Pope had drawn up between him and Edward III. The King of England, since the battle of Espagnol-sur-Mer that year, was able for the first time in history to be known also as King of the Sea; and within the next decade or so of her foreign wars, made glorious by victory at Poitiers and rewarded by plunder in Languedoc, England secured the wool staple.

The growing independence of England and the poor state of Naples profoundly affected Florence. Her trade was hit, her country infested by robbers from the South, whom Niccolò had bribed to take their leave when they could take no more. No road in Italy was safe from their attentions. Even Vaucluse was not exempt. In 1353 Petrarch learned that robbers had been there. The Pope, prince of robbers, had to cut his losses in England, and he pressed every long-forfeited claim to Italian revenues. Extortion from Avignon became what it had never been before. The jubilee brought millions of "Peter's pence," but the Papacy wished also to recover the revenues of the lost Ecclesiastical States. For this it found several convenient instruments. Charles of Bohemia was one.

Charles, although he showed ability at home where he

put his country in order (incidentally discovering and exploiting the waters of Carlsbad) had, in respect of Italy, submitted himself so entirely to the Pope for mutual profit that he became known as Emperor of the Priests. The Visconti, who had grown steadily in power in the North since the year before Boccaccio's birth, had made speedy use of Lombardy's comparative immunity from the Plague and were triumphantly adding to their territory further south. The very month of Petrarch's visit they had struck a blow at Florence by conspiring with the Papal legate to deprive Bologna of her liberty. Gold from this source found its way into the Papal coffers and into the hands of disbanded soldiers, with the subjection of a depopulated Tuscany in view. Luchino Visconti had died—after appropriating some of Queen Joan's Piedmontese possessions. Although Florence was nominally at peace with his brother, Archbishop Giovanni (called "Egone" in Boccaccio's *Eclogues*) who succeeded him at Milan, she had good reason to fear the man who has been called the Bonaparte of his time. Isolated in her freedom,* the Commune had appealed in vain to Clement, and the time was past when she could look to the Angevins for military help. With Bologna enslaved and the Northern routes exposed, she tried to take Pistoia by force with but partial results, and she was glad, early in 1350, to buy Prato from Joan. To this transaction, which was conducted by Niccolò, Boccaccio was a formal witness. Joan had inherited Prato from her father. It may be doubted if she ever handled any of the 17,500 florins which her commercial agent brought away.

As these things were debated between Petrarch and Boccaccio, Petrarch readily agreed that the Pope was

* Pisa was then free also, and the peace treaty of Walter of Brienne still operative, but the city, like Siena, had Ghibelline sympathies and sided with the Visconti.

greedy, the Emperor Charles despicable and the Visconti obnoxious. But beyond that there was a profound difference of opinion. Petrarch still cherished, with less excuse than Dante, what may be called the White Guelph delusion, and he fondly hoped that, if suitably exhorted by himself, the grandson of Henry VII might become the saviour of Italy, with Rienzo restored as Tribune of Rome and the Pope re-installed at the Lateran. Already, in February, he had written to Charles bidding him descend and reign.

Boccaccio was not misled by any such mystical fantasy. To him Charles was no more than "a phantom Cæsar," and a ridiculous phantom at that.* Nor did he waste a hope on Rienzo, who, after approaching the King of Hungary without satisfaction, had turned up before the throne of Bohemia not long after its occupant had perused the Laureate's letter. Charles himself was so little impressed by Rienzo's dramatic eloquence concerning the Holy Ghost, that he handed him over to Clement at Avignon; and although Clement perceived certain possibilities for himself in Petrarch's protégé, he imprisoned him till these should mature—which they did not until after the death of Clement, who was already ill. Hearing that Rienzo was to be tried for heresy† Petrarch had written to Clement, demanding with high-pitched indignation, that the Tribune should be given a public trial at Rome. But Clement only smiled and offered Petrarch the Papal Secretaryship. Though Rienzo was chained by the leg, he was well supplied with books and with food from Clement's own kitchen.

* It must have amused Boccaccio to learn that Charles was detained from immediately saving Italy by his inability to pay his butcher's bill, so that he was actually arrested for debt!

†Rienzo, a convert to the Olivists at Sulmona, had announced that the reign of God the Father and the Son was over, and that henceforth the Holy Ghost would reign.

After some days of stimulating conversation in Florence, Petrarch went to Rome in the company of an abbot. He was kicked by a horse *en route*, but bore the accident with exemplary sweetness, and from Rome he wrote to say that he had now finally "turned his back on poetry." This being so, he thought it a good thing that Boccaccio had not accompanied him, as then the temptation to wander about as mere poets instead of concentrating upon their souls, might have been too strong.

Petrarch's letters to Boccaccio are full of similar expressions of affection, sometimes facetious, sometimes stately. Yet upon reading them we cannot escape the belief that he felt more warmly towards at least half a dozen other men than he did towards this one. He sincerely enjoyed Boccaccio's attempts to dissuade him from his "fasts and numerous vigils." He liked exhorting Boccaccio to pray for both of them that they might be saved from "that association with women" which he deplored as his "secret uncleanness." He was kindly resolute in recommending the author of *Amorous Fiammetta* to maintain "a consistent contempt for false and fleeting joys," and to forsake the vulgar idiom. But, although he manifestly clung to this new outpouring of affection, which flowed from fullness, his own response came rather from poverty of heart. In spite of his countless friends, Petrarch was secretly a lonely and dissatisfied man. He needed deference and craved the warmth of which he was himself incapable, but his feeling for Boccaccio was not more than a half-hearted fondness for one who shared his intellectual interests. "The frost of age" for him was less like "a celestial dew" than he would have us believe, and he spoke with more truth than he intended when he said, "In my aged years I despise all the world and myself most of all!" He found sweetness in the torture of addressing an unpossessed Laura in her grave. But his was not, as Boccaccio's was, "the

fruit of natural love in an honest heart," which "remains to be delightful." It should have been of himself not of Boccaccio, that he spoke when, five years later, he said, "From many letters of yours I have extracted one thing, that you have a troubled spirit."

In December, having been accorded a triumph at Arezzo on his way from Rome,* Petrarch paid a second visit to Florence. He brought with him the codex of Quintilian's *De Institutione Oratoria* which he had appropriately discovered in his birthplace. Nelli proceeded to make a transcript for him and Boccaccio bestirred himself to claim every honour for the guest, while the friendly, learned conversations were renewed.

Yet Petrarch seems to have returned depressed to Padua, or it may be that he became depressed only upon learning that, shortly before his arrival there, his patron, Giacomo Carrara, had been murdered at his own table by his cousin, some say his bastard, who paid immediately with his own life. Petrarch wrote earnestly begging some, or any, of his remaining friends at Avignon to come and live with him. While extolling it as his greatest treasure, he detested solitude.

Yet he occupied the winter at Padua not uncomfortably, and interested himself in trying to mediate between Venice and Genoa, and—with more success—in the revision for posterity of those very poems which he professed to condemn. His heart was warmed by an account, given by two monkish visitors of his host, of a certain Brother's self-forgetful devotion during the Plague months in a convent at Montrieux, the devoted one being his own brother, Gherardo, whose kindred to him was only then discovered by the narrators.

Also, while in Padua, he received an uninvited visit

* He was shown the house where he was born, and was told that the citizens would permit no alterations to be made in it. Such museum honours till then had been reserved for saints—after death.

from Boccaccio, who came as the bearer of a very particular missive from Florence. Would he honour them, wrote the Priori in their most flattering style, by taking up his residence in Florence, there to become the luminary—in any capacity he might choose—of their new university, which thereby would rank as the premier place of learning in Europe and would attract all the finest minds to Tuscany? At last there was a university by the Arno! With characteristic Florentine optimism this had been inaugurated during the Plague year, and although as yet it was nothing to boast of—indeed never would be—the Pope, while declining to protect the Commune's existence, had promised privileges to its new institution equal to those possessed by the universities of Bologna and Paris. Having Petrarch's name it would surely spread a lustre rivalling that of more ancient centres of learning, making Florence the queen of modern cities equal to Rome in her prime. None other than Petrarch could bring this about—in consideration of which the Priori offered to return to him the value of his father's property, confiscated two years before the poet's birth. As a sentence of exile was, in fact, still operative, by Florentine law Petrarch was in peril of death every time he entered the city. But this also the Priori would put right. Not only the fame but the population and the trade of the place would enormously benefit if it became the home of Petrarch.

The authorities could not have chosen a more persuasive carrier for their request than "our citizen, Giovanni Boccaccio." Glowing with the single purpose of doing honour to his friend, and overjoyed at the prospect of having him in permanent nearness, he communicated his own enthusiasm to Petrarch.

It was Laura's anniversary (6th April). On that day Petrarch had first seen her; on that day she had died. The spring weather was kindly to reminiscence, and the days

that passed during Boccaccio's visit were refreshingly monotonous. The Laureate "gave himself to sacred studies" until sunset, while his humble friend was industriously content to make fine copies of his host's works. Petrarch was not lavish with presentations. He raged constantly at the "tribe of copyists" who were either dissolute, lazy or simply ignorant. "A work written in a few months," he grumbled, "cannot be copied in so many years." Over ten times he had tried to get *The Joys of Solitude* satisfactorily transcribed, and often he declared that, what with errors, arrogant corrections and interpolations, a transcribed page was scarcely recognizable. Once or twice in his role of Cicero he had undertaken the task himself, but he made no practice of it. His poor sight and his rich self-esteem combined to render it irksome; but Boccaccio made and sent his own meticulous copies of manuscripts in all directions, and he was never too busy to duplicate Petrarch's writings.

When the sun was low in the sky that April at Padua, the friends left their desks and strolled or sat in the well-kept garden which Petrarch never lacked, while they conversed "in placid and delightful idleness" till nightfall. They spoke of the years wasted in youth, and of how at least they might now help to restore the lost culture of the classics to Italy; they compared notes upon the love of women; and if Boccaccio had not already scrutinized Simone's miniature of Laura, he did so now. They lamented the wickedness of Emperors and Popes, and dwelt on the oppressiveness and greed of the Visconti which all free souls must withstand. Especially they denounced the new head of the Visconti, Archbishop Giovanni, now the master of Milan and the destroyer of Bologna's integrity. When he left, Boccaccio carried back with him a condescending reply which read like the affirmative he took it to be.

III

He had barely returned to Florence to announce the good news before the Priori heard from Petrarch himself that, although he still "desired to obey," he had no intention of doing so. "If I break my word that I have given to my friends," he wrote in separate explanation to Boccaccio, "it is because of the variability of the human spirit from which none is exempt save the perfect man. Uniformity is the mother of boredom and one can avoid boredom only by changing one's place." Had he said "mind" instead of "place," his meaning might have been clearer. He had never seriously meant to come. His chosen word must therefore refer to his intention of presently returning yet again to Avignon where he was still angling for a place in the Comtat.

Swallowing his disappointment the Florentine poet went on with his own preparations for a life of modest but assiduous study, to be varied only by civic duties which would involve travel. He deputed a couple of notaries to take over the guardianship of his stepbrother. Unlike Petrarch he delighted in children, yet he seems never to have suggested taking even the "angelic" Violante to live with him. More modest and considerate than S. Augustine* or Petrarch, he judged himself ill-suited to provide the best atmosphere for a young boy. He knew what trouble Petrarch was having with his son John, and how unhappy John was. Petrarch called the boy his "vomit nut," and congratulated himself upon having only one.

* Augustine removed his illegitimate children from their unhappy mother when he sailed to Africa. Nobody knows what came of them but they must have suffered from their father's saintship.

"When he is with me," he wrote, "he always keeps silence; whether my presence is irksome and confusing to him, or whether shame for his ignorance closes his lips, I suspect that it is the latter, for I perceive too clearly his antipathy to letters. I never saw it stronger in any one; he dreads and detests nothing so much as a book; yet he was brought up at Parma, Verona and Padua. I sometimes direct a few sharp pleasantries at this disposition. 'Take care,' I say, 'lest you should eclipse your neighbour, Virgil.' When I talk in this manner, he looks down and blushes. On this behaviour alone I build my hope. He is modest, and has a docility which renders him susceptible of every impression."

The passage speaks for itself. But if Petrarch had failed, how could he, Boccaccio, hope to succeed? Further, Boccaccio had already decided that he wished to make his home at Certaldo, which was remote from grammar schools and other means of youthful grace. However, he continued to take a more than benevolent interest in his stepbrother.

In December he set out on a journey that was long, cold, responsible and dangerous—and he hated cold, diplomacy and travelling almost equally. But he saw his duty in this undertaking. Florence, after repeated appeals to the Pope without result, and having heard that the coming of the Emperor Charles was imminent, was looking elsewhere for help that would not be too costly. She had decided to approach the excommunicated and unpopular monarch, Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, who was the son of her old enemy, Lewis of Bavaria. For this mission she had selected her citizen, Giovanni Boccaccio, giving him letters to deliver in person to Ludwig, and to the Duke of Teck who had visited Florence ten years earlier so that the poet-ambassador had probably met him there then.

The situation was difficult, especially regarding Bologna. Having been sent to claim that city for the Pope, Cardinal

Albornoz, the warlike Archbishop of Toledo, to whom Clement had given almost no money, had begun to fight for his own hand, and when Clement, who was suffering from an abscess in his face,* sent for his "purple captain" to remonstrate, the legate replied that he would come accompanied by 12,000 horse and 6,000 foot. That summer a considerable number of those had been sent by Albornoz under his Visconti lieutenant† to frighten Florence, but the attempt had failed and they had gone back to Bologna. But the Cardinal, hand-in-glove with the Visconti, was greatly to be feared, and indeed within a few months Clement, near his own end, was to lease Bologna to Albornoz for 12,000 florins a year, leaving him to make his own private bargain with Giovanni Visconti over the transaction.

Boccaccio's embassy to the Tirol failed. Brandenburg wanted money but he would intervene only on terms unacceptable to Florence. Further, he had been making friends with Charles of Bohemia who had formerly been his great enemy. All he did, therefore, was to dispatch one Diapoldo Katzenstein to Florence, and Diapoldo, not satisfying the Signoria, returned in due course.

Hating princes, Boccaccio was a less persuasive envoy than Petrarch. He writes no panegyrics of emperors and kings, nor they of him. When Petrarch spoke, even in rebuke, royal personages invariably listened "with profound attention." Has he not told us so himself? And they as invariably offered him their patronage. But while, upon occasion, Boccaccio could command attention, he was neither impressive nor ingratiating. He lost no opportunity of picking up the current talk concerning his hosts, and pounced upon any new tale for his col-

* To Louis of Taranto he wrote that his affliction had "altered our appearance to an extraordinary degree."

† John Visconti da Oleggio, reputed to be a Visconti bastard.

lection that his travels offered; but he found the position of ambassador irksome,* and he saw too clearly beforehand the futility of most embassies.

After an inconclusive attempt to engage the protection of Charles—a move which betrayed the loss of integrity in traditional enmities as well as the desperation of Florence—it became necessary to make humiliating terms with the Visconti. The fact that these had outplayed the Florentines at their old financial game, tempting the neighbouring Tuscan pockets as they had the coffers of Charles and of the new Pope, Innocent VI, annulled further efforts at combining with the few free communes that remained. Innocent, using Albornoz to recover the Church property on the Romagna, was coquetting with the Serpent of Milan for his own ends, and elsewhere he was carrying on Clement's policy, pressing for the coronation of Joan and her consort and for the release of the Tarantesi and Durazzeschi by Lewis of Hungary. Also he was preparing to use and to ruin Rienzo.

Clement had died on 6 December, 1352, and his *cortège*, from the palace to which he had put the finishing touches, was graced by a train of nephews who helped to carry the coffin. He would perhaps have smiled had he known that his skull would stand as a drinking-cup on the table of the Marquis de Courton—for Clement too was a man of family and his letters suggest a nice ironic sense. But he might not have liked to foresee that, before it was a thing of bone, that same handsome head which had so often lain in the silken lap of beauty, would serve as a football for hobnailed Huguenots.†

* We know this from a reference in one of Petrarch's letters.

† When the General of the Carthusian friars was suggested as Clement's successor, Cardinal de Talleyrand was shocked. "What are you thinking of," he exclaimed, "don't you see that this monk will wish to make us all live like anchorites? He will oblige us to go on foot like the Apostles, and our thoroughbreds will be put to the plough!"

The following year was marked by another funeral—this time in Florence—which equalled Clement's in splendour, and, it may well be, exceeded it in expense. Niccolò Acciajuoli's son, Lorenzo, having escaped from many perilous adventures in the Neapolitan wars, had succumbed to illness, and his burial signalized the official opening of the tomb at Certosa which was called after his name saint. Matteo Villani says that the ceremony was more than royal, and it was reckoned by the Florentines, who were practised assessors, that Niccolò must have spent upwards of 50,000 florins that January day. Boccaccio, in his other way of reckoning, averred that the display owed more to pride than to paternal grief. Later he went so far as to state that Niccolò's mourning was an affectation. As the uncrowned king of Naples and the man who could command the Pope through his purse-strings, Niccolò had grown ever more arrogant, ever less reticent of his crimes of ambition. In the preceding year he had quarrelled with Barrile, so that Petrarch had to interpose by letter to make peace. As yet there was no open rupture between him and Boccaccio, but Zanobi da Strada seemed to Niccolò a far more promising and useful person than his old friend. Having tried without success to secure Petrarch as his private secretary, he had invited Zanobi, who accepted eagerly. Meanwhile Boccaccio paid another visit to Ravenna. While there, he heard that Petrarch had gone to Milan to live under the protection of the enemy of Florence, Giovanni Visconti.

After many months at Avignon without obtaining what he wanted—a lucrative ecclesiastical post that involved no work—the Laureate had returned to Italy, and had found himself disposed to "accept the commands of the greatest man in Italy." Milan under the Visconti was the flourishing capital of a European state which, though small, had few superiors. The Archbishop had offered Petrarch a

commodious house situated in the best quarter of the town, beside the Vercellino Gate and near the ancient church of San Ambrogio. The windows commanded a fine view of the Alps.

Boccaccio's letter, upon learning of this, was so full of reproach that it is surprising to find it among the four from him which Petrarch preserved. He would not have believed the news, he writes, if it had not come from Petrarch himself. Was it from greed, from "variability," or from spite at the Florentines having withheld his father's portion* that he had become the ornament of the arch-enemy of liberty? What of their garden talks at Padua, when together they had cursed all the Visconti and this one in particular? Where was Petrarch's scorn of wealth, his praise of the simple life, his condemnation of joys "false and fugitive"?

"Silvanus," he writes, using the name by which Petrarch was known to the Florentine circle, "has forgotten his dignity, he has forgotten all the language he used to hold respecting the state of Italy, his hatred of the Archbishop, and his love of liberty; and he would imprison the Muses in that court. To whom can we now give our faith? . . . How has the Visconti obtained this truckling? . . . It is no use your saying that you have not incited him to war against our country, nor lent him either your pen or advice. How can you be happy with him, while you are hearing of the ruins, the conflagrations, the imprisonments, the deaths and the rapines that he spreads around him?"

Such reproaches did not reach Petrarch from Boccaccio alone. His friends at Avignon—Socrates, Guido Settimo, and Philip de Cabassoles who had tried hard to obtain a benefice for the poet in his own diocese, were both astonished and grieved. "The proud republican," who had "scorned an office in the Papal Court" because it was

* Since Petrarch had refused to live in Florence this was not repaid.

"a gilded yoke," had "accepted the chains of the tyrant of Italy"!

Petrarch, of course, had not scorned office at Avignon. He had simply not been offered any to his liking—for which he was never to forgive Innocent VI. His replies to his friends were various. "How can I refuse anything," he asked, "to a man to whom the gods refuse nothing?" "The requests of princes have greater force than their commands," he added. He admitted that he had "acted contrary to my genius and my wonted manner of thinking." But he had found the Archbishop "impossible to resist." "I confess to all, and seek for no excuse." St. Chrysostum had said that "Man has not a greater enemy than himself."

Thus he took refuge in facetiousness. His more sustained defence was written to Boccaccio almost ten years later, when he says, "I have always been the most free of men, even when I appeared subdued to the hardest yoke. . . . My mind shall always be free, tho' my body may be subjected, like yours, to a master or many masters. It seems to me better to live under the law of one tyrant than, as you do, under that of a tyrannical people." After all, Archbishop Visconti "treated all obedient subjects with kindness" and he had "bestowed a great many charities."

Boccaccio was fully answered. He wasted no more breath on the subject.

IV

As the loyal, if not loving, son of the Florentine Commune, he was himself now sent upon yet another mission of futility. The Emperor was expected. Tuscan interests were threatened. Mere letters addressed to the Pope had failed to elicit satisfactory replies. Boccaccio was to assure the Sovereign Pontiff of that Florentine devotion in which neither he nor Innocent had much faith, and to discover, if possible, Innocent's intentions with regard to Charles. Minor questions concerned the appointment of one of the Peruzzi to the bishopric of Perugia and the return of certain exiled nobles of whose warlike help the Commune might presently stand in need.

The importance of the occasion, and the tact required, show that Boccaccio had discharged his Tirolese mission satisfactorily. This time he was accompanied by one Bernardo Cambi, as assistant envoy. Boccaccio's pay was four florins and ten soldi a day, and he was allowed three horses. Cambi got one florin and twenty soldi and one horse. They set out on 28 April, 1354. It was estimated that they would be gone forty-five days.

That the inquiry failed goes without saying. Niccolò Acciajuoli was the only Florentine who could read the Papal mind, and this was because he knew how to fill the Papal purse. Innocent VI was not so clever as Clement VI, but he was pope enough to conceal his intentions from a Florentine who had nothing but questionable devotion to offer in return for explicit statements.

The forty-five days were extended to sixty while the politic conversations marked time. When nothing definite

is said, however, something definite is usually made known, and Boccaccio carried away a shrewd idea of the truth. This was that the Pope hoped, by playing a waiting game, to manipulate both Charles and the Visconti in such a way as to net the main profit for the Church without much incommoding Florence—from his own point of view—and that Albornoz was his chief lieutenant to this end. Boccaccio's embassy was immediately followed by another from Florence.

This had been his first sight of Avignon, and in May and June he must have seen the place at its best (if also at its worst for one of his views about churchmen). It is the more to be regretted that the letters he wrote to Petrarch and others, while Innocent kept him waiting about, have been destroyed.

It is also unfortunate that his observations upon his next very different errand, which followed immediately upon his return to Florence in midsummer, survive only in one of his Latin *Eclogues*,* where they are so wrapped up in classical allusions that we can disentangle no vivid impression.

This time Cambi and he went again together, having equal pay and probably but a horse apiece. Evidently they were on friendly terms. For six hot days they rode about the neighbourhood of Certaldo which, just then, was not at all safe. The perils and their presence were closely connected.

It will be remembered that, in Naples, Boccaccio knew Charles of Durazzo. He must therefore have had some acquaintance, even then, with the man whom everybody called "Fra Moriale." A Knight Hospitaller of good Provençal birth with an uncle settled at Capua as Prior of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Fra Moriale had been attached to the House of Durazzo as principal

* *Eclogue*, vii.

gentleman-in-waiting. He had taken a prominent part in hunting down the Catanesi, and had been a witness of their subsequent tortures. He had led the mob in the sack of Charles Artois' palace. An inborn taste for torture and stolen treasure was thus fostered. When the kingdom was invaded he was given a command at Capua. But after the flight of Niccolò and Louis of Taranto, he soon perceived how the King of Hungary meant to behave and, at a fatal moment for the house he had served, he made a secret change of masters. The royal villa at Aversa, and then the Durazzo palace in Naples, offered full scope for his acquisitive propensities and he helped to drive out his former mistress, Maria Durazzo, with her infants. Later, when some of the Duchess's more faithful servants by stealth or force recovered certain valuable church ornaments which had found their way from her house to the Priory at Capua, the Pope ordered her to restore these lest she be guilty of sacrilege! Clement had a weakness for well-born Provençals. But when, in 1352, Fra Moriale set about raiding and killing as a regular trade, Clement, after vainly summoning his knight to Avignon, was obliged to declare him "in contumaciam." In consideration of this Fra Moriale promised to amend and Clement bade Joan and Louis to forgive him. This, prompted by Niccolò, they refused to do. But Niccolò had to pay him to remove himself.

Now, having spread terror around Arezzo and Siena, this same gentleman with a following of 1,500 horse and 2,000 foot, had been devastating the countryside of Boccaccino's birthplace in the Val d'Elsa, and the inhabitants were dismayed. How dismayed appears from the fact that Florence had empowered Boccaccio to pay the marauders 25,000 florins as the price of their departure. If the offer was refused, however, Boccaccio was to tell them that Florence would fight. A diplomatic detail—

can it have been suggested by Boccaccio or was it merely a Florentine ruse?—was that without Fra Moriale's knowledge 3,000 additional florins were to find their way, on the same terms, to his officers' pockets. In all, that is to say, Boccaccio and Cambi had 28,000 florins to dispose of.

Naturally the knight took the cash. He and his followers could kill elsewhere. Boccaccio's face, as the money changed hands, and his remarks to Cambi when the bargain was completed, must have been worth seeing and hearing. But the conversations between the usurer's son and the gentleman robber were strictly polite, and Boccaccio may have thought Fra Moriale no worse than Clement or Innocent, whose aims were similar, while their scope was greater and involved no risk of their skins.

Boccaccio was not the only literary man who undertook embassies that year. Petrarch too was busy in his way for the public good as he conceived it. But, being Petrarch, he acted rather as a diplomatic freelance in what he took to be the cause of peace. For he was citizen of no commune and he was nobody's humble servant.

Much had happened in North Italy during the late summer and autumn of the preceding year. In August the Genoese fleet had been destroyed by the Venetians. This astonished everybody, but no one more than Petrarch who had always predicted success at sea for Genoa and had, accordingly, addressed high-sounding epistles to the Genoese counselling them to be magnanimous. It was also very annoying to Petrarch's patron, the Archbishop, who, not long before, had received Genoese submission. He now deposed the city Doge and Senate and sent a deputy to govern for him there, which favour the Genoese were obliged to accept.

A further incident of moment had taken place in

September, when Albornoz came to Milan as a forerunner of the Emperor. Petrarch had already bidden Charles by letter to come to Italy and save everybody and everything; so he was glad to see Albornoz whom he now met for the first time.

Not for nothing had Albornoz been director of the siege of Algeciras. He was a remarkable man and a great soldier—young, brave, full of talents, without scruples and extremely handsome—the sort of man for whom Petrarch had a natural appreciation so long as deference was shown to himself.

He came to Lombardy with a showy retinue, and the Visconti, though they were by no means pleased to see him, offered handsome hospitality and went out two miles in full panoply to bring him in, Petrarch riding in Galeazzo's suite.

The poet's horse* unluckily slipped into a ditch at the side of the road. But his equanimity was soon restored, for Albornoz treated him "with great benignity" and—"granted all that I asked for my friends." What the grants and which the friends, we do not know, except that Boccaccio was not among the latter. But Petrarch has recorded that, when the Spaniard asked what he wanted for himself, he replied with dignity that he had no needs, as his friends were his all. What if Petrarch had made some request for his friend and hero, Rienzo, for whom he still professed some affection and hope? Albornoz, like the other benignant Cardinal, Guy of Boulogne, was determined upon the Tribune's death. But Petrarch had always taken a modest pride in his capacity for knowing "when to speak and when to remain silent."

Meanwhile, after an operation to a carbuncle on his forehead, Archbishop Giovanni died on 4th December. While Florence celebrated the occasion with a general

* He says he had four horses at his disposal and at least six amanuenses.

holiday, Petrarch was called upon for the funeral oration—which he condescended to make in Italian—and to take part in the proclamation of the dead man's nephews, Matteo, Galeazzo and Bernabò, who were to reign jointly in his stead. Matteo, who was already fifty-four, was to die—some say by poison—within a year, leaving his brothers to divide Lombardy between them. Outside their rule there were only six independent cities left. Galeazzo, who became Petrarch's new master and friend, is noted in European history for having invented and practised a method of execution by mutilation. This was carefully graduated and could be varied, but was calculated to keep a man alive for forty days. It may be urged in his favour that he had to handle persons like Fra Moriale, members of "The Great Company" who had taken service with Petrarch's other tyrant patrons in Italy, and that it was his business, when he could not employ them himself, to make their blood run cold. In most respects he was said to govern with foresight and judicious magnanimity: reverses found him philosophical, and he bore his own long tortures from the gout with a patience that brought tears to the eyes of witnesses. His younger brother, Bernabò, who maintained five thousand boar-hounds at the public expense, had a less respectable character, but something may be forgiven him for having perpetrated one of the most original practical jokes in history, when he made the Papal legates eat their Bulls, and saw to it that they swallowed even the leaden seals and silken cords.

Three days after the Archbishop's decease, Rienzo, who had been reinstated in Rome a short time before under Papal surveillance, was ingloriously killed by the Pipini.*

* Innocent, using him as a pawn, had done this, and Petrarch had been complaisant.

Did Petrarch, addressing the Milanese upon the virtues of the late Archbishop, spare a thought for this other friend, whose death he and his noble acquaintances had helped to bring about? If he did, perhaps he found consolation in two manuscripts which Boccaccio now sent to him as gifts. These were an anthology, composed especially for him from Cicero and Varro, and St. Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms.* Both were beautifully copied by Boccaccio's hand.

Six days after Rienzo's murder Charles of Bohemia entered Italy. His coming was greeted by Boccaccio* and by Filippo Villani with ridicule, but Petrarch hailed him as "reale Natura, angelico intelletto!"

Ignoring invitations by the Visconti, Charles went first to Padua where the Carrara received him magnificently, and then to Mantua where obeisance was made to him as sovereign, not only by the Gonzaga, but by ambassadors from many other cities throughout Italy. Only the Guelph republics and the reigning della Scala of Verona failed to put in an appearance.

At Mantua Charles received an effusive letter from Petrarch offering him Italy and inviting him to Milan, to which Charles responded by inviting Petrarch to Mantua. It was early December and harsh with fog, but the Laureate made the four-day journey and was present at all the forthcoming conferences.

He wrote to "Lœlius" at Avignon, describing his own "more than imperial reception." "Nothing could be more refined and engaging than the dignified manners of this prince," who had once danced with Laura—though Petrarch had thought poorly of him then. He went on to tell of the long evenings' *tête-à-tête* in which Charles listened respectfully, while, "I used my customary freedom of speech while conversing with persons of rank."

* *Eclogue*, vii.

Charles, he says, "desired to hear the history—or shall I say the romance?—of my life, from the day of my birth to the present time." But it soon appeared that Charles had already studied the fascinating story so closely that he was able to interpolate several details. This piece of flattery encouraged the Laureate to instruct the Emperor in imperial behaviour, and to promise that, if this was properly forthcoming, the *Lives of Famous Men*, which was in process of completion, should be dedicated to him. At this point Petrarch noted with satisfaction that "there was a sparkle" in the royal eye "as Charles inclined his august head." Less prejudiced historians have granted Charles some intelligence. The royal sparkle suggests further a sense of humour. Presently he led Petrarch into a discussion upon the Solitary Life. He disapproved, he said, of anything that would deprive the world of Petrarch's presence as counsellor. In fact, he wished Petrarch to accompany him and grace his coronation at Rome.

This Petrarch refused to do. He would go with Charles no further from Milan than to the fifth milestone beyond Piacenza. He wished, he said, to see first from afar how the prince conducted himself.

Such counsels, courtesies and compliments were not, however, what had brought the Laureate to Mantua. Charles had arrived with so modest a following that he was jeered at for travelling like a merchant. The rulers of Lombardy wished to assure him that they had 30,000 disciplined soldiers under arms and that they were prepared to contribute 50,000 florins towards his Roman coronation, besides endowing him with the Iron Crown at their capital. But before he came for these things he must sign a humiliating agreement. Petrarch modestly disclaimed the honour of this peace-making arrangement when congratulated by friends at Avignon. None the less

he was present when Charles signed the document. And he must have brought this with him, and it must have travelled back in his company when he returned to spend his Christmas at Milan.

Upon his arrival he found that he had just missed Niccolò Acciajuoli who had left four letters from Zanobi da Strada. He had not heard from him these two years, possibly because letters had got lost in transit. This was a common complaint. In Petrarch's case, particularly, autograph hunters intercepted his correspondence to cut out his signature together with any parts they fancied, and they did not always send on the remainder.

After Christmas Charles was met at Lodi by Galeazzo and magnificently conducted to a palace there made ready for him. His 3,000 unarmed cavaliers noticed that the city gates were locked ostentatiously as soon as they had entered and were not reopened until they left.

The same happened at Milan on January 4th, when Matteo and Bernabò escorted him with drums and trumpets and proceeded to match the Lombard against the Bohemian sense of humour. Before receiving the Iron Crown at San Ambrogio, Charles had to sit at the palace window with Petrarch beside him, while he enjoyed an uninterrupted view of the well-equipped forces which his hosts paraded in the streets below.

Petrarch records no undue brightness in the august eye as Charles surveyed the sight of the Visconti army, its ranks further swollen by companies of mounted burgesses whose caparisons put those of his own gentlemen to shame. Those near him explained that what he saw was merely the field army and that there were numerous fortresses occupied by garrisons in the outlying districts of the state. If he did not smile Charles faced the ordeal with imperial composure.

Upon his coronation he named the Visconti brothers

Vicars of the Empire in all their Italian possessions, and created the infant sons of Galeazzo and Bernabò* Knights of the Spur. The parade of armed force had been effective in securing the Visconti demands. The Emperor, enriched by the promised money and 200 horses and with an escort of 600 Milanese cavalry, pursued his journey to Rome by way of the Lombard States. Petrarch, true to his promise, accompanied him five miles beyond Piacenza where he bade Charles a paternal farewell.

* Petrarch, for holding young Marco at the font, received a gold cup.

V

It has often been said that Boccaccio forsook Italian for Latin to please Petrarch. This needs qualification. The Laureate discouraged literary activity in the vernacular and his influence was strong. But the younger man's best Italian prose was written after the two met, some of it a long time afterwards. Before their meeting he had written chiefly in Italian because his Latin was poor and because, even had it been good, Fiammetta could not have enjoyed it. But he did not cease, even so, to repair his defective education and, when barely thirty, he had embarked upon *De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium* which was to occupy him for fifteen years before it was finished. His *Eclogues* and many of his poems would also, it is to be feared, have been written in Latin even if he had never called Petrarch master.

Further, if some of his works may be spoken of as more secular than others, there are none which are basically anything else. He penned no *Confessions* or *Meditations*, and would not venture or comment upon "sacred writings." For this he found his intellect too "slender," and "in all respects it is most unbecoming to devote yourself to an undertaking which you are almost certain you cannot carry through."* His huge natural survey, the *De Montibus*; his chronicles of human misfortune, the *De Casibus* and the *De Claris Mulieribus*; his *Eclogues* of modern events; his life of Dante, and the mass of legend, literary criticism and autobiographical detail composing the *De Genealogiis*; all are equally Boccaccian, equally

* *De Genealogiis*, xv.

un-Petrarcan, and equally secular in flavour with his most worldly productions.

It is, by the same circumstances, unappreciative to find fault with Boccaccio, as de Sanctis and many others have done, for possessing "no organic unity, no plan," or for having in himself "several distinct men . . . not properly fused"—as "the man of erudition, the artist, the troubadour, the literato and the man of the world,"* with "a great deal of vulgarity" thrown in. For it is this very diversity, which is nevertheless always in character even when he is most imitative in his forms, which gives the vital charm to his least perfect works. It is precisely because he was, as one biographer apologetically says, "at the mercy of his impressions of real life and of his studies," that he speaks with a living voice after 600 years. Under all influences, including that of over-modesty, he was artist enough not to swerve from nature within and without himself. Moreover he was saved by his lively sense of humour. Beneath his heartfelt tributes to Petrarch there lurks a sly detachment, and while he sits at Petrarch's feet he is often engaged in pulling Petrarch's august leg. In writing of the ancients he warns us that "when they fail me, or I find them inexplicit I shall set down my own opinion," and "this I will do with perfect freedom of mind . . . as being a poet."† In lively anticipation of criticism he announces that it will then be not he but "the ancients who are to blame . . . for such untruthful and discrepant statements that you could never suppose them the utterances of philosophers, no, not even the inventions of rustics. All these inconsistencies you will observe in their chronology. All these discrepancies and more I do not purpose to reconcile or correct unless they naturally submit to some order. I shall be satisfied merely to write down what I find and leave the learned disputa-

* de Sanctis. † *De Gen. Proem.*

tion to the philosophers. All this not without God's help."*

The author of the *Decameron* speaks, and behind his spacious humour there is a unity far more integral than the polished literary unity of Petrarch with his divided soul, his separate perfections and his unassailable pretensions to understanding. He is vivacious where Petrarch is dead. He smiles triumphantly at the accusation of shallowness while gaily accepting the definition. He has something of the imperfection that is the charm of life. Boccaccio's humour has not had full justice done to it. It lurks in his most solemn-sounding passages. Perhaps he is never wholly serious except when he is decrying tyranny or extolling love and poetry. And even at love he can laugh. His humility is naturally joyful. It might have been of him that Dante spoke when he said:

> "The soul shows herself in the mouth almost like colour under glass. And what is laughter but a scintillation of the soul's delight, that is a gleam showing itself without, no otherwise than it exists within?"†

Yet with it all he was immovable in all that mattered to him. Nothing would ever convince him that his love for Fiammetta was sinful, or that truckling to tyrants was anything else. He entered the arena fully conscious that he was "a manikin against those giant hulks—who have armed themselves with authority to say that poetry is either no art at all or a useless one."‡ He knew also that "around my book as usual at the sight of a new work, will gather a crowd of the incompetent, lawyers wearing togas and gold buckles, who will say, 'Oh yes, a very pretty work but of no use whatever.'"‖ But he reminds us slyly that

* *De Gen. Proem.*
† *Convivio.*
‡ *De Genealogiis*, vi.
‖ *De Genealogiis*, xiv.

so learned a man as Augustine "did not blush that he could not understand the beginning of Isaiah," and he holds poetry, upon which Petrarch had turned his back, to be "an art or skill, not empty, but full of the sap of natural vigour."

In 1354, when Charles was on his way to be crowned at Rome pursued by Petrarch's blessing and Boccaccio's ridicule, Boccaccio was still at work upon the *Decameron*. But before he finished this and before, for several reasons, he withdrew into the compiling of educative works in Latin, he wrote two more short books in Italian, which, though not his best, are nevertheless among the most interesting of his works. They are, moreover, as sharply contrasted as any two books could be, while each is as different from what went before them in the vernacular as from what came after them in the scholastic tongue. Neither could have been written by any other man and without them his output would lack its rich completeness. They are the novel, called *Il Corbaccio*, and the celebrated *Life of Dante*. Both appear to have been written between 1354 and 1355. The *Life*, though finished the later, was the earlier begun.

The novel may be taken first, as it belongs to a definite incident which befell its author when he was still engaged upon the *Decameron*. At the age of forty, and in spite of Petrarch's unflagging adjurations, he had become violently enamoured of a pretty Florentine woman, the widow, it is said, of a Florentine named Antonio Pucci.

She was already provided with a lover, and the grey-haired, corpulent poet who was noted as a writer on love, struck her as a subject for merriment. Deliberately she set herself to deceive him, her own heart being untouched. Boccaccio was attracted and she led him on, how far he does not tell us. In all confidence that the attraction was mutual he disclosed his feelings.

Then he learned, by accident or by design, that she was going about Florence making a mock of him, amusing her more youthful lover with his sayings, even handing about the letters he had written her. Florence smiled. Boccaccio's mortification was complete.

The victim, however, was not one to suffer in silence. He said what he thought of such women in at least one *Decameron* story, and he relieved his feelings in the satirical novel which he called *Laberinto d'Amore*—not the labours this time, but the labyrinth of love—otherwise known as *Il Corbaccio, The Invective of Messer Giovanni Boccaccio against a Wicked Woman.*

Some critics have deplored this as an "unimaginative and unpleasantly interesting book," and as "full of the most revolting cynicism." Others have apologetically drawn attention to its apt and observant descriptions of women both young and old, its valuable information upon female toilettes and habits of the time, its amusing anecdotes and asides, its scenes that rival Plautus, its comic force, and the immense increase in flexibility and felicity of language it displays, though these still maintain that it is a blot upon Boccaccio's literary scutcheon.

It is only fitting that one of the world's most wholly committed lovers, who was also the first laughing lover in Europe, should have known also this aspect of the amorous, and that this side of woman should not be hidden from his experience. Neither Dante nor Petrarch could ever have admitted to having been ridiculed by a woman. Scorn or indifference they could endure, for neither of these need be hurtful to a poet's pride. But to be seen as ludicrous by themselves or by others was outside of their scope. Perhaps this is one reason why a certain absurdity haunts both their great loves while Boccaccio's love for Fiammetta moves us to tears. The *Corbaccio*, with its ribald frankness and its underlying

laughter at everything, including its hero, is perfectly in character. He wrote it partly to relieve his anger, partly to "open the eyes of the young." It reveals his simplicity, and the disrespectful tenderness with which he regarded human life. His attack is not upon love but upon those who make love base.

Although as a whole the *Corbaccio* is too angry a book to achieve the full detachment of humour, there is irrepressible fun in its form, which is modelled, with comic appropriateness, upon that of the *Divine Comedy*. Fun reappears in point after point as this takes shape, not to mention the intrusion of broadly smiling incidents. Dante was released from the dark forest (*silva oscura*) of error by Platonic love: Boccaccio's hero, who is also himself, is led out of the jungle of false love by the light of common sense.

The outline is simple. A man who has been made a laughing-stock by a woman contemplates suicide. Fearing Hell, however, even more than a woman's scorn, he prefers the escape by literary composition. He dreams that he is in a tangled forest in which he encounters the shade of the woman's husband. That the husband may enlighten his widow's would-be lover by telling the truth about her —and, incidentally, about all women more or less—he has been released for a space from Purgatory, to which he was consigned at death to expiate the sin of having been too long-suffering in married life. It is nothing against him that he echoes Ovid and Theophrastus when he makes the husband describe his wife's greed, her pettiness, her stupidity, her artifices, and how horrid she looks first thing in the morning.

Not only is this *scelerata femmina* a painted fraud: she is both cold and jealous. When she does not sulk she wears her mate to death with nagging, while she herself does not tire and her tongue does not pause in reproach

even at night. "Never once when I have come home to bed," mourns the shade of the too patient husband, "hast thou said to me 'my love thou art welcome.'" Instead she had chilled him with the information that "when a man kisses two mouths it is righteous that one of these mouths should spit at him." He does not deny that he kissed two mouths, although this is not what sent him to Purgatory.

Of wives in general, the good-natured ghost assures Boccaccio that they live in their husbands' houses only to spend their money, to upset their pursuits and to quarrel with their friends, relations, children and servants. They make them believe that they are timid, fearful of heights, of boats, of a rattling window. They must have warning if you are going anywhere or doing anything. "But God only knows how bold and ready they are when it comes to having their own will. The darkest night and the highest wall will not stop them then. All they wish is to rule their husbands, and to achieve this they will stoop to anything."

From so dismal a labyrinth of truth, in which many other horrors are disclosed, Boccaccio is led to the top of a mountain, and it is now made clear that the labyrinth leads to Hell. The lesson cures him, not of loving—as he is careful to say—but of the false conception of love which he had too long cherished. For, with a flick of her wicked eye, the Florentine widow had released much which was pent up in him long before he met her. In the shock of the discovery he involves even Fiammetta in his labyrinthine invective. Women's prayers, he says, are "said secretly in bedrooms, and consist of French romances such as Lancelot and Tristan and Florio and Biancafiore. All are inconstant, and light, willing and unwilling in the same heart's beat," he says, making no exceptions, "unless what they wish happens to minister to their incorrigible vices."

If this is, as it would seem, reminiscent of Fiammetta, it made her none the less beloved. It merely rounded his love with laughter at himself and at her, and reinforced it with the truth.

Incidentally too, the real widow and her dream husband convinced him that he was past the age for light loves:

"An ageing knight, for ladies' love unfit."

Thus Dryden in his *Iphigenia* renders one of Boccaccio's lines.

Boccaccio does not seem to have needed women in the somewhat furtive way of Petrarch. He demanded both tenderness and laughter, candour and spirit, in his lightest affairs; and this is a combination not to be bought in the piazzas, nor even perhaps to be easily found at a king's court.

NOTE

The Corbaccio has never been translated.

VI

THE other Italian book, the *Life of Dante*, is an essay of barely 20,000 words not divided into chapters. "My little boat," the author calls it in his concluding sentences, which "has reached the harbour she made for, from one shore to another of a deep and tranquil sea, by the mercy of God who filled her sails with a happy wind."

As a piece of shipbuilding, however, and notwithstanding God's mercy, this first of modern biographies has met with long and merciless if also at times with patronizing criticism, which began with Filippo Villani and Lionardo Bruni and has continued into our own time. Its particulars have been attacked, and in general it has been disparaged. Bruni, after accusing the author of political ignorance, belittled the book for being too like a novel.

"—this most delightful and charming Boccaccio of ours wrote the life and manners of so sublime a poet just as though he were writing the *Filocolo*, or the *Filostrato*, or the *Fiammetta*. For it is all full of love and sighs and burning tears; as though man were born into this world only that he might take his place in those ten amorous *Days* wherein enamoured ladies and gallant youths recounted the Hundred Tales. And he grows so warm in these passages of love that he drops the weighty and substantial parts of Dante's life, passing them over in silence, while he records trivial matters and holds his peace concerning grave ones. . . . I could wish that our Boccaccio had made mention of this valour rather than of his falling in love at nine years old and such like trifles, which he tells of so great a man. But what can you expect? The tongue goes where the tooth aches; and 'His discourse who loves drinking is ever of wines.' "

As criticism this is worthless. It is none the less amusing and interesting. It assures us that without Boccaccio we should have had to forgo "such like trifles" as the features, the colouring, the dress, the aspect, and the love of "the man who had been in Hell." It also reveals the affectionate lack of appreciation in distinguished fellow-citizens, who did not trouble to define what are the grave and what the trivial things in life, towards one whom Fiammetta had taught "how great a fire a little matter kindleth." Without Fiammetta Beatrice would never have been known as a woman who lived in this world. Without the frivolous Florentine widow we should have lacked the fiery passage against marriage, which Boccaccio introduces with the purpose of showing Dante as a defaulting husband and Gemma Donati as an unfortunate, ineffective wife. No other fourteenth-century writer would have found it worth while to describe in her party frock the little girl, Bice Portinari, whom Dante once seeing could never stop loving, because she was "right gracious after her childish fashion and full gentle and winning in her ways—a kind of little angel." Bruni would have excluded all these things as unimportant. But Boccaccio wrote with Violante in his eye and with Fiammetta in his heart. Thus he had, as the wise old Benvenuto da Imola puts it, "the great wit needful for such an undertaking," which Petrarch had not—the wit to remain "full humble and light," no matter how great his subject.

Boccaccio himself makes the frank admission that he did not know what the terms Guelph and Ghibelline originally signified. But he did know the daughter, the nephew, and at least two intimate friends of the poet, besides many acquaintances in Ravenna whom neither Bruni nor Filippo Villani had ever met. If he did not care to burden his statements with references, this

is not to say that he invented facts which are being corroborated as time goes on.* Creating yet another new form, which was followed brilliantly by Machiavelli and a host of others, first in Italy and then much later in England, he saw the life of the individual in a new way. He is not content merely to praise, but desires to present "the dark oracle" of a whole man with all his faults and virtues, and to "reprehend and reward human life according to its diversity." For "every man," as he tells us Solon said of every commonwealth, "must go or stand upon two feet." While planting Dante firmly upon his, Boccaccio keeps his own.

But, in spite of Bruni's sneer, Boccaccio's theme is Dante's greatness. He regarded himself as no more than "a small part of that same city whereof Dante Alighieri, considering his deserts, his nobility and his virtue, was a very great one."† His rebukes are full of gentle sympathy, his exaltation bounded only by the rules of eloquence. Hence his subject gains in magnificence on every page. Dante, he says,

"looked down from the height of the government of the commonwealth, on which he stood, and saw over a wide stretch, as from such places may be seen, what was the life of men, and what were the errors of the common herd, and

* For criticisms of the *Life* English readers may consult Dr. Witte's *Essays on Dante* (pp. 222 *seq.*, and 262–93); Dr. E. Moore's *Dante and His Early Biographers*, and P. H. Wicksteed's preface and notes to his translation. Boccaccio finds a modern and learned defender in Prof. G. Ferretti, whose *I Due Tempi Della Composizione della Divina Commedia* (Bari: Laterza) is a closely reasoned vindication, dwelling especially on the much-debated point of the date when the *Divine Comedy* was begun. In this important matter Boccaccio is declared to be correct.

† In this clever qualifying phrase, Boccaccio anticipates one of Villani's criticisms, that he has exaggerated the importance of Dante as a Florentine citizen during his lifetime. But Villani, like many others, was impervious to our author's more delicate irony.

how few they be who depart therefrom, and of how great honour worthy; and they who side therewith, worthy of how great confusion."

One of the distinctions between Boccaccio and a gifted poetical mocker, such as Cecco Angioleri of Siena, is that while Boccaccio delighted in mockery he could not make light of human greatness. He did not scruple to examine the frailties of Dante, but he never lost sight of his splendour nor ceased to worship it.

Petrarch could never be persuaded to agree with the finding that Dante was "worthy to be named above all." In all his letters, overflowing though they are with literary allusion, he does not refer to the author of the *Divine Comedy* more than twice, and then only when forced to by Boccaccio. "Though readily procurable," there were none of Dante's books in his library until, in 1356–7, Boccaccio made and sent him copies of the *Divine Comedy* and the *Vita Nuova* with a forty-line poem praising their author. These things, however, elicited from Petrarch only the cold admission that Dante's technique was "the best of its kind." Dante had ability, he allows, and had he chosen to devote this to some other occupation he would have been more worthy of esteem. Concerning the man Alighieri, whom he had met in childhood without being favourably impressed, he says that he would certainly have admired and befriended him, "provided of course that I found his character as attractive as his genius."

He could not forgive Dante for not having written in Latin. In youth, he reminds Boccaccio, he too had thought well of the vernacular and had used it—with what effect the whole world knew. But this was "not yet having learned to look higher," whereas Dante had "devoted his whole strength to those things which with me were but the flower and first fruits of my youth . . . mere sport, a

pastime, the first essays of my powers," although admittedly "extremely popular with the vulgar herd."

Petrarch was certainly envious of Dante and of Boccaccio's unshakable enthusiasm. The fear of being ranked as an imitator was always with him, and by his own admission "fills me with aversion." And, worse than all, he was blind to the freshness and grandeur of Dante's major work, to the extreme sweetness of the *Convivio* and to the novel and profound beauty of the *Vita Nuova.* He found that the *De Eloquio*, with its plea for the spoken idiom, was based upon a false and exploded notion. No matter if writers and readers felt and thought in Italian: no matter if Dante delightfully said, in a passage which must have gone to Boccaccio's heart—

> "This vulgar tongue of mine brought together my two parents, for they spoke in it, even as the fire disposes the iron for the use of the smith who makes the knife. Wherefore it is plain that my native tongue had a share in begetting me, and this is, in a sense, the cause of my being."

—Petrarch still reiterated that Latin was better. But nothing Petrarch could or would not say, destroyed Boccaccio's faith in Dante's pre-eminence. He turned this faith into splendid music in the gravest and most virile of his sonnets, and his prose vibrates with reverence. "'Twas he," he proclaims, "that revealed the glory of the vernacular among the Italians. 'Twas he—and none other, through some had practised it—who had the feeling and the courage to bring under the rule of art every beauty of our common speech, making it sovereign above every other."

Because of this, and in spite of Petrarch, he writes the *Life* "in our Florentine idiom, that it may not depart from what Dante used in the greater part of his works. . . ." He makes, for once, no reference to Petrarch. He finds in

Dante "the river both shallow and deep, wherein the small lamb may wade with its feet and the huge elephant may swim with ample space." To Dante alone he gives the highest praise that can be accorded to the imaginative writer: "He saw over a wide stretch—what was the life of men."

NOTE

The *Life* exists in two versions (as well as in several intermediate forms) the longer being known as The *Life*, the shorter as *The Compendium*. The authenticity of the latter, which is softened, abridged and padded, is rightly questioned. The authentic work has been printed in at least twenty-two Italian editions, the other only in four—with a lapse of 332 years (1477–1809) between the earliest of each. In English there are at least two good translations, P. H. Wicksteed's and James Robinson Smith's (*Series Yale Studies in English*, 1901). Much scholarly work has been done on the subject, notably by Dr. Paget Toynbee.

VII

CHARLES of Bohemia, on his way from Milan to Rome, offered all the considerable republics the choice between the expenses of receiving and of keeping him out.

Lucca, which remembered him as a young and amiable Prince Royal during his father's imperial stay there, was unanimous in welcome. Florence was desperately prepared to pay for non-interference. Pisa was divided.

This last city, while remaining on commercial terms with Florence, contained a strong Ghibelline element which had led her to send encouraging envoys to greet Charles at Mantua, and it was in Charles' mind to give both Pisa and Siena as principalities to his brother, the Patriarch of Aquileia. Towards such an end the first step was to foment internal discord in these places. At Pisa Charles was to be met by Albornoz, who had been deputed to assist the Bishop of Ostia at the Roman coronation. Pisa thus became the imperial centre for parleys with deputies from the other Tuscan towns.

All came to heel but Florence. She sent half a dozen citizens to address Charles as His Most Serene Highness, to refuse imperial recognition, and—with an ill grace after long debate—to give him 100,000 florins in return for his confirmation of her liberties. The manner of these messengers was offensive to the Emperor's suite, but Charles, with a benignant gesture, acceded to all requests and threw in the annulment of his grandfather's sentences against former offending members of the Commune.

He might well appear benignant. He had come to Italy to collect as much money as possible for his beloved

Bohemia. These same sentences which he now so handsomely remitted had been annulled by John XXII in 1318 with the heaviest ecclesiastical penalties for disobedience. But the Florentines had forgotten this as they had forgotten Charles' own oath of non-intervention in Tuscan affairs exacted more recently by Clement V in full Consistory at Avignon. These lapses of memory, if genuine, point to panic. But perhaps they betokened rather the loss of Papal and Imperial prestige which was a feature of the time. In either event the money was paid, and the Florentines could comfort themselves with the knowledge that they were spending less upon temporary avoidance than Siena or Pisa upon giving entertainment.

If Charles' suite was unfavourably impressed by the demeanour of the six citizens, these failed to note in the Emperor any of that dignity which had called forth Petrarch's enthusiasm. "Lœlius," who, at the Laureate's friendly instigation, had come from Avignon to meet Albornoz and to seek advancement, found nothing to admire in the Emperor's deportment. Being present at the meeting of Emperor and Cardinal, he observed the former's exaggerated deference. He mentioned this to Petrarch, and Petrarch in reply permitted himself to disparage "those Cæsars from the North who disputed humbly with priests."

Petrarch was presently further grieved by his Imperial pupil's unimperial behaviour at Rome. It could be pardoned him that he passed the Friday and Saturday before his Easter Sunday coronation visiting churches in the garb of a common pilgrim. But when, after receiving the crown of Charlemagne, he confirmed all Church privileges, even observing the Papal injunction not to sleep a single night within the sacred City where the Laureate would have him reign, a letter of reprimand was dispatched from

Milan. It was even reported that Charles had refused a strong request by the Romans that he would rule them.

Yet another blow was dealt to the lover of Laura when the new King of Rome, on his way back from his bed-and-breakfast week-end outside the Roman walls, crowned Zanobi da Strada as Laureate before a fashionable assembly at Pisa. This was not among the favours Petrarch had asked for a friend, and he never wrote to Zanobi again.*

The explanation of Zanobi's coronation was simple. At Rome Charles had met Niccolò Acciajuoli, who was doubtless making notes for the forthcoming crowning of his ward by Queen Joan's side at Messina. Niccolò, accompanied by Zanobi, bethought him that as the Laureate would not become his secretary, his secretary might as well become a Laureate. Who could refuse the Grand Seneschal of Naples a little thing like this? Certainly not Charles.

Charles did worse things at Pisa than place the laurel on a negligible head. He and certain restored nobles put such pressure upon Florence that he was able to institute further fines for the continuation of her freedom and to demand that she should call her magistrates Vicars of the Empire. The notary who was called upon to publish this announcement broke down and sobbed. Next day the Act was rejected seven times before it was passed.

Charles, however, having got all the money he could, was homesick for Prague. After coping feebly, therefore, with sedition that had broken out against him in Pisa, he decided to go north with his ransoms before there was more trouble. Lœlius, fortified by the promise of a Papal secretaryship, went with him on the first of June as far as Cremona, where they were kept waiting for two hours and none of their troops admitted. He then pressed

* Zanobi had further dared to rival Petrarch by writing a bad epic upon the Second Punic War.

on, bearing royal valedictory messages to Petrarch, and Petrarch indited a scolding to Charles for his "ungrateful flight, which struck me like the stab of a poniard." Petrarch, however, found this letter more suitable for showing round than for sending, so it never reached Charles, who was treated instead to epistolary encouragement mingled with tearful reproach. As a result of this Petrarch was invited to adorn the Court of Prague with his presence. He promised to consider it, but excused himself for the moment on account of an attack of malaria.*

The Emperor's departure was the occasion of a public holiday in Florence. The rejoicings did not last, however. Where the Emperor was not, there the Visconti would be. Matteo died that autumn—to Petrarch's grief. But it was not long before the two surviving brothers had their troubles in the North. The Genoese rose against their new rulers, driving out the Milanese garrison, and there were other revolts in possessions less newly acquired. This made them the more anxious to profit by troubles in Tuscany, and Bernabò took the lead in conspiring with the imperial faction in Pisa.

Although Walter of Brienne's pusillanimous peace still held and there was as yet no fighting, commercial relations between the two towns had become strained. Within eighteen months the Florentines were forced to remove their Pisan shipping houses to Talamone, thus furthering chagrin in Pisa and sickness among Florentine merchants. Bernabò, having hired an army to the Pisans at an exorbitant charge, found his chance when they defaulted over the last instalment of 30,000 florins. Entering into an agreement with one of their citizens, Gian

* "The tertian ague," he called it. For some years past it had afflicted him every autumn, and that year it kept him in bed for a month though it did not interrupt his flow as a correspondent—rather the reverse.

Agnello, he privately passed this man the required sum to pay over in public as from a patriotic purse and, in return, promised to make Gian a submissive Doge of the city he was to sell. The plan worked.

The Florentines were weakened by a further trouble. Twice over they were forced to deal with bands of "The Great Company," which came from the North, where the business of bleeding the minor tyrants for the Visconti was not what it had been. And, although these were repulsed without bribes, and eventually broken up into groups which had to scatter for hire while the Apennine passes were mastered, the effort made Florence more vulnerable to a better organized enemy.

Boccaccio passed the years between 1355 and 1359 working quietly and looking on at politics without participation. When he says anything he speaks in ridicule or in strong distaste. He made no move to find worldly advancement in the opposing currents which threw up so much for his friends. When, much later, through Petrarch's long-delayed influence, he was offered the Papal secretaryship, he refused it.

Much happened in Europe and in Italy during these four years. The battle of Poitiers was fought, and won—to Petrarch's amazement—by the English. The equally heroic battle for the freedom of Pavia was fought, and lost —to Petrarch's satisfaction—by the Augustinian monk, Jacopo di Bussolari. The famous Golden Bull, which became the Germanic Magna Carta, was issued by Charles of Bohemia.

Charles was much occupied with his Bull during the year after his return. None the less he received Petrarch at Prague. The poet had come, partly as the Visconti agent to inquire into a rumour that Charles and the Duke of Austria were scheming a descent by the King of Hungary to appropriate Tuscany and annex Venice on the way,

partly because he had not yet given up his dream of an imperial throne at Rome with Charles seated thereon. Charles was able to deny the rumour. But he did not disclose that he had secretly become an enemy of the Visconti. Instead he listened with deferential enjoyment to all his visitor said, only pressing him to stay for good. Petrarch, as usual, promised to consider it. Charles created him a Count Palatine. After he left, the Empress dispatched a special courier with a silver-gilt cup, to inform him that, after five years without issue, she had borne a daughter.* Invitations were renewed, but Petrarch found more plausible excuses than human variability for not going, while he continued to urge Charles by letter to return to Rome.

It was upon his return to Milan that he heard of Poitiers —that "incredible, unheard of and unexampled" event in which "an invincible hero, the greatest king that ever lived," was made captive by an inferior horde of "cravens and cowards." At the gates of Milan also, a cowardly host was disputing power with the Visconti to such an extent that the house beside San Ambrogio became no place for a scholar. Petrarch removed to a new home three miles away at Garignano, where he had once more a garden with softly flowing water. It was attached without being subject to a monastery built by Giovanni Visconti on the foundations of one of Barbarossa's castles. It was an appropriate setting for a poet "blest with just mediocrity of means" to write *A Remedy Against Either Extreme of Fortune.*

It seemed also, to a certain very old acquaintance of that poet, to be an appropriate setting for the receipt of a begging letter. Agapito Colonna, to whom Petrarch had acted as tutor when first befriended by the boy's highly placed uncles at Avignon, had fallen on evil days. Rienzo

* Anne, who became the first wife of Richard II of England.

and the Black Plague between them had brought down the family fortunes, and possibly Agapito was not all he might have been. In any event he had not inherited the Colonna talent for eminence. He was, he wrote, "a poor exile fallen from prosperity, ill-clothed, and leading a miserable life" in the suburbs of distraught Bologna. Evidently this was not his first appeal to the man whom his house had helped to make, for he reproaches the Laureate. "You avoid me," he says, "and no longer think of me." He draws attention to the superiority of Petrarch's position as his apology for craving help.

We give the relevant passages from Petrarch's reply, which surely ranks as a classic in such exercises.

> "It is true that my income is a little augmented, but so is my expense in proportion, so that I can lay by nothing at the end of the year. . . . You are poor, you say, which it astonishes me that a man of your name and merit can be. But if it be so, how can you suppose that poverty would make you despicable in my eyes? I have always had a particular regard for you. . . . Instead of accusing me of forgetfulness and despising you, you ought to attribute my silence and my indolence, which is well known, to my occupations, which increase, and to the scarcity of couriers. Adieu! Whether you are poor or rich, whether I write or remain silent I am always your much attached."

There is no sign that any practical offer accompanied this prudential epistle.

The Bussolari episode, which began that same year and lasted two years, shows Petrarch in a worse light. This learned and Christian monk, hero and poet, had been sent to Pavia from his convent at Vercelli to preach the Lenten sermons, and while he was there the Visconti besieged the city. Since the year of Boccaccio's birth the place had been ruled by the Beccaria family, who owned

remote fealty both to the Visconti and the Marquis of Montferrat. When these fell out, the Beccaria stood with Montferrat, and Galeazzo came to batter Pavia into submission. It would have fallen at once but for Jacopo, whose preaching, backed by his example, inspired the townsfolk. One day in May he led them from the steps of his pulpit out through the gates and they took one redoubt after another so that the siege was raised.

Unfortunately for himself he did more. For, having saved the Pavesans from their enemies outside, he began to deal with their oppressors within. His dealing was so bold that the citizens had to guard him as he went about, and so successful that when he told the Beccaria to go they went. But too soon they came back, this time allied with the Visconti to renew the siege of the town.

While Petrarch sat up of nights writing long letters to beg Charles to be the saviour of Italy, here on the spot was one made of the valiant stuff of saviours. But although Pavia under Jacopo's good government held out for a year, all Jacopo received from one who had called him friend, was a letter of lofty reproof bidding him yield to Galeazzo and to the frivolous, oppressive Beccaria. Worn at length by the assault and smitten by an epidemic, the Pavesans began to desert their leader, who, left at last alone, was faced with defeat. Going out solitary to face Galeazzo he offered his terms for capitulation. He demanded respect for the new municipal liberties, an amnesty for all the inhabitants, and clemency towards exiles whom the Visconti might recall. For himself he asked nothing.

He might as well have talked to a jackal. Petrarch's protector signed Jacopo's treaty, then lost no time in violating it. Was he not one of the Imperial Vicars? Could he be held liable for a contract made under stress which was prejudicial to the Empire? So Pavia was once more

enslaved. The Visconti built themselves a fortified palace there, at which Petrarch was often to be an honoured guest; and Jacopo was thrown into a dungeon at his own convent at Vercelli—also a Visconti possession—where he was allowed to die. Pavia became Galeazzo's capital, as Milan was now Bernabò's.

VIII

MILAN, to which Boccaccio's principles forbade him to go, was still Petrarch's chosen home. He had come to love its "inhabitants, soil, air, very walls." But he found it salubrious to pass the spring and summer months in more rustic surroundings. Hence, as early as 1353, he had acquired yet another "retreat," which he named Linterno after the country home of his hero, Scipio Africanus. This was at Garignano, three miles from Milan, close to the castle of S. Columba, which was now a Carthusian monastery. Though the monks would have welcomed him he feared to disturb them with his servants and frequent visitors. This at least was the reason he gave for preferring to occupy an independent villa with a fine garden and a soothing view across a network of gentle streams. Despite his excuse he claimed that he went there chiefly to escape from his importunate city visitors.

At Linterno he divided his hours, he said, between study, gossip* and "the innocent pleasure which religion offers," while granting "to Nature nothing but what she imperatively demands, and what it is impossible to refuse her"—a concession that included excellent food, wines and good country service. His innocent pursuits notwithstanding, he found occasion to observe "that liberty and leisure are only for souls of consummate virtue. When we are not of that class of beings, nothing is more dangerous for a heart subject to the passions than to be free, idle and alone. The snares of voluptuousness are *then* more

* "I am a great gossip with my friends," he said in one of his letters.

dangerous, and corrupt thoughts gain an easier entrance —above all, love, that seducing tormentor, from whom I thought that I had now nothing more to fear."

He was, in fact, well qualified to give advice to his friend Boccaccio, whose unfortunate and humiliating experience with the Florentine widow had come to his ears. But there was a still stronger reason for the urgent invitation which he sent to Florence in the spring of 1359, bidding Boccaccio visit him.

Since learning the Greek alphabet sixteen years before, he had not ceased to cherish the ambition of reading Homer, and he had shared with Boccaccio the project of displacing by a full Latin rendering the existing epitome of Italicus, which he rightly guessed was "a vulgar travesty" of the original.

His first difficulty—that of securing a copy of Homer in Greek—had been surmounted twelve years after Barlaamo's rudimentary and curtailed lessons. His other Greek visitor at Avignon, Nicolas Sigeros, now Praetor of the Romagna, had later sent him the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a souvenir. Now, after five years of proud but unavailing possession, he had found "a poor but upright grammarian" who had the qualifications, under proper direction, for the undertaking. A powerful friend at Padua had secured this man who was a new arrival in Italy. The glad tidings reached Boccaccio with a pressing summons. Woman could have no power over two men absorbed in the task of translating Homer for Italy.

Visconti or no Visconti, Boccaccio could not resist such an invitation. The weather was bad; the journey, which involved crossing the flooded Po, long and dangerous; the address of his friend only a little less intolerable than the walls of Milan. But he still loved that friend, who, as it happened, had lately hurt one of his feet quite seriously

by dropping upon it, several times in succession, a heavily bound manuscript of Cicero. The affair with the widow had upset and depressed him. His Italian works were finished and put aside. His Latin compendiums, although he persevered with them, weighed heavily upon his spirit. He would make the visit brief, pleading "pressure of business" in Florence, but the attraction of Homer was too great to be resisted.

True to his determination and in spite of persuasions and commands, he stayed for the shortest possible time. It is uncertain if he met the upright grammarian whose name was Leontius Pilatus. But Petrarch, who had seen him, professed the greatest enthusiasm, and arrangements were made by which Petrarch and this prodigy should begin the translation in Lombardy, while the prodigy and Boccaccio (directed by Petrarch in correspondence) should carry on and complete the work in Tuscany.

Petrarch, no doubt, disclosed the fact that the scholar who was to be the medium of their joint triumph was a monk of indeterminate breed, unprepossessing appearance, and dirty person—which last was only partially concealed by a ragged cloak. But such disadvantages had to be faced. Leontius had the highest recommendations from persons of rank: he was "immersed in constant contemplation," master of a vast store of knowledge, and "profound in the Greek language" which he professed to have learned in its classic purity from Barlaamo himself. If his personal habits and temperament left something to be desired, the first might be ignored, the second humoured in order that the lost light of secular Greek culture might dawn again. It was not until Petrarch became better acquainted with Leontius as a collaborator, and when it was too late for Boccaccio to draw back, that the man of learning was fully described. "His aspect is frightful,"

Petrarch was to write then. "He has very long and black hair that is ill-kempt. In Italy he calls himself a Greek and in Greece an Italian, persuaded that in both countries it is honourable to pass for a foreigner." Indeed at this later stage, Leontius's patron would go so far as to call him "a great beast" and to admit that "of Latin he has but a slight tincture."

But at the time of Boccaccio's visit, hopes were rosy and the talk ran high on poetry, especially the poetry of Homer which Leontius was about to reveal to them. As they discoursed, the visitor helped his host to plant appropriate laurel cuttings in the garden. Wherever he went Petrarch planted laurels on his own and his lady's account. He once took a nasty fall clambering up a bank by the roadside that he might bear home by the roots a bush that grew there wild. Now he trusted that Boccaccio's presence would bring luck to the sacred plants which were immune even from the strokes of lightning, and he reproached his fellow-gardener for refusing to claim for himself the title of poet. Why, he demanded, do this, seeing that to be a poet had always been Boccaccio's declared aim? But Boccaccio still hesitated. Petrarch always overpowered him and brought home the inferiority of his education, his talents, and his birth.

In the course of this historic visit Boccaccio has told us that Petrarch "made me sensible that it was improper at my age to lose my time in courting women; that I ought to employ it more seriously, and turn towards Heaven the devotion which I misplaced on earthly beauties." Purposing to practise, with the help of Homer, what Petrarch preached, and to turn the burning bush of Fiammetta into a cool and convenient laurel, Boccaccio hurried home. He had promised, for his part, to pray that Petrarch should be preserved from similar temptations. Even the properties of the laurel had been known to fail before the

lightnings of desire. It is well that Beatrice, Laura and Fiammetta are always represented as wreathed in smiles in their Circle of Venus. One of the first things Boccaccio did on his return was to send his wise counsellor a copy of *The Divine Comedy* in his own hand* with some Latin verses in praise of its author.

Petrarch, however, while pursuing a fairly austere course as regards women, soon wearied of the Homeric task he had set himself, and he wearied yet more of "our friend" Leontius. Homer, he had to confess, even with help was difficult. Still "the portion I have which the same Leontius translated for me into Latin prose . . . has given me a foretaste of the whole . . . it contains indeed a secret charm." Accordingly he did not despair but continued to long for a complete rendering, and would "second with all my power such noble enterprises," desiring "for myself only that the thing be well done." In short, Leontius was to be passed on without more delay to Boccaccio, while Petrarch confined himself to sapient admonitions by letter.

Besides finding Leontius and Homer a trial, Petrarch was not exempt from other troubles that autumn and winter. A renewed war between the Visconti and the Beccaria for Pavia had menaced Milan, and Petrarch, who was in the city, had returned to Garignano leaving his son John in the town house. But the weather was severe, and, after a short stay he went back to Milan, to find that his house there had been robbed of all valuables except his books. Ascribing the theft to his son as well as to his servants, he turned everybody out of doors and went by himself into a lodging. A painful circumstance was that at least some of the Milanese observers were inclined to

* This still exists in Boccaccio's exquisite writing. Ornamented with miniatures and drawings and burnishings of gold, it must have cost much money as well as time.

exonerate John. What scanty mentions we have of the young man certainly suggest a nature lacking in charm and talent, whereas his sister, who was not brought up by her father, had a delightful as well as a respectable character. But our sympathy for the parent of a son who was disappointing, possibly vicious, is chilled by Petrarch's too persistently virtuous disclaimers. His "I have nothing to reproach myself with" is so constant that it mars his equally constant determination to act dutifully. Upon this occasion he refused alike the hospitality of friends elsewhere and their advice that he should have nothing more to do with John. Soon tiring of lodgings, yet unwilling to return to Garignano in the winter, he acquired a new town house, this time near S. Simplician, a Benedictine Abbey of the monks of Monte Cassino. Just outside the walls of Milan it was quiet and spacious, and there was a convenient back door for avoiding visitors. Here, after some time and much pleading on the part of the prodigal, father and son began once more to live together.

Niccolò Acciajuoli, visiting there the following summer, and captivating Petrarch who then met him for the first time, must have seen the unfortunate youth, but does not mention him. Niccolò, now Grand Seneschal of Naples, was on his way south from a financial mission to Avignon, where he had been given the Gold Rose, and created Count of Romagna, Governor of the Patrimony of S. Peter, and a Senator of Rome for life. Fuller than ever of honours, he had passed on Zanobi to the Curia at Avignon, taking the Prior Nelli as his own secretary, a circumstance which Petrarch found annoying, as he had not been consulted. But an enthusiastic friendship was struck up between the two distinguished men; and although Petrarch did not accede to Niccolò's urgent persuasions that he should come to live in the magnificent Acciajuoli villa outside Naples—"a country made for

poets by nature and by art" as Nelli said—he took part in the Seneschal's abortive Milanese discussions, which aimed at reconciling Bernabò with the Church over the difficult question of Bologna. Petrarch, for his part, could claim a successful reconciliation between his patron and the Pope, Galeazzo having made a triumphal return to Milan after the conquest of Pavia for his family.

Petrarch's son had only two more years to live. The Plague, which broke out again in France that year, became deadly at Milan as never before. During a visit to Paris on Galeazzo's behalf,* to congratulate King John and the Dauphin on their safe return from the English barbarians, the poet was relieved of his troublesome offspring at the age of twenty-five.

The event did not shake his impregnable sense of rectitude. But the home at Milan can hardly have been a happy one these eight years, and we cannot wonder that its master was for ever imploring his friends to come and keep him company. What is strange is that they as constantly refused. "Socrates" sent letters from Avignon full of complaints, news of quarrels between himself and "Lœlius" (patched up by Petrarch's epistolary good sense) and gossip concerning the spite of certain common acquaintances, whose criticisms of the absent Laureate took the form of persecution of his friends. Yet, although Petrarch, busily editing his works, dedicated all his prose writings† to this friend of thirty years' standing ("of all men the dearest to my heart. His sentiments towards me never varied"), "Socrates" would not leave the hated Avignon to make his home at Milan. And the year after John died, he too was taken by the Plague, which at Avignon then attacked particularly the upper classes.

* Galeazzo's son, Giovanni, was about to marry Isabella, daughter of the King of France, for which honour the Visconti paid 600,000 florins.

† His writings in verse he dedicated to Barbato of Sulmona.

Paris, too, had suffered, so that Petrarch found the streets of the French capital deserted, overgrown with briars and with grass sprouting everywhere. It need hardly be said that from Paris he had brought back a letter from King John begging the Visconti to release their ornament that it might adorn the French court. But the ornament declined, at the same time refusing a pressing invitation —accompanied by a gold cup—to reside at the Court of Prague, where a male heir had now been born.* Petrarch's collection of gold and silver cups must have been considerable.

It was not until Leontius had been installed a considerable time with Boccaccio that Petrarch agreed to lend them his Plato (doubly precious for having escaped from a fire in his library at Vaucluse) and also to send for their use either his own copy of Homer or an inferior one which he thought he might obtain from the same Paduan friend who had produced Leontius. Doubtless he thought there was no hurry, as Boccaccio had still to master the Greek alphabet and acquaint himself with the language.

Leontius stayed in Florence nearly four years, and he must have passed many of his hours in the narrow, dark and simple house at Certaldo which, about that time, became the poet's refuge from Florence. The author of the *Decameron*, as middle-age overtook him, had withdrawn to "the country of his ancestors." From there it was that he wrote to his friend, Pino de' Rossi—in exile on political grounds—saying that he wished to avoid contact "with those vile people," their fellow-citizens. To Zanobi da Strada, also, he confessed that he "never cared to become a Florentine." Henceforward he would be not "John of Paris" or "of the Rocks," but in sober fact, as in patronymic, "John of Certaldo."

* The incapable Wenceslaus, who at his baptism made water into the font, grew up to confirm this bad augury.

With regard to Leontius he behaved throughout with exemplary good-humour and most industrious fortitude. He improvised a Chair of Greek—the first in Europe—at the new university, and not only attended his ragged colleague's incomprehensible lectures but persuaded two or three friends to a like heroism. Having fully experienced the upright grammarian's variable temper and less variable disposition to indolence, frivolity and rebellion against any set work, he still laboured on, blaming chiefly his own shortcomings for the fact that Homer remained very dark to him. Unlike Petrarch he did not get the length of detecting a secret charm, but he did aver that what little he could understand seemed fine.

To-day the Calabrian-Thessalonian adventurer's long infliction upon two such men as Petrarch and Boccaccio can best be explained by the view that nobody else could be found to take his place. But Boccaccio never seems to have disliked him even while he found him something of a trial, and, in contrast with the elder poet's disgust, we have kindly tributes from the younger one who was far better acquainted with Leontius. If, knowing Boccaccio's opinion of the opinions of royalty, we detect irony in his remark that "emperors and princes bore witness that none so learned as Leontius had appeared for many centuries,"* we need not wholly discredit the acknowledgment that "though a little man he was great in learning," and that "so immense was the measure of all he had to tell, that my memory, quickened though it was by pressure of other care† would not have been good enough to retain it had I not set it down in a notebook."‡ Nor can we question that Boccaccio found consolation in his uncomfortable visitor's large, if curiously assorted and often

* *De Genealogiis*, xv, 6.
† Presumably by trying to learn Greek.
‡ *De Genealogiis*, xv, 6.

inaccurate knowledge of things etymological, genealogical, mythological and "interpretative." Upon Boccaccio's broad shoulders devolved all the trouble and the expense of an impossible task. But at least he had a living quarry from which to build up those formidable and most praiseworthy dictionaries of learning and legend which were destined to be the text-books of the early Renaissance, while Petrarch's more facile outpourings would stay on the shelf. In justice to Leontius it must further be said that, quickly bored by security combined with labour, he often demanded his discharge, occasionally with menaces. It is possible that Boccaccio had to employ bribery as well as tact to keep him so long.

The wonder is that any headway was made. Leon's Greek did not embrace the Epic idiom. He met obscurities on every page and left them yet more obscure in translation. His plan for dealing with a word he did not know was to translate merely its characters from Greek into Latin. His mistranslations of words were frequent and glaring. Even his correct renderings were puerile.

To begin with, Boccaccio had assured Petrarch that he should have both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* "word for word." Fortunately for Boccaccio, Petrarch objected that this method would cause the secret charm to evaporate. They must, he insisted, make a "free translation." He saw fit also to remind the toilers at a distance that Homer wrote many centuries before Plato. If they forgot this, "the union of these two great Princes of Greece might cause unseemliness." In conclusion, he told them not to let their own mortal shoulders be "crushed by the weight of these two geniuses."

During the progress of the work, fearing perhaps to be crushed, Boccaccio went to Naples. Often since the Plague year his thoughts had returned there, and in 1355 he had almost gone. His change of plans at the last moment

may have been influenced by the behaviour just then of Acciajuoli, who, visiting Florence, had surpassed even the occasion of his son's funeral in flaunting his wealth. Criticisms had reached his ears, and he had revenged himself by forcing the Florentines to cancel all taxes on his Tuscan properties on pain of Neapolitan reprisals on their merchandise. Boccaccio was among his critics, but no open breach had occurred between the two. His opinion of Niccolò had gone down. But when, seven years later, Niccolò held out hopes of permanent establishment in the South for his old friend, there seemed no discredit in considering the offer. Poor and without office in Florence, and disliking the place, he had every right to honourable assistance from one who professed to be the patron of letters in Naples. Prior Nelli had added his entreaties. In May, 1362, therefore, Boccaccio bade Florence farewell and, taking with him his step-brother, Jacopo, now a young man, he travelled south.

Coming as he did by the Grand Seneschal's invitation, the reception which was accorded to him points to one of two things—either Niccolò was made hideously callous by success, or he was determined upon Boccaccio's humiliation. The visitors were conducted to a filthy, verminous apartment where they had to share a bed. So bad were the conditions that Boccaccio was obliged to send Jacopo to an inn while he himself thankfully found hospitality with Mainardo Cavalcanti—good son of a great father who also in his day had been a homeless poet.

Weeks passed before Niccolò sent a messenger summoning him to the magnificent villa he had built for himself at Tripergoli near Baia. By this time Boccaccio had doubtless heard rumours of the task which was expected of him. Niccolò desired a biography of himself couched in eulogistic terms. Unable as he was to comply, Boccaccio was prepared to defer judgment upon his vain and neglect-

ful friend until he had seen and spoken with him. Accordingly he went to Baia leaving Jacopo in the city.

At Tripergoli things were worse than they had been in Naples. Mæcenas had been called away on more important business, and he had assigned—not a room in his own home, but a rough country lodging where muleteers were accustomed to put up. Boccaccio found to his cost that such an one had been the last before himself to occupy the wattle bed. A better couch was supplied, but still Niccolò did not return and his gates remained closed. Nelli, who was at the villa, counselled Boccaccio to have patience, but taking his leave the poet returned to Naples. Why, he asked Nelli soon afterwards in a letter, should he undertake to praise such a man? What had Niccolò done to merit immortality? Was he good or magnanimous? Had he been a public benefactor? Was he even a great general? Nelli had accused Boccaccio of touchiness, calling him "a man of glass," and he had reported Niccolò as saying that he was complaisant in accepting benefits from those he despised—for this was what Niccolò's phrase, "Tranquil John" signified. The full details of this quarrel, like most of the incidents of the visit, will never be known. But Boccaccio defends himself angrily and at great length; the more that some of his anger must have been directed against himself.

Boccaccio was by nature gentle. Such are profoundly affected by self-disgust and by disgust with their fellows. Accordingly, there may be some connexion between the depression which followed upon his trip to Naples and an incident which occurred soon afterwards.

At Siena, where St. Catherine was still a girl, a Carthusian named Pietro Petroni,* who was widely known for his saintliness, had died. Some time afterwards a humble monk, Gioacchino Ciani, arrived at Boccaccio's house as the bearer of a special message. On his death-bed, said

* A Life of Pietro Petroni was written by Bartholomæus Senensis.

Gioacchino, the good Pietro had seen with clear understanding "the present, the past and the future." It would seem that Pietro, before receiving this vision, had been a reader of current literature. For it was borne in upon him that warning counsels ought to go forth to the two most distinguished writers in Italy, namely Petrarch and Boccaccio, as well as to persons whose names we have not learned in France and England. Boccaccio, being the nearest, was the first approached.

The message, which he was to pass on to Petrarch, was that but a short span of life remained to them in which to turn fully to God and amend their works and ways.

The effect it had upon its first recipient suggests that Gioacchino was, at least, not a knowing impostor. After the strange conference, Boccaccio determined with all his heart to obey the blessed Pietro. Petrarch's admonitions had not made him abandon imaginative or biographical writings in the vernacular until it suited him to do so. He had merely tried to put aside the more frivolous authors and to discontinue cursory intercourse with women. But now, with profound abandon, he was ready to forsake even the practice of poetry—using this phrase in its widest sense. He would sell even his Latin books, pay with the proceeds all to whom he owed anything, and devote the remainder of his life to God, in contemplation, sacred studies and works of mercy.

He wrote at once to Petrarch telling him this, passing on the message (evidently in the gentlest of hints), offering him the first refusal of his books, begging him to deduct whatever sum was owing to him,* and declaring his intention of entering some order as a poor Brother.

The fact that Boccaccio constantly ridiculed monks and friars is no argument that this impulse involved

* Petrarch must have made some small payments to his friend, who was always poor, often—when it came to travelling or employing copyists—in serious need.

recantation or a debilitated judgment. That a thousand brothers are bad, or hermits mad, does not condemn the call to brotherhood or to asceticism. He had honoured the First Day in his *Decameron* by telling of the wise and witty Hebrew, who embraced Christianity not because Christians were good but because Christianity persisted in spite of their wickedness.

Further, all Boccaccio's observations upon poverty show that he was by nature sympathetic to the central doctrine of St. Francis as maintained by the nobler Spirituals, or Fraticelli, of the Order. This must have been strengthened by his long residence in Naples, although he rejected the degradations and extremes of the Mendicant friars. Nor was it made less by his observations of courts and of rich men. His hatred of worldliness is as marked as his love for the common people and things of the world. Ill at ease with persons of property, he had a longing for simplicity that was real where Petrarch's was a pose. He was sensitive to the ugliness of social inequalities and of lives subordinated to personal gain. He had seen inoffensive peasants tortured in a war of which the declared just cause proved to be a mask for greed, and he had lived in a plague-swept city. Where Petrarch escaped by combining prudence with subtlety, Boccaccio was reckless of his heart and body. He was naive and religious before he was scholarly.

In such circumstances, it shows no division in this great laugher at the pretensions of priests that he should undergo in middle age the experience of a religious conversion.

There is indeed not much support for those commentators* from Petrarch onwards, who, while they

* Thomas Campbell speaks of Boccaccio's "moral madness." Edward Hutton finds in his emotion a weak and even "hysterical" *volte face*, and goes so far as to call its instruments "infernal humbugs." But he offers no evidence of fraud. Even if the light on the Damascus road were proved to be a natural phenomenon, should we therefore be justified in calling St. Paul a deluded weakling?

would scarcely venture to apply such descriptions to the experiences of Saul of Tarsus, Augustine, or Catherine of Siena, have seen in Boccaccio's conversion either decay or instability of mind, inexplicable folly or the fear of hell. In defence of their contentions such critics have pointed out that his best work was done before his conversion—that is to say between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. But the same is true of sundry unconverted authors. No sign appears that his intellect failed, unless it be that during the last pain-racked months of his life he is known to have accumulated some religious relics. Some years before his conversion he had ceased to write Italian prose and any kind of fiction. After it he continued to put forth short Italian poems, among which are some of his best, to compose his *Eclogues*, and to complete those Latin works which were to bring him two centuries of fame. He continued also to lead an active and responsible life. It seems best, therefore, that we should accept the incident simply, as he did himself.

Petrarch was at first both "astonished" and "chagrined" at the news. An unlettered monk had prevailed far beyond his most eloquent persuasions. But he soon pulled himself together and replied with magisterial condescension. He was kind but lofty. In favour, as he must be, of "plucking sin from one's heart," he none the less would wish to put Gioacchino to a searching cross-examination. The easiest way of indicating that he found nothing in the message for himself was to suspect imposture. Had he not long ago "turned his back" upon those poems of his youth (which at that moment he was busily polishing for posterity!) as unworthy of a serious man's attention? He appealed to his friend's "natural good sense," and bade him reconsider the forsaking of learning. True, "scholarship might be an unreasonable and even bitter pursuit"; but it was also "the pleasantest of comforts." History was "full of examples of good men who have loved learn-

ing, and though many unlettered men have attained to holiness, no man was ever debarred from holiness by letters."

How true this all was, though how differently the far more learned St. Jerome would have put it!

To conclude, should Boccaccio persist, Petrarch will buy his library that it may be added to his own and left, upon both their deaths, in good hands for the public benefit. He hopes that "this mood" of Boccaccio's "will pass." Meanwhile he repudiates the notion that his friend owes him a penny, and he begs him to make his home with him.

If not, as it has been called, "one of the most beautiful letters ever written," the effort does Petrarch some credit. He failed to enter into Boccaccio's readiness to go all lengths for his own peace, but he succeeded in limiting these lengths. Boccaccio accepted his advice. He retained his library and his lay existence. Modest, even in his conversion, he has made his apologia for not taking up "sacred studies" in one of the most interesting passages of the *De Genealogiis Deorum*, which was probably written soon afterwards. There he finds that it is disgusting in an ageing man to undertake work in which he is unpractised. Besides, he asks (in his noble defence of poetry in this same book), what, after all, is the "hidden fruit" of all poetry but God, and what theology but "a certain Poesy of God"? Is not Christ represented in the Scriptures now as a lion, now as a lamb? Is not this poetry? And were not the first poets also the first praisers of the Creator?

It is unfortunately not known whether Gioacchino persevered to the extent of being interviewed by Petrarch. To encourage Boccaccio in the pursuance of common sense, the Laureate shortly had the offer conveyed to him of the Apostolic Secretaryship. This Boccaccio refused.

His conversion had not made him love the Pope. But he might not have grieved had he lived to see his *Decameron* in flames on the second lowest tier of Savonarola's bonfire, where it was put by the great monk's orders. He would more probably have smiled with deprecating approval.

Part VI

FOREGROUND

I

FORTUNATELY the *Decameron* was not only written but was gone from its author's keeping beyond recall.

From his childhood he had been insatiable of those stories and anecdotes which constituted the popular literature of his time. The world, and especially Naples, was full of them. They were recited in the streets for soldi, passed from mouth to mouth, written down by the collectors and the makers of the *novelle*, without any art so long as they seemed to merit repetition. Legends of the Saints, of Charlemagne and of Arthur; tales of Rome, folk tales of Greek, Arabic, Persian and Indian origin; comic incidents of contemporary life; all were pressed into the service of the hungry illiterate, and their threadbare dreariness was enlivened by interludes of licentious song. People were tired of them, but there was nothing else for the common man's amusement, still less for the entertainment of women. The cultured despised them, yet many, even among the cultured, found enjoyment in subjects that had been introduced by the Trouvères and the Jongleurs. The "hundred antique tales" which a nameless chronicler—or more likely several compilers—had assembled into a single volume, had a vogue far beyond their deserts.

Deprived of the education of the schools, but born with the passion for poetry and the most lively interest in human action, Boccaccio brought a fresh intelligence to bear on the mass of raw material which lay trodden down everywhere about him. Precisely when he turned from being merely an assiduous collector and connoisseur of anecdote to become the first European artist in the short story, and

how he penetrated the fog of dead chivalry and half-alive mythology to produce his *Decameron*, is not known. Despair as well as discovery had a hand in the significant progression, accident and long toil as well as inspiration. The original manuscript is long since vanished, and the earliest existing copy bears the date 1368, when the book had been in existence for at least ten years. Petrarch was wrong when he took it to be a work of Boccaccio's youth. Boccaccio's youth is all in the *Decameron*, but it contains his mature judgment of the world, and is executed with an experienced hand and an art acquired after years of effort. The Plague in Florence which inspired the framework, and the mention of that year in the "Induction," prove only that the book did not appear before 1348. It is most unlikely that he worked upon it after the date of his conversion. But he says that when he issued the first thirty tales his hair was already white. He tells us also that the thirty tales were attacked by his learned friends and enemies. Petrarch had heard that the author defended them and himself "with staff and voice." His written defence is incorporated in the book as the proem to the Fourth Day and the tail-piece of the Tenth. His deprecation of his own masterpiece, when his last illness had emphasized his always too ready humility, need not therefore be taken too seriously. There is nothing in his last letters or poems to show that he ever recanted in his heart from the spirit, which equally with his art, give vitality to the *Decameron*. He was "freed from Love's fetters" when he wrote it, but his freedom was of a different kind from Petrarch's.

In the *Decameron* the whole man is to be found. Compared with this, the fact so often dwelt upon, that it contains the ideal picture of the contemporary world, is of secondary importance. The author's outlook gives unity to what would otherwise be merely a collection of well-

told tales haphazard in their variety. In their cunning choice and presentation, in their frame, in the proems, the commentary, the asides, the long speeches given to certain of the characters on certain occasions, Boccaccio speaks for himself. Writing avowedly for the entertainment of women and of the unintellectual—and magnificently succeeding—he has, just as Rabelais has, a serious creed and a whole-hearted philosophy. The *Decameron*, broadly speaking, is one of the earliest monuments of European democracy, and Charles James Fox praised it more perhaps than he knew, when he wrote of it that this was "by far the warmest piece of eloquence in favour of love for women I ever read."*

In style lovingly involved, in language invariably polite, the *Decameron* is, unlike some great books, easier to read with enjoyment than to write about with effect. It has been decried by governments, who rightly saw in it properties subversive of society. The Church condemned it because, with wit which never grew bitter, it spoke aloud of the priesthood what every woman knew. Petrarch's fulminations were harmless when compared with Boccaccio's laughter. When it had circulated for more than a century Savonarola had it publicly burnt, and, not content with that, delivered a sermon upon the dangers of reading it. As a devotee of the spirit as against the body, he well knew the effect such a book was bound to have even if all the tales of ecclesiastical misbehaviour were omitted from its pages. Less than a hundred years later it was placed on the Index *Librorum Totorum Prohibitorum*, where it remained for nearly 350 years. Surreptitious editions had to substitute magistrates for clergy where these were ridiculed for avarice. To-day, even with a reformed priesthood and bench, no churchman and no dictator could afford to sanction it if he knew

* Samuel Rogers's *Recollections*.

his business. Yet its merits as a work of art and its place in literary history have never been in dispute. It created Italian prose for centuries and was a source of subjects and of inspiration for the poets and novelists of Europe. Chaucer, Hans Sachs, Lope da Vega, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare, Dryden, Molière, La Fontaine, Lessing, Keats, Shelley and Tennyson, are among those who found it delightful or useful. No modern writer will challenge their judgment. On the other hand the *Decameron* often has to depend for praise upon those who would shrink from examining, much less accepting its principles. It has been magnified and shelved. Costly editions are issued for the libraries of connoisseurs: ill-printed copies are offered surreptitiously for sale by purveyors of pornography. Few great classics have been relegated to so dubious a limbo.

The fifteenth century with some ten editions, and the sixteenth with seventy-seven, found it both delightful and inoffensive. In England, though parts appeared and passed from hand to hand, there was no complete translation till 1620, when Isaac Jaggard produced his splendid, if free, edition made by an unknown hand from the French version of de Maçon. This took its place as a people's first favourite with Amyot's Plutarch. "A tale of Bocace," writes Roger Ascham, "was made more account of than a story out of the Bible," and Robert Burton tells us that it was a favourite book for reading over the fire of a winter evening. But its English popularity was challenged by that other great story-book, King James's Bible, which had nine years of a start and the weight of authority behind it. The three could not run side by side. Plutarch dropped out and Boccaccio was effectively frowned upon. Evangelical Puritanism, with its insistence upon the salvation of the soul by means of the theoretical sacrifice of the body, took the public fancy by storm.

Most people went on living much as the less admirable characters in the *Decameron* live. But at best such lives were regarded as inferior by the standards of mystical idealism, and at worst were forced into a sordid rebelliousness. Even when the Bible ceased to be read for pleasure and became a penance, Boccaccio's book and what it stood for gained not at all.

Eighteenth-century rationalism found it convenient to adopt a sentimental attitude towards women and love, so there was no great honour for a writer who, though sweetly reasonable, was neither moral nor sentimental. Nineteenth-century Calvinism retained the sentimentality and added energetic reform, high aspirations and prudery. There was a notable revival of interest in Dante, and Petrarch's spirit of self-examination and public uplift belonged to the general pattern, which is more or less faithfully repeated in Victorian novels and poems that are now forgotten. But Boccaccio did not fit into that pattern. He had no mysticism. He recognized neither abstract virtue nor abstract vice. Taken seriously, he was for revolution rather than reform. Taken without seriousness, he was offensive to propriety. A sense of sin was obviously lacking in one who could say, " 'tis better to do and repent than to forbear and repent," or, "Verily I confess that I did wrong; but who is there that does not wrong sometimes?" As for his religion, it was expressed in the single sentence, "Holiness resides in the soul."

"The way in which this great master of style and delineation of character sets at naught all Christian notions of honour and decency," writes one eminent and grave historian,* "is simply appalling." "The effect is all the more dangerous," says another,† "from the genuine wit with which the writer describes the triumph of cunning, whether over honest simplicity or narrow-minded selfish-

* Pastor. † Hettner.

ness." "Even the modern naturalistic writers," adds a third,* "can hardly outbid the defilement." This is the judgment of triumphant industrialism—modern counterpart of fourteenth-century Florence.

Twentieth-century critics have had to be more cautious, realism having altered the appearances of things. So they have enlarged upon the *Decameron* as "a perfectly great book," and have put the author aside as perfectly light and impersonal. They have established its importance in literary history. They have traced and analysed its literary sources and derivatives. The author's skill has been exalted, but his thought, when examined at all, has been dismissed as superficial. The Italian de Sanctis and the Englishman John Addington Symonds are adepts in this oblique praise. Others, more emancipated, have exulted in Boccaccio's naughtiness or in his amorality. The book is acknowledged as a masterpiece and its author classed as an irresponsible, delightful being, who closed his eyes to all that was not comic in human existence.

When the first thirty stories appeared, Boccaccio was attacked by the whole weight of medieval thought which he had transgressed. To begin with, he had written to make women smile. The *Decameron* was the first work in the world—single poems apart—to be dedicated to women. But women were feather-headed creatures, when they were not worse. They were the grand hindrance to the stepping heavenwards of the male. They were pronounced by the wisdom of centuries to be destroyers of the spirit and ensnarers of the body. They jeered at power, hated war, laughed at attainment, worshipped the transient, welcomed the physical, the imperfect, the ridiculous, the passing need. They lived by what must be uprooted from the soul if perfection was to be attained in this world or heaven in the next. Petrarch

* Scartazzini.

and Dante found even their chosen specimens easier to love when they were dead. Love as a torturer, as an adversary, as a dream or an ideal might be permitted. But natural love between man and woman as a solution or as the centre of life, was too humbling to contemplate. It implied that joy is here and now, that life on earth is all we have, and that, love being its centre, it is enough. Boccaccio was far from denying tragedy or suffering. His tragic stories—ten out of a hundred—are most carefully chosen and treated. An equally just place is given to stories in which suffering and humiliation are prominent for the persons concerned. Others—some of the merriest—are full of distressing mishaps. But the author, well taught by old Andalò and by experience, makes very careful distinction between preventable and inevitable sorrows, and he allows to the latter no more than their due proportion. The larger number, which are caused by various forms of greed and by the desire for personal ascendancy, are done away with by the conditions of free and honest love. Society, not nature, is at fault. Boccaccio punishes only the greedy, the mean, and the revengeful, because these are not lovers. The foolish suffer from their foolishness; but love is his cure for folly too. When lovers come for any reason to grief, he finds that "the fruit of natural love in an honest heart remains to be delightful, no matter what torment it may cause." This is his ruling for the lightest, as for the most enduring affection between men and women, provided this be natural and honest. "I should esteem my life but a paltry price," he says in the person of Filostrato commenting upon one of the saddest of the tales, "to pay for half the delight that Ghismonda had with Guiscardo." He is full of compassion for suffering, but he finds in it no other moral purpose than to elicit compassion and to enhance joy. He finds room, even in grief, for trivial distractions.

Here he is truer to reality than many realists, in that he refuses to underline pain. While he never forgets that all must die, he declares that life need never be fruitless of deep joy. Lack of love alone makes the fruitless life. The brave man, who is also the heroic lover—ready, if need be, "to daff life aside" for life's prime necessity—will take any risk but this one of sterility.

Those who are jealous to revengefulness, mercenary, cold or dishonest lovers, and those who despise love, are the only characters whom Boccaccio treats with severity. They are mortified and brought low on earth, torn to pieces by dogs in the hereafter, exposed on towers to the Italian midday sun to be tortured by flies. Chappelet, the despicable priest, whose "equal in wickedness has not yet been born," was "as fond of women as a dog is of a stick" and died "as pure in that respect as when he first came into the world." "The more noble the soul, the apter to be swayed by passion." The only fatal sin is the sin of refusing to love. And if one asks how love may be obtained, Boccaccio replied, "by loving": if how it may be recognized, by finding together "desire, tender regard and intimacy." Although sinners against this love are castigated in the *Decameron*, the book is otherwise remarkably free from the cruelties and the callousness of its age.

Boccaccio, however, accepts all the wiles by which the clever get the better of the stupid, even if the trickster is a rogue and the victim a virtuous fool. This too is life. We must look out for it and for ourselves, just as we must dodge, as far as possible, the blind strokes of nature, and "elude the buffetings of the furious hurricane" as best we may.

Magnanimity—if need be even to renunciation—is for him consistent with natural love as informed by human intelligence. There is nothing that such love cannot meet. In reality there is no true magnanimity but that of the

creature who owns love's sway, because no other can exercise it without wounding the recipient. He has not tasted happiness sufficiently to do so. "Aldobrandino received them [those who had wronged him grievously] compassionately, wept, kissed each on the mouth, and let few words suffice to remit each offence." This from an Italian who "recognized the sweetness and the savour of revenge to the wronged." "Ah! how marvellous to whoso ponders it is the might of Love, and how unsearchable his ways!" . . . "times not a few the might of Love, how great and singular it is, has been set forth: but yet I think the topic is not exhausted, nor would it be so though we should continue to speak of nought else for the space of a full year,". . . . "there is scarcely aught that lovers will not find possible" . . . "no venture, though fraught with greatest peril, that whoso loves ardently will not make." True magnificence of spirit belongs to the lover alone, because to magnificence the spice of gaiety is requisite. The "I to whom love did full contentment bring" is the only natural king, his pride the only sort worth having. "I am become a man on your account."

But besides measureless courage, fine strategy is needed and endless discretion. "My own love-taught astuteness," one character claims. Another has "her wits sharpened by love." The knight's wife "now began to understand what she had never till then understood, to wit, what love really means." "Not a few there are," Boccaccio observes, "that in their simplicity aver that Love deranges the mind, insomuch that whoso loves becomes as it were witless: the folly of which opinion, albeit I doubt it not, and deem it abundantly proven by what has been already said, I purpose once again to demonstrate." Which he does.

Thus Love, according to the *Decameron*, is not only the

rightful crown and the only solace, but the best instructor of all who live. Boccaccio would not be the Latin man he was if he confused for a moment the most "natural" human love with the loves of the lower animals. His plea is for animal love surcharged with human intelligence. This it is, as the story of Cimon demonstrates, which transforms beasts and boobies into men that walk like gods. "Those who are most versed in deep matters are the soonest mastered by Love," and "without Love I deem no mortal capable of true worth or aught that is good." If it may lead "lovers to debate with themselves whether they were not best to die," love's forces are also "holy, mighty and salutary" and are "most unjustly reprobated and reviled."

At whatever moment the Plague suggested itself as the background and frame for the stories he had so long turned over in his mind—stories from Greece, from Persia, from Brittany, Sicily and Scotland—this must have given the author deep satisfaction. Nothing else could have conveyed less obtrusively the sense of the distracted world in which his lovers walk so bravely, that "whoso met them . . . might well have said: 'Either shall death not vanquish these, or they will meet it with a light heart.' " He places love in the most terrifying of circumstances to show it as the means of self-preservation and of sanity.

The terror of the Plague gave him the further chance to release women from the bondage of a long convention and to give their natures a scope denied in the society he knew. The result is a seemly, highly civilized and courteous freedom. "You will find that there is no deceit in me," says one girl to another. Boccaccio's women—daring, imperious, gay and full of good sense—will do anything for love, but they can also look after themselves. They stand up to their men, kindle with scorn, defend themselves with virile energy, breathe "sighs fiercer than

fire," and hesitate no more about declaring their feelings —reciprocated or not—than about deceiving their husbands or anybody else, always excepting the men they love. Shakespeare had to look to Italy for his heroines—the Italy of the *Decameron*.

This brings us to marriage. Than the loving wives of the *Decameron*, there are none in the world more patient, more courageous, warmer, wiser, or more constant. But, as a whole, Boccaccio's observation of the world as he knew it—a world in which marriages were arranged and indissoluble—led him to regard the matrimonial tie as an impediment to love, and to love he did not admit impediment. Society would not permit the daughter of an apothecary to mate with a king, or the daughter of a king to find her happiness with a low-born man. Till society was altered this limitation of choice must be cunningly overstepped or openly defied, as must be the tyrannies and unsatisfactoriness of every marriage in which one partner is dissatisfied.

Hence, what many critics have found to be an inordinate number of the stories in this spacious book, are devoted to anecdotes of trickery practised by spouses against each other and the social canons. Only thus can they "know Love's furthest bourne . . . to the immense delight of both parties" . . . "to which goal I pray that I, and all other Christian souls that are so minded, may be speedily guided by God in His holy mercy."

Here he leaves us, observing that "corrupt mind did never yet understand any word in a wholesome sense," and that "if any shall seek profit and reward" in his book, it "will not deny him the same." "Some there are," he reminds us, "who methinks deem themselves to be wiser than the rest of the world, and are in fact less so." These "presume to measure their wit against not only the counsels of men but the nature of things; which presumption

has from time to time been the occasion of most grievous mishaps; but nought of good was ever seen to betide thereof." So he answers his critics beforehand, never laying aside his light tone, and he prays his women readers to "rest ever in God's 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."

The skill with which the stories are told, the combination in them of airiness and detail, grace and fun, are things that have already been pointed out by every good literary commentator, and every reader can discover them afresh either in the adequate and faithful English of J. M. Rigg, or—if they are lucky—in the freer rendering of Jaggard's unknown seventeenth-century master, where they are dressed in our language at its most gracious. Instead of troubling about the praise of critics, let those who interest themselves in the art of fiction note the bones of a single story—as, for example, the Second or the Third tale of the Ninth Day—try to re-write it themselves in two pages and a half, and then re-read Boccaccio's version, comparing the flesh of his with theirs. Let them consider that phrase in which Boccaccio describes how Lisabetta cuts off her dead Lorenzo's head with a household knife "as well as she could."* Or let them try to achieve in their own words the dulcet loveliness which illumines the last pages of the sixth novel of the Second Day with family love after much tribulation. Landor was never more obtuse than when he made Petrarch say to Boccaccio, "Admirable as you are in the jocose, you descend from your natural position when you come to the convivial and the festive." For, although we have plenty of roystering and cosy cheer in English literature, we have little or nothing to match

* An example not only of Boccaccio's visual gift, but of his rule that "whoso in telling a story diverges from the truth, does thereby in no small measure diminish the delight of his readers" (ix, 5).

the *Decameron* when it comes to picturing the festal elation of the heart before food and drink that is lovingly shared. Nor have our painters been inspired by our poets to depict English men and women feasting.

Petrarch was very far from appreciating his friend's masterpiece, which did not fall into his hands—he "knew not whence nor how"—until 1373 or 1374. "If I told you that I had read it," he wrote, "I should deceive you. It is a very big volume, written in prose, in our mother tongue and for the multitude, and published, I presume, during your youthful years. I have been, moreover, occupied with more serious business, and much pressed for time . . . what I did was to run through it, like a traveller who, while hastening forward, looks about him here and there."

Some of the stories gave him pleasure, however, and he excuses its freedoms and its levity of subject on account of the author's presumed youth at the time of writing, and because of "the class of readers to whom it is suited." He accords it "elegant language" and, "in the midst of much gay and playful matter, severe, grave and pious thoughts." He found the description of the Plague "most true and pathetic," and was so moved by Boccaccio's version of Patient Griselda (a tale he had long ago heard from another source) that he would have liked to learn it by heart. Instead, he would improve it by a Latin rendering, of which he would send his friend a copy.* This was the last letter Boccaccio had from Petrarch. It may have made him smile. He had not changed in his heart about love, but the *Decameron* was behind him. He was no longer concerned to defend it. At the same time the Laureate's patronizing praise was chilly fare.

* This story, always popular, became a favourite subject for puppet performances in England in the seventeeth century.

II

After his return from Naples and the experience of his conversion, Boccaccio, under the sobering influence of Petrarch, had resumed the translation of Homer with Leontius. But in the spring of 1363 the Calabrian's clamour to be set free could not be silenced, and Boccaccio saw nothing for it but to go with him to visit Petrarch again. Driven from Milan by the Plague, Petrarch had passed some months at Padua where Francesco, the son of his old patron, Jacopo Carrara, was reigning for the moment peacefully,* while the neighbouring lord of Rimini, Pandolfo Malatesta, himself a versifier, had long been an admirer of the Laureate, so that he now commissioned two portraits to be painted of him. From Padua Petrarch tried to return to Vaucluse, for which he was periodically homesick; but he was driven away by bad weather, the Black Death and the Visconti wars, and after another sojourn at Padua he went on to Venice taking his library with him. He was not, he said, "flying from death but seeking repose." The Venetians, delighted, assigned to him the huge Molina Palace, known as the "Two Towers," on the Riva degli Schiavoni which overlooked, as it decorated, the fascinating activity of the harbour. Here was quiet as well as magnificence for a man of letters who suffered from increasing distaste both for noise and for solitude. In return he promised to leave his books to the Republic at his death.

So to Venice came Boccaccio and Leontius to stay till

* To Francesco Carrara Petrarch dedicated his *Best Form of Government* which was based on principles laid down by the House of Carrara.

the end of the summer, and all three worked on in some kind of harmony. The change and the luxury placated Leontius for a time.

Petrarch greatly enjoyed these few months during which Boccaccio made his home with him. They had not spent so long together before, and Laura's lover was a good host. That Fiammetta's was as good a guest we may infer from the letter which followed him when he took his leave late in August or early in September. "I have always thought," wrote his friend, "that your presence would give me pleasure, I knew it would, and I felt that it would please you too. What I did not know, however, was that it would bring good fortune. For during the very few months, gone so quickly, that you have cared to dwell with me in this house that I call mine, and which is yours, it seems to me, in truth, that I have contracted a truce with fortune who, while you were here, dared not spoil my happiness. . . ."

The spell of happiness came to an end only too soon. Boccaccio, just before leaving Venice, learned that both Nelli and Stefano* were victims of the Plague. But he could not bear to break the news to his host. Keeping silence he returned to a Florence that was not only weakened again by the Plague but embroiled in a war with Pisa.

The hired generals of Florence (Pandolfo Malatesta among them) frequently played false in hopes of securing the discouraged Commune as a prize for themselves, while the Visconti, with similar designs against both Florence and Pisa, reinforced the latter with money and troops. German mercenaries were thus employed by Petrarch's master, Galeazzo, and also English ones. John Hawkwood, the Essex yeoman who knew more about soldiering than all the princes of Europe together, was among the latter.

* Lello di Pietro Stefano, Petrarch's "Lœlius."

He and his White Company of East Anglians, after learning their trade in Brittany and under Galeazzo in Lombardy, were now subsidized at the cost of 50,000 florins to reduce Florence to a Visconti principality. It was the first time the Tuscans had seen English soldiers and, while they began to understand how the victories of Créçy and Poitiers had come about, they were obliged at the same time to witness new sorts of barbarities in their own countryside. Gloomily the Florentine shopkeepers watched while Germans and Englishmen danced round their bonfires on the hill-side of Fiesole, shouting insults at the city below. Yet these Florentine shopkeepers bought the German general, and later they were to engage the talents of the English one, so that to-day Shelley's ancestor lies, not in his natal earth at Sible Hedingham, but in their cathedral as *Johannes Acuto*—the nearest they ever got to pronouncing his name.

As for Leontius, even the peaceful Riva degli Schiavoni could not hold him much longer, and Petrarch shared his impatience. He set sail, therefore, for Constantinople, "cursing Italy and the name of Latin," but promising to procure and send to Petrarch some classical Greek texts.

The rest of his story has been told by Petrarch in a letter. "One would have thought him scarcely arrived there," he wrote to Boccaccio, "when I received a badly written and very long letter, more untidy than his beard or his hair, in which among other things he said he loved and longed for Italy as for some heavenly country, that he hated Greece, which he had loved, and execrated Byzantium, which he had praised, and he supplicated me to send for him back as eagerly as Peter, about to be shipwrecked, prayed Christ to still the waves."

As Petrarch failed to send for him, Leontius set sail for Italy without the invitation. His ship was wrecked in the

Adriatic. But drowning was not for him. Lashed to the mast at his own request, but lacking a sprig of Petrarch's potent laurel, he was struck by lightning and his body charred to a cinder. Boccaccio spoke gently of one whom he calls "that peregrine man." Petrarch is consoled by the knowledge that, "thanks to the honesty of the sailors" the dead Leon's "wretched baggage" was intact, so that he might hope to "find the Euripides, Sophocles and other manuscripts which he had promised to get for me."

Although Leontius was removed, Boccaccio went on working hard and steadily from the notes he had accumulated with his help. In all, he translated only six books.

The task which gave the love though not the text of Homer to the Renaissance, extended over a period of eight years of which Boccaccio is responsible for seven at the least. But Petrarch in his own way carried on the labour of love. He had difficulty in finding an efficient copyist. It was easier, he said, to find a painter. When one was at last obtained, he had not only to be always at the fellow's elbow, but to submit to the fellow's being at his, even when he went out for walks. Necessarily they progressed very slowly with the transcription of a rendering which was certainly free but never faithful. Yet Petrarch did not grow tired. Wherever he went for the rest of his life he carried it about with him, covering every page with conscientious and ingenious notes.*

Boccaccio never became a great scholar. But besides making Florence the centre of European Hellenism, he could permit himself from 1359 onwards to quote Greek poetry. When people objected, as they did, he justified himself and poetry together in those passages of

* His copy is in the National Library in Paris. The original document contrived by Boccaccio and Leontius Pilatus, which would constitute an even more moving monument to Humanism, has unhappily vanished.

his *De Genealogiis** which became the basis of the many Defences of Poetry in England later on.

"Suppose I *have* quoted Greek poetry for mere ostentation," he asked, "what of it? Must they therefore set their teeth in me? Whom do I hurt in the pure enjoyment of my natural right? They may not know it, but it is my peculiar boast and glory to cultivate Greek poetry among the Tuscans . . . this, though I did not understand Homer any too well."

* Books vii and xv.

III

When Innocent VI died in September, 1362, a jealously quarrelsome lot of Cardinals had played for safety by entrusting the Keys of Heaven to Guillaume de Grimoard, as Urban V. The sixth Frenchman in succession to hold them, he possessed amiability and a genuine respect for letters. Further, he seems to have had some religious sentiments. For, to the wrath of the King of France and the more pronounced Francophile Cardinals at Avignon, he agreed with Petrarch that Rome was the proper place for the Pope. Although his return to St. Peter's was to be made—after thinking it over for five years—from mixed motives, he had desired it, at least to begin with, merely as a Christian. The Florentines as Christians were obliged to welcome an idea which as citizens they loathed. They deputed Citizen Giovanni Boccaccio to carry suitably equivocal letters to Urban. Accordingly, in the August of 1365, he went upon this his second visit to Avignon. He was to call at Genoa on his way with letters for the Doge. Whilst in Genoa he had some conversations about poetry, in which Zanobi da Strada figured as a bad example of commercialism—conversations which, upon his return, he embodied in *Eclogue* XII.

Urban had intervened in the war between Pisa and Florence, and had decreed that Pisa was to pay Florence 100,000 florins over the next ten years by way of indemnity. But he had also threatened to withdraw what was still more lucrative, his blessing, from the Florentines whom he found lukewarm towards himself and hostile towards his legates. On their part the Florentines were alarmed by the

power of Albornoz as governor of the Romagna, by the condition of Bologna, by the Papal-Visconti alliances,* and by the rumour that Urban intended coming to Rome, not alone, but squired by the Emperor Charles IV who was again running short of money for improving Bohemia. Urban, having ostensibly made peace with Milan, was in fact enlisting both the hatred and the greed of Charles. Naturally Florence was nervous.

Boccaccio's thankless task, as an eminent man of letters and a member of the Guild of Judges and Notaries, was to cross the Alps in the hottest month of the year and to sound a new Pope who would be as dumb as his predecessors. He was also to make the usual representations of Florentine devotion, backed with the offer of five galleys should Urban choose the sea-route to Rome, or 500 soldiers should he prefer overland travel. He was paid four florins a day, which was not liberal, but no doubt Florence was economizing where she could. There are no records of any of the payments made to Petrarch in his various missions, but they were certainly more than this. The Visconti especially paid well.

Urban returned thanks and promised to consider the contents of the letters. Among other requests it may be that they contained one for a canonicate in Florence or in Fiesole for Petrarch.† If so, Boccaccio had at least the satisfaction of furthering a friend.

His only other satisfaction at Avignon was the warm embrace of Petrarch's old neighbour, Philip de Cabassoles, who, though he had never seen him before, threw both

* In 1354 a peace had been patched up with Bernabò, who refused, however, to be friends with Albornoz, so Urban had sent yet another Cardinal Legate, de la Roche, to Bologna. Petrarch, who greeted him there, was shocked by the desolation in the city of his student days.

† Either this was never given to Petrarch or he refused without recording the offer. Urban, besides the Papal Secretaryship, later suggested the canonicate of Carpentras, where Petrarch had passed his boyhood.

arms round the Tuscan envoy and kissed him "in the presence of the sovereign Pontiff and his astonished Cardinals." Philip was now Bishop of Sabina and Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Petrarch was not without hopes that some day he would wear the Triple Crown. Boccaccio does not mention the names of any other friends in Provence, but in Mattheus de Long, Archdeacon of Liège, who had been a student with Petrarch at Bologna, he doubtless found a cleric who showed him kindness. It was to Mattheus that Petrarch wrote, after Philip de Cabassoles' death seven years later:

"In that first season of life which is full of error and presumption I despised all the world except myself. In middle life I despised only myself. In my aged years, I despise all the world, and myself most of all. I fear only those whom I love. I desire only a good end."

At no age did Boccaccio despise all the world, and one likes to think that Philip and Mattheus were his guides in a tour of inspection over the Papal palace.

His messages delivered, he hurried home as he had been instructed to do. In all he had been absent little more than three weeks. At Florence the building of the new Ponte Vecchio was going forward under Taddeo Gaddi, then in the last year of his life. The Signoria was spending Pisan money before this could be filched by Pope or Emperor. As for Urban, after a year of considering—during which his faculties were somewhat quickened by Bertrand du Guesclin*—he acknowledged the Commune's notes and announced that, for the good of Italy, the Church and the city of Florence, he was determined to remove his seat to Rome.

When he got to Certaldo, Boccaccio found written

* Du Guesclin besieged Urban in Avignon and mulcted him of a huge ransom.

reproaches from Petrarch. Already on his way north he had written excusing himself for not having gone on from Genoa to see his friend who was then at Pavia. Pavia was two days' journey out of his route, the weather sultry, his body fat, his purse thin, his time limited, the roads doubly unsafe for a man with a mission to perform. Yet, Petrarch insists that if Boccaccio had cared he could have seen both him and the fine Ligurian city where St. Augustine's bones lay and Galeazzo Visconti's favourite palace now stood. Petrarch seems to have had no suspicion that, however much the Ticino might resemble the Sorgue, the scene of Bussolaro's martyrdom could not please Boccaccio. Of such things he did not think. He took occasion to complain further that, while in Genoa, Boccaccio had neglected to call upon the Archbishop, who was Guido Settimo, the friend of his childhood and youth. This omission, he held, was due to the sin of *acedia*, to which he thought Boccaccio prone. For Boccaccio, when refusing to go to Pavia, had admitted to heaviness of mind as well as of body. But the Genoese Archbishop was a perfect model of cheerfulness under affliction. "Though weak in body," wrote Petrarch, "he has a spirit of great energy." Besides, "in seeing him you would have seen me, for since infancy I have lived with him in perfect conformity of will and sentiment and, believe me, you . . . would have said you had never seen anyone more full of vitality." Petrarch, however, expresses pleasure at hearing of Philip de Cabassoles' embrace and of Boccaccio's safe homecoming. Knowing what journeys were and how this traveller hated them, he declares that "not a day, not a night has passed tranquilly" for him while Boccaccio was on the roads.

In March of the following year, believing his friend to be once more in Venice, Boccaccio determined to remedy his fault and testify his love with time that was his own. But,

reaching Florence, he heard that Petrarch was back in Pavia as Galeazzo's guest. This was a blow. The weather besides was so wild, and travellers' tales so hair-raising that his friends begged him to stay at home. But he had started, and had made all his arrangements and announced his arrival at Venice by letter. So he decided to carry out his original plan. At Venice he would at least be able to renew his congenial acquaintance with men he had met there before, and he would see Petrarch's daughter, who was married there to a young man called Francheschino da Brossano di Amicolo and had two children—the younger a boy, born only the month before. He had long wished to know the Brossano family, who had lately made their home in the Molina Palace. From them, too, he would hear all Petrarch's news, and by so doing he would give what pleasure he could to Petrarch short of going to Pavia.

It proved the happiest of all his visits. In his every mention of it we find the same kind of festal quality that gives their warmth and blitheness to so many of the *Decameron* stories. Dante alone could sometimes rival it. But with Dante the radiance occurs only at the apex of a solitary and heavenly flight, whereas Boccaccio sheds it upon companies of men and women seated at dinner tables, and makes it stream from the hearts of lovers who solace each other in a human bed.

When he reached the coast, but before he had embarked to cross the bay to Venice, he met Petrarch's son-in-law by chance. From the first moment the ageing poet and the young merchant felt a mutual attraction. During their "festive and friendly greetings" and eager interchange of news, Boccaccio noted Brossano's "quiet and pleasing face," calm ways, attractive voice, and large manliness. Then, as Brossano had business to do, the visitor cheerfully sailed on to Venice by himself.

At the quay, before he could send to announce himself, Venetian friends of the last visit competed for the honour of being his host, while, in Petrarch's absence, Petrarch's old friend and his—Donato degli Albanzani*—insisted that he should go to the Molina Palace. But Boccaccio shook his head smiling. He preferred to stay with Francesco Allegri, a young Florentine friend who also was eager to have him. His reason for refusing to sleep in Petrarch's home when both masters were absent, he told to Petrarch afterwards. Absurd as it might be to connect scandal with a fat, feeble, white-haired man like himself, there were always evil-minded people whose mouths nothing would shut. "And although you know in this and in many other things the integrity of my heart towards you, certain fools might question it." As the widely known author of the *Decameron* he could not be too careful. How careful he was in another respect may be seen from the phrase "in many things." In one or two things his integrity forced him to differ from Petrarch. Living at Pavia under Visconti rule was one of them.

Francesca Brossano, whom he affectionately calls "Tullia," sent for him as soon as she heard of his arrival and, after resting a while he went. "She met me joyfully," he records, "blushing a little, and looking on the ground." Then, having "saluted and embraced" him, she took him to the garden where friends had gathered to enjoy his company and, "with matronly serenity," she declared him free of everything in the house including the library.

But the most poignant moment for this lonely old student of poetry was still to come. Turning at the sound

* To whom Boccaccio's *Eclogues* are dedicated. As a grammarian at Venice, this poor but respected scholar later translated Petrarch's *Lives of Famous Men* and Boccaccio's *Lives of Famous Women* into Italian. He had known Boccaccio's children and had held Brossano's baby boy to be baptized. He was in Ravenna on one of Boccaccio's visits. He outlived both his poet friends, dying at the end of the century.

of a child's footsteps, he saw coming towards him the small daughter of the house:

"Your Eletta, my delight, who without knowing who I was, regarded me smiling. I was not only overcome with joy. I took her in my arms, greedily fancying that I held my own little lost virgin. What can I say? If you think I exaggerate, ask William of Ravenna, the physician, or our Donato, who both knew her. Your child has the very aspect of the child who was my Eletta, the same expression, the same light and laughter in her eyes, the same gestures and walk, the same way of carrying all her little person, except that *my* Eletta was somewhat taller for her age at five-and-a-half, when I saw her for the last time. She has the same way of talking and uses the same words. She has the same simplicity. Indeed, indeed there is no difference except that your baby has golden hair while mine had chestnut locks. Ah! how often when I hold yours in my arms listening to her prattle, the memory of my own small lost one has brought me tears that I let nobody see!"

Here we see Boccaccio as an old man, yet as he must have been from the time he was born till he died. Neither Petrarch nor Dante was capable of the tenderness contained in that passage.

He goes on to speak with gentle enthusiasm of Eletta's mother, and of her father who was soon back in Venice. It was a warm and merry party. For Boccaccio at least —and he surely communicated it—it had the happiness he has again and again imparted to a feast at which, after long vicissitude, friends or lovers who had thought each other dead or faithless, find themselves unexpectedly united. He still refused to sleep at the palace because, had he done so, Allegri's feelings might be hurt. But he ate with the Brossanos, and every meal was a celebration, perhaps not the less so for Petrarch's absence.

At length he had to take his leave. That evening, "the hour being already late," the tall young host enticed his guest into a quiet corner, "and with few words, laying on my feeble arm his big strong hands, he ignored my embarrassment, pressed a liberal sum of money on me, and calling out his good-bye as he fled, left me no time to do more than blame myself for ever having betrayed my poverty. May God so give it to him again!"

In ignorance of what calls Boccaccio had to make on the road either way, it is impossible to know how long he spent in Venice on this occasion, but he was back at Certaldo in June, when the letter quoted was written to Petrarch, and it has the tone of immediacy. Most probably he made the inclement journey from Florence slowly and with breaks, and the return journey more quickly, staying not more than a couple of weeks in Venice in the sweet of April or of May.

The date of his *Eclogue to Olympia* is not known, but everything points to a single impulse for letter and poem. A passage of fifteen years, between Violante's death and the poem to her inspired by little Eletta Brossano, is in keeping with Boccaccio's character.

The poem has been quoted in an earlier chapter, but if its composition belongs to the year 1366, this is the place to note its blissful conclusion.

After Violante (Olympia) has assured her father that the two rejoicing striplings and the three girls before him are his own children grown to youthful maturity in Paradise,* he composes himself to address them, saying:

"Come, O my children, whom I have held in my arms on my breast, and with happy kisses heal my heart. Let us make a joyful festa and sing a hymn of delight."

* Two of his daughters died in infancy. The boys' names were Giulio and Mario.

The hymn that follows—sung by Violante in honour of Jesus and the Virgin—is the loveliest of Boccaccio's Latin songs.

"She is mother to Jove and his daughter,
  Queen mother to all the gods.
Fauns adore her, and nymphs. Apollo exalts her
  With his lute. Round her head
Fly snow-white flocks of swans."

Petrarch and Boccaccio were happy men in this, that they believed in a heaven where their loves waited for them. And in Boccaccio's heaven, even after his conversion, Jove's son, Arcesius, with a lamb in his bosom, shepherded herds of blissful cattle besides all the planets, grass grew and trees, water played, hoary satyrs praised God, and a virgin Queen who was also a mother, smiled her blessing upon amorous birds and beasts and humans alike.

IV

PETRARCH's letters to Avignon urging upon each new Pope the duty of returning to Rome, had never ceased. But as time went on, his epistles, each one more high-flown than the last, had become something of a joke among the less sympathetic and more French of the Cardinals. And, when at last Urban said he was coming, the Laureate expressed his satisfaction with a certain weariness. In July of the summer of Boccaccio's last visit to Venice he had entered upon that sixty-third year which he, with many other sapient men of his time, held to be one of the most critical of the human span. Sixty-four was a dangerous age. He had become subject to fainting attacks, alarming enough at first when they were widely separated, more so as they became frequent. But his rapid recoveries amazed the doctors. He simplified his days and his diet—drinking water instead of wine, eating only a little salted meat and subsisting largely on fruit—in spite of doctors' orders. High blood pressure is suggested, so his self-treatment was wise. He loved study as much as ever—especially the study of his own works. But he no longer enjoyed making efforts. Even sustained talk and writing long letters tired him. And although Urban —whom he had never seen—pressed him, often by personal letters, to come to Rome, he made no haste. He conveyed his approval, declared his wish to see the historic entrance of Pope and Emperor, and promised to come when he could. He hinted that the ceremony would go quite well without him, even that he might enjoy it more from a distance. He was perhaps none the less gratified that Urban went on beseeching.

In spite of five mutinous Cardinals who stayed behind in Babylon, Urban made a stately entry into Viterbo in June, 1367, and began at once to oppose the Visconti by means of a new league of cities and powers. When Bernabò invited him to Milan he replied by publishing a crusade against the family, which had lately annexed San Miniato in Tuscany and, in the States of the Church themselves, could show more possessions than the Pontiff. This was unpleasant for Petrarch. And when, in October —after trouble in Viterbo which caused him to be besieged there for three days—Urban rode into Rome on a white mule "amid universal acclamation," the Laureate had a fault to find. The entrance of the Cross of Christ, he said, ought not to have required the presence of 2,000 soldiers.

Petrarch's disagreeable business at the moment was to open up negotiations between Urban and Bernabò. In this he failed as completely as Bernabò presently succeeded in making Urban's legates eat their parchments. With unabated dignity he wrote his *Letter to Posterity* and continued his annotation of Homer, flitting between his three homes at Venice, Pavia and Padua. The last-named city had joined the Papal league, so he was safe there should the Visconti be vanquished. Venice was usually a safe place to live in, because she fought only at sea.

It was six months after the white mule's progress with Urban astride, that Boccaccio, who was now a Camerlingho of Florence and one of the committee for alterations in the Or 'San Michele, rode on an ordinary horse into the Holy City. The Emperor, with the object of milking both the Visconti and their enemies, was expected in Tuscany the following May. The poet greeted Urban in April. Other duties besides official greeting he must have had as Florentine representative, but there is no record of them nor of what Boccaccio thought of Rome. Neither is it clear how much of that summer he spent in Rome.

Although, again, no account survives, he was almost certainly a witness of what Petrarch had so long dreamed of and had written and prayed to bring about—the joint entry of Pope and Emperor into the Holy City. This took place in October. The 2,000 soldiers repeated their appearance and the white mule was once more in evidence. But this time the Emperor paced on foot beside the animal, his hand at the stirrup by the Papal heel. Boccaccio more than Petrarch seems to have enjoyed the symbolism.

Petrarch did not see it. In June he had felt obliged to travel from Padua to Milan for the wedding of Galeazzo's daughter Violante to the King of England's second son, Lionel Plantaganet, Duke of Clarence.* There had been a splendid feast at which Froissart, then aged about thirty, was an undistinguished but observant guest. Petrarch notably graced the proceedings and gave a present to the bride. But he was neither happy nor well, and that same day while they feasted, his two-year-old grandson, the Brossanos' boy, died. Longing to get away he insisted upon chartering a boat and sailed down the Po. This meant running the gauntlet of the rival armies, so the crew needed coaxing to start and, having started, they trembled at their oars. But they were soon made aware of the prestige of their passenger. For, as the boat passed, military operations ceased on either bank and the officers of Visconti, Papal and Imperial troops, competed in showing honour. The Italians knew how to treat their Laureate.

What passed between Boccaccio and the Pope that late autumn has to be guessed from Urban's letter to the Signoria, which the poet carried back.

* To whose household Chaucer had been attached as page fifteen years earlier. Where Chaucer was during this year is not known, but he was probably campaigning in France, where we hear of him a few months later. Lionel died within a year of this his second marriage.

"Urban, the Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to his chosen sons, the Priors of the Arts, Gonfalonier of Justice, and Town Council of the City of Florence, greeting and apostolic blessing.

"We have been pleased to receive your Ambassador, our chosen son, Giovanni Boccaccio, with consideration of his mission and appreciation of his good qualities. We have listened carefully to his able exposition of your case. We have told him also that we entertain favourably those proposals which, according to God's will and by His help, for our own and for the public good, aim at reform and enrichment, in particular at those of Italy. We have considered it reasonable and think that it should be answered. Upon further details he can inform you verbally.

"Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 1st of December. In the sixth year of our reign."

That Boccaccio did not on this occasion present letters, but himself voiced the requests of his Commune before Urban, indicates that he had not been back in Florence since leaving in April. There are, however, two clues to his movements during the six months which lay between his two Roman encounters with Urban. One is a letter to Petrarch from Ravenna, which, although undated, points to this time. The other is the narrative of a visit paid by him to the famous Convent of Monte Cassino.

Of the Ravenna visit nothing can be said except that Boccaccio, with his commentary on the *Divine Comedy* in mind, was still hot on the scent of Dante, and that he had business in the town about which he writes obscurely to Petrarch, mentioning the names of Pier Damiano and Giovanni da Ravenna.

Biographers are unable to put a date to the Monte Cassino visit. They all agree, however, that the Benedictine monastery was the scene of Boccaccio's greatest discovery for Humanism—a discovery far surpassing any

made by Petrarch—namely the finding of five lost books* of the *Annals* of Tacitus and two lost books* of the *Histories*. In fact, Boccaccio's find can have occurred neither much earlier nor much later than that same summer. Had he possessed the Tacitus manuscripts earlier, Petrarch would surely have seen them, and he never did. Had he found them later, he could not have lent (to his cost) at least one of them to an ungrateful churchman before 1370, which he did. That he indeed found them is proved by the constant quotations we find from them in the latter parts of the *De Genealogiis* and the Commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, which were both written soon after his return from Rome. As it is generally allowed that Monte Cassino was the likeliest place in which a Tacitus might be found by Boccaccio, his visit thus finds its approximate date.

Benvenuto da Imola has recorded his account† of the monastery which had harboured so many learned and so many tragic men of the past.

"My reverend master, Boccaccio, told me that, being once in the neighbourhood of Monte Cassino, he paid the monastery a visit and asked if he might see the library. Whereupon one of the monks, pointing to a staircase, said brusquely, 'Walk up; it is open!' Boccaccio went up and saw to his amazement that the library, the storehouse of the monastic treasures, had neither door nor other defences; and on entering he found grass growing in the window-frames and all the books and benches buried in dust. When he came to turn over the books, some of which were very rare and of great value, he found that many had been mutilated and defaced by having leaves torn out or the margins cut—a discovery which greatly

* Books 12 to 16 and Books 2 and 3. This discovery is sometimes wrongfully ascribed to Poggio.

† Benvenuto, who later came from Bologna to attend Boccaccio's lectures on Dante, himself wrote a Commentary on the *Divine Comedy*.

distressed him. In answer to his inquiries as to how this damage had been caused, he was told that it was the work of some of the monks themselves. These vandals, wishing to make small sums of money, were in the habit of tearing out leaves from some of the MSS and of cutting the margins off others, for the purpose of converting them into psalters and breviaries which they afterwards sold."

It is a valuable reminiscence of Boccaccio and of the state of the monasteries. Can we doubt that, as a distinguished visitor, he asked and obtained leave to take away with him at least a few of the rare books which meant so much to him and so little to their guardians? The only pity is that he did not carry his find intact back to Tuscany. He would have saved himself much annoyance, besides a more than annoying experience.

For Florence the coming of Urban had been mitigated by the death of Albornoz in August of the same year. But new legates, less gifted if also less masterful, would, of course, take the energetic Spaniard's place. The coming of the Emperor was attended by another accident which had more lasting results. The platform erected at Pisa for the imperial investiture of Charles' puppet Doge collapsed at the right moment. With it collapsed the ceremony which Charles had so carefully arranged for his own aggrandisement, and, with a broken leg, Agnello's sham dignity also suffered a mortal blow.

Charles had trouble too in Siena, where the Salimbene, secretly abetted by Florence, were against him. When he called there on his way from Rome the place rose against him so that he had to escape hungry and humiliated to Lucca for a square meal. For the kindness shown him by the Lucchese he left a German garrison to ensure the citizens' payment to him of 300,000 florins within the next few years. In return for this he promised them their liberty, but not before the sum should be paid. Rejoicing,

the Florentines financed them, so that the whole was handed over in one year. With Charles back in Bohemia, Lucca recalled her Guelph exiles and modelled her Signoria on that of her helpful neighbour. Henceforward the two cities were close allies. Charles had achieved little in Tuscany and he would not come to Italy again.

Urban had not left off begging the Laureate to come to Rome, writing persuasive and flattering letters with his own hand. In the autumn after the Visconti wedding, however, Petrarch was ill with his malaria for forty days —the longest bout yet—and the following winter he felt unwell and postponed the journey while making elaborate preparations for it. Among other things he made his will, appointing his son-in-law as his heir and executor. His books were to go to Venice. To Francesco Carrara, the Lord of Padua, he bequeathed his Giotto painting of the Virgin. And for Boccaccio he set aside "fifty gold florins of Florence," with certain directions and a handsome apology.

At last, all arrangements made, he started for Rome. But at Ferrara he fell in a faint. And though he came out of it and wanted to go on, his friends carried him back to Padua. The much desired visit was not to be. Perhaps he was secretly relieved.

Rid of the Emperor, Italy was not much longer to be questionably blessed by the presence of the Pontiff. Between the state of Rome—so sad a change from Avignon—the defiance of Bernabò, and his own indisposition, Urban was glad to snatch at the excuse of the new hostilities which had broken out between France and England. So he hurried back, in the role of peacemaker, to Provence, where, soon afterwards, he was obliged to make his own peace with his God.

V

Boccaccio's poverty persisted and his health flagged. The *tramontana* that sweeps Certaldo in the winter months searched out his ageing bones. His solitude was not always sweet. Still, he refused to prejudice his freedom of mind by going to live with Petrarch, who remained comfortably sheltered beneath the downy underwing of tyrants. Petrarch, now somewhat broken in health though not an invalid, would have welcomed him at his nice new house twelve miles south of Padua, at Arquà in the Euganean Hills, which Francesco Carrara had built to the Laureate's own specifications. "At Venice I should have been suspected," he wrote, "here I am caressed." But Boccaccio would rather shiver through the cold nights in his own draughty room, attended by Bruna Cianchi,* the peasant woman who had long been his only servant there. Cold was preferable to the shadow of Carrara's court.

For the benefit of future students he was compiling an alphabetical catalogue in which he described the classical "mountains, woods, fountains, lakes, rivers, swamps and seas," and into which he packed whatever geographical and geological knowledge he could come by, even of the fossils in the Certaldo wells. Unfitted for "sacred" and denied to imaginative works he could hardly have done anything more useful. Nobody reads such books to-day. Even the student finds them to be

* It has not hitherto been suggested that Bruna was the mother of his children, whose fate, if she long survived them, is not known. Yet "Fusca" (swarthy) is a very Boccaccian pseudonym for Bruna (brown).

uncouth, long-winded and stuffed with mistakes. But they fulfilled their purpose. Generations of poets preferred them to Petrarch's less cumbrous but more platitudinous efforts along similar lines. At least one reliable modern commentator* is assured that they bear the impress of a very great man.

But it was heavy labour for one of Boccaccio's temperament. And in the winter of 1370, cold, dejected and anxious, he accepted an invitation from one of his oldest friends.

This was none other than Niccolò di Montefalcone, once his youthful companion in Naples and now, by his own report, Abbot of the S. Stefano Convent in Calabria. It was to him that Boccaccio had lent his Tacitus when in Rome. Niccolò had then described his Convent in glowing terms. It was, he said, well endowed and beautifully situated, surrounded by woods and waters, and supplied with a good library. In such a refuge a man might go on working peacefully into old age, with the sun on his shoulders for the greater part of his time. He had begged Boccaccio to join him there. Now, under the urgent necessity to provide for his latter years, Boccaccio decided to go. His hope was that he would remain there under monastic vows, which he was ready to take. So he might pass the rest of his days in peace.

Abbot Niccolò who borrowed books without returning them, proved to be yet another of those who do not speak from the heart. The warmly invited guest announced his coming. But on arrival he was coldly informed that the Abbot had gone from home leaving no instructions for a welcome. So much for the place in which Boccaccio had thought to die in peace.

Events of the kind are hard to explain, yet they have

* Dr. Bergen. See his spirited defence of the Latin works in his introduction to Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.

been common in the experience of very many great men. Boccaccio was unlike Petrarch. He carried about with him no aura of success. He was a misfit with the worldlings who knew what he thought of them. Yet the religious viewed him with disapproval. There also, in spite of his gentleness, he betrayed the fact that he saw too much and despised what he saw. His heart was so lively, his eye so clear, that in his presence many people were made uneasily aware of their own emptiness. Again, few can have been insensible of his powers of ridicule.

Going on to Naples perplexed and almost penniless, he wrote and asked Brother Niccolò to return his Tacitus. It is a pleasure to record that he also told Brother Niccolò what he thought of him.

But where worth is in distress, there is often one kind for every unkind hand. To the credit of Naples the nobleman, Count Ugo di San Severino, had only to hear of the poet's plight to come forward with every sort of recognition, including that of money for his immediate needs. Boccaccio said that such gifts were "more worthy of the giver than the receiver." But he accepted them, and availed himself of Ugo's eager hospitality for the summer. In Naples he met at least one other congenial man, the Friar Minor, Ubertino di Corigliano, who was on an embassy from Sicily. Ubertino loved Dante, so the pair were happy talking together.

In that peaceful, but too short interlude, Naples overcame him. Careless alike of Petrarch and of Brother Ciani's warnings of hell-fire, he blossomed once more into Italian sonnets. He wrote one upon returning to the place where a man has loved, another on the melancholy that spring holds for a man when the woman of his heart is underground, and yet another on the sadness of the singer who sees his life running to its silent end.

The greater Niccolò—he of the Acciajuoli—was dead,

and Mainardo Cavalcanti was first man in the Kingdom. This did not lessen his regard for Boccaccio whom he welcomed as formerly. Offers of patronage were now made to the poet, who lacked his return fare to Florence. Queen Joan's third husband, James of Majorca, whom she had married on the death of Louis of Taranto* offered protection with "complete liberty of action." But Boccaccio desired only to return once more to Certaldo.

In the autumn, therefore, after having kindness shown to him by Andreina Acciajuoli and others, he accepted his travelling expenses from his host and left Naples for the last time. While faring northwards he may have heard of the battle of La Rochelle, which lost England's sovereignty of the seas to Spain. The incident was one of the causes which was presently to bring the English esquire, Geoffrey Chaucer, to Italy upon business of maritime importance.

Some time after his return a further offer of patronage came from Niccolò Orsini, Count Palatine and Count of Nola. But he replied that he had become used to independence. In Florence, at last, one or two people had begun to bestir themselves, and the pliable but not evil-hearted Archbishop Acciajuoli had provided some kind of office that would ensure a pittance.

Soon it was also common knowledge that his health had seriously broken down. Early in August of the following year he writes to Mainardo that he has been under "long infirmity which only in the last few days has given me a little respite. Since the last time I saw you . . . every

* After James' death in the following year, Joan married Otto of Brunswick to whom she gave the principality of Taranto. With materna kindness she adopted Margaret, her sister Maria's youngest daughter, and Charles of Durazzo (son of Louis of Durazzo by a daughter of the San Severino family) when he was released from Hungary. These two married, and Charles had Joan smothered so that he might sit upon the throne. Maria's third husband was young Philip of Taranto, who later married a daughter of Stephen of Hungary. Thus the Neapolitan quarrels ended.

hour of my life has been very like death, afflicted, tedious, and full of weariness to myself." He goes on to describe his symptoms. For "a continuous and burning itching, and a dry scab" he has had "scarce nails enough day or night."

"Then I was afflicted by a heaviness, a swelling of the spleen, a burning bile, a suffocating cough and hoarseness, heaviness of head, and indeed more maladies than I know how to enumerate; all my body languished, and all its humours were at war. And so it happened that I looked on the sky without happiness; my body was weary, my steps vacillating, my hand trembled; I was deathly pale, cared nothing for food, but held it all in abhorrence. Letters were odious to me, my books, once so delightful to me, could not please me, the forces of the soul were relaxed, my memory almost gone, my energy seemed drugged, and my thoughts were all turned to the grave and to death."

It is a picture of a body almost worn out for all but the purposes of pain. In this condition he was attacked by a violent fever which confined him to bed and broke his long resolve to keep out of the doctors' hands at all costs. He was at last quite helpless. Bruna, who would have done anything for him, could only weep and wring her hands, and accuse her master of stinginess because he would not employ the Certaldo physician. True, he was a man "accustomed to attend only peasants," but he was known to be "kind and thoughtful." Bruna made Boccaccio laugh, ill as he was. He yielded, and the rustic healer was summoned to his bedside.

All that Petrarch had ever written against the medical practitioners of the time was now confirmed. Boccaccio, after being examined, was informed—in a phrase with which we are still familiar to-day—that unless the poison was extracted from his system he could not expect to live

beyond a day or two. The method of extracting the poison was to burn his skin here and there with irons heated in a furnace in the bedroom, and to bleed him all over with razor-slashes. The patient had no faith in it, but after submitting sceptically to the torture, he fell, from sheer exhaustion, into a deeper sleep than he had enjoyed for many days. Perhaps this was as the doctor foresaw. Bruna, at any rate, was loud in his praise, as, with her jubilant help, Boccaccio began to creep back to an enfeebled life.

Knowing that Petrarch was himself not well, he refrained from troubling this friend with news of illness. All that has been quoted comes from the letter written to Mainardo in August with apologies for its long delay. By return, Mainardo sent him a little gold vase from Naples, full of gold pieces with which, he said, Boccaccio was to buy a warm cloak, as he would certainly shiver after such a bout of fever. Money for the cloak which Petrarch proposed to bequeath, was still locked in the future.

In spite of his recent unhappy experience there, Boccaccio remained inspired by Naples and went on writing Italian sonnets. Some of these rank with his best. They are addressed to Death, and to the dead man and woman whom he most loved. That Dante and Fiammetta were waiting for him was his grand solace. If he now found more help in relics, which had belonged to great-hearted men and women, than in doctors' knives and cauteries, he was at least being practical.* One could cool one's cheek against an alabaster carving of the Blessed Virgin, and soothe one's heart in the knowledge that others had suffered and triumphed. He has been accused of relapsing into credulity. None the less, his mind never soared more calmly than when he wrote:

* Sismondi remarks that relics were less injurious than medical treatment.

"Dante, if thou within the sphere of love,
As I believe, remain'st contemplating
Beautiful Beatrice, whom thou did'st sing
Erewhile, and so wast drawn to her above;
Unless from false life true life thee remove
So far that love's forgotten, let me bring
One prayer before thee: for an easy thing
This were to thee whom I do ask it of.
I know that where all joy doth most abound
In the Third Heaven, my own Fiammetta sees
The grief that I have borne since she is dead.
O pray her (if mine image be not drown'd
In Lethe) that her prayers may never cease
Until I reach her and am comforted."

Besides this, there are the three lovely sonnets—surely written at this time and never shown to Petrarch because they were in Italian—the two to Fiammetta dead, and the magnificent one where Dante speaks from another world in which "no envy can make dim the truth."*

Dante, for a practical reason, was more than ever in Boccaccio's mind. Early in that same August a petition had been laid before the Signoria that he should lecture on the *Divine Comedy* in Florence, and the appointment had been made with only nineteen dissentients among the voters. The expositions, which would open in October, were to be in the vernacular for the benefit of unlearned citizens. For twelve months of daily readings (barring holidays) he would receive "not more than" 100 gold florins. Payment for the first half-year would be made on the last day of December, by when he should have proved himself.

Nothing of the sort had happened in Europe before. Perhaps a friend, aware that Boccaccio had been for some time engaged upon writing a Commentary on Dante's

* Sonnet lx. Rossetti's translation.

poem, had sponsored an idea that displays Boccaccio yet again as an innovator. Writer of the first epic, the first pastoral, and the first psychological novel in a modern language, translator of Homer and discoverer of Tacitus, he was now to be the first popular lecturer on a contemporary poet. He was, as Professor Walter Raleigh says, "incomparably the most distinguished writer who ever took up with that uneasy trade."*

He doubted if Dante would have approved. He knew that Petrarch would not. Certain superior persons in Florence and elsewhere expressed strong disfavour. But Dante was neglected and Boccaccio poor. He would crawl down to Florence and do his best, having first apologized to his author in another sonnet which shows that there was fire in him yet. He could still bow to greatness and knock a few heads together at the same time.

"If Dante mourns, there wheresoe'er he be,
  That such high fancies of a soul so proud
  Should be laid open to the vulgar crowd
(As touching my Discourse I'm told by thee)
This were my grievous pain; and certainly
  My proper blame should not be disavow'd;
  Though hereof somewhat, I declare aloud
Were due to others, not alone to me.
False hopes, true poverty, and therewithal
The blended judgment of a host of friends,
  And their entreaties, made that I did this.
But of all this there is no gain at all
Unto the thankless souls with whose base ends
  Nothing agrees that's great or generous."†

* Essay on Boccaccio. *Some Authors*, by Sir Walter Raleigh.

† Critics of the lectureship drew from him three sonnets numbered in the *Rime* vii, viii and ix.

VI

THE place chosen for the lectures was the Benedictine monastery of the Badia, near the old Roman wall. Founded four centuries earlier by the blissful Matilda, it was one out of the three sacred buildings that Dante had loved enough to commemorate. This cannot have displeased Boccaccio.

We must doubt, however, if Countess Matilda had anything to do with the Signoria's choice. Seven years before Boccaccio's birth, when the city smarting under three successive interdicts had retaliated by taxing all Church property, the monks of the Badia alone had resisted. As a result their house had been sacked and their tower thrown down. Exquisitely the tower had been rebuilt by Arnolfo. The abbey was richer than ever. But the little adjoining church of S. Stefano, which also pertained to it though it stood outside, had been allowed to fall into comparative neglect. Shabby and unfavoured but intact,* could any building have been better adapted for a gathering of citizens unlearned in the *ars grammatica*, and for a project which caused the learned minority to look down their noses? It was here, therefore, and not in the abbey proper that Boccaccio stood up on Sunday, 23 October, 1373, to praise the man whom his hearers' fathers would have burned alive.

The lecturer was shaky and shrunken in his robe, but

* "In the inner circle is the Abbacy of the monks of St. Benedict in whose church called St. Stephen's the hours are struck more clearly and accurately than in any other church in the city. To-day this church is ill-cared for and neglected, as I myself have seen whilst I listened to my beloved teacher, the distinguished poet, Boccaccio of Certaldo, lecturing in that same church." So writes Benvenuto da Imola. S. Stefano no longer exists.

his sense of humour did not desert him. He did not attempt to model himself upon the rules of Messer Bruno Cásini,* who had founded the art of modern rhetoric for public speaking "after the manner of the ancients," with declamation, gesticulation and the rest. The tone of the speaker in S. Stefano was conversational, even bantering. Having invoked the aid of Jupiter in the words of Virgil, he addressed his audience—"You gentlemen of Florence!" —as "men of lofty understanding and wonderful perspicacity." Deriding "those witless ones" who had failed to see Dante's greatness, he begged his fellow-citizens, "for the greater honour of Florence," to ask for Dante's body from Ravenna†—"not but that I am certain he will not be surrendered to you." He then proceeded to treat the wonderfully perspicacious ones as babes. Nothing was to be taken for granted—not even that they knew the difference between the prow and the stern of a ship, the position of the keel or the functions of the tiller.

The framework of the lectures, so far as it is preserved, is in the *Commentary*, the only book Boccaccio never finished.‡ He seems to have composed his notes with

* Casini died of the Plague in 1348, but his maxims were still current among fashionable orators. Petrarch, no doubt, observed them.

† After providing sumptuous obsequies Guido da Polenta had died before he could carry out his intention of giving Dante a fitting tomb in the old church of S. Francesco, and his successor, Boccaccio's patron, had omitted to do so. There was thus a good excuse for Florence to demand the ashes of her great citizen. But, as all the world knows, Dante still lies in Ravenna. His first monument—by Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian—was not put there until more than a century after Boccaccio's lectures.

‡ In this he was unlike both Petrarch and Chaucer, who left many loose ends. Of the fragment known as *Il Comento*, which at his death was valued at eighteen florins and caused a lawsuit between his stepbrother and Fra Martino da Signa, only three complete manuscripts survive. It was extensively used and copied, however, often without acknowledgments, by all later commentators. The first printed edition did not appear until 1724 (in Naples with a Florentine imprint), and the first critical text not until 1864, when this was undertaken by the Milanese, Gaetano.

care as he went along, intending to make a book of them later. No doubt he divagated widely in speaking, besides devoting a part of each lecture to reading aloud from the poem. Even in his notes he allows himself to divagate. He would not be Boccaccio if he did not.

Nor did his scheme encourage conciseness. For, adopting Dante's method in the *Convivio*, he had set himself to expound the *Comedy* on the three planes of meaning which he regarded as essential to true poetry—namely the superficial, the allegorical and the significant. He dealt, that is, with language, with moral intention, and with underlying, universal truth. Hence, with Dante for his text, he had all learning, all teaching and all life for his theme. If he sometimes got confused, so has every other man in a better state of health than he was, who has tried, before or since, to define the practice and the purport of poetry. The topic is one upon which no two persons have agreed.

What we should most like to know to-day is whether Geoffrey Chaucer was ever among his hearers.

Chaucer, whose connexion with Boccaccio has worried many literary historians, was in Italy at the time.* The business that brought him there did not require a visit to Florence. But to Florence, if we may trust the English official records, he went before he returned to London late that same year after an absence of over ten months.

Did he drop in at the little church where the greatest of Italian story-tellers, himself a fine poet, was lecturing daily upon one of the greatest poems of the world? Did he and Boccaccio ever meet and talk?

It is natural to hope, reasonable to believe that they did. But the scholars will not have it. There is, as they point out, no record of a meeting. Moreover, although Chaucer refers admiringly to Dante and to Petrarch, he does not

* It is possible, though by no means certain, that this was his second visit.

once name the man to whom he owed more than to both of these together. Where Boccaccio's name ought to stand in Chaucer's pages, we find instead the name of one "Lollius." "Lollius" is given as "myn autour" of the *Filostrato*, which the English poet translated and transformed into the loveliest of his own long poems, *Troilus and Cressida*. To "Lollius" in particular Chaucer is careful to ascribe certain incidents of the Trojan story, which, as they are nowhere to be found outside of the *Filostrato*, are taken to be Boccaccio's own inventions. In Chaucer's *House of Fame* "Lollius" has his statue, taking precedence of all but Homer himself as a writer on the Troy legend. How then, ask the scholars, dare we let ourselves think that Chaucer met Boccaccio, or even that he knew Boccaccio's name?

Hope may be properly forbidden to the conscientious biographer, but not experience or common sense. If it be conceded that Chaucer returned from Italy knowing the names and the fames of Dante and Petrarch, and with his head (and his travelling trunk) stuffed with the works of many lesser Italian writers which he proceeded to use and name, it is hardly possible that he was not aware of Boccaccio's identity at least. There still remains the question, why should he substitute for Boccaccio's name that of "Lollius"?

It has often been asked and various solutions have been offered. Professor E. P. Hammond and others would have us think that there may have been a Latin or medieval writer on Troy called Lollius, whose works (remarkably resembling Boccaccio's and assumed by Chaucer alone to be famous) have been lost with all concerning him. The Italian biographer, Landau, has followers when he suggests that Chaucer, knowing what he was about, declined to name an author whom many condemned as immoral. Others have submitted that, as copies of manuscripts often lacked the names of their authors, Chaucer may have

read and even translated Boccaccio without discovering his name!

More cautious commentators confine themselves to the observation, that "Chaucer is evidently playing with his readers."* But they refuse to inquire further. Douce† says that "of Lollius . . . it will become everyone to speak with diffidence." Professor Hales‡ lays it down that "no satisfactory explanation has been given." We are accordingly told to accept the problem as insoluble unless more evidence is forthcoming.

It is permissible, without diffidence, to set out the circumstances again, and to put down—for the first time in this connexion—all the relevant facts concerning any known man named Lollius. A new theory, with diffidence, will then emerge.

After her forfeit of the seas to the Spaniards at La Rochelle, England had begun to lose her possessions in France with the disastrous march by John of Gaunt from Calais to Bordeaux. It was therefore important that she should strengthen her trade relations with Italy. Chaucer, a well-informed and internationally experienced official, was sent to treat at Genoa with "the duke, citizens and merchants" for the purpose of choosing some port in England where the Genoese might form a commercial establishment. A few years later he would return to Italy to debate with Bernabò Visconti (whose fate he tells in the *Monk's Tale*) and with Sir John Hawkwood|| on political matters.

* E. G. Sandras. † In *Illustrations of Shakespeare*.

‡ D. N. B., *Chaucer*. In this article Professor Hales gives August 3rd as the date of Boccaccio's first lecture. The appointment was given on that day, but the first lecture not until October 23rd. On August 3rd, Boccaccio was at Certaldo, ill.

|| Rendered unemployed by the Peace of Bretigny, Hawkwood and his "bull-dogs" entered Italy in 1361 to fight the Visconti for Montferrat of Pavia. Next he served Bernabò, but when Chaucer met him he was the champion of Florence. He died in 1394.

He was in his early thirties. He spoke French and Latin as well as English.* As a former member of the Duke of Clarence's household, and by virtue of other highly placed connexions, he was familiar with Italian affairs and Italian personalities. He was, in fact, as keen and questing a visitor as ever crossed the Alps. What he did not know when he left London he must have learned in Genoa where he arrived early in the year. With the Genoese "duke, citizens and merchants" the names of Petrarch and Boccaccio were household words. Both men had preceded Chaucer upon embassies in the Republic, and their personal acquaintance there was considerable.

Chaucer had more than commercial affairs in Italy. He was already a considerable author. But as a new writer in a new literary language, he had by this date drained the last drop from the faded French wells. Now he was looking for new forms, new subjects, a new stimulus. Nowhere else but in Italy were these to be had. The supposition that he went from Genoa to visit Petrarch at Arquà near Padua has strong support from his own lines. He puts into his Monk's mouth the statement that he learned his story of Griselda (which we know to be from Petrarch's Latin version of the *Decameron* tale) from the "worthy clerk":

> "Fraunces Petrark, the laureat poete,
> Highte this clerk, whos rethoryke sweete
> Enlumined al Itaille of Poetrye."

Whether he actually met Petrarch or not—and a meeting is generally admitted as most probable—he knew that Petrarch was not only the Laureate of Italy who lived at Padua, but that he was of Florentine origin,† and he

* He was to learn enough Italian to read Dante, at least after a fashion, but it is unlikely that he ever knew the language well.

† "This noble poete of Florence and Itaile."

brought home a copy of Petrarch's Griselda. Afterwards, it is true, he translated one of the Laura sonnets, gave it to Troilus as a love-song, and said that "Lollius" was its author. But as "Lollius" is also the creator of the loves between Troilus and Cressida and of the go-between called Pandarus, such an attribution is easily accounted for. It might be a mere slip. Again, the sonnet in question was perhaps a copy in Boccaccio's hand given to him by Boccaccio himself.

If he spoke with Petrarch he must have listened to a discourse upon Italian literature, learning, for example, the Laureate's low opinion of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, which he had himself translated as a prentice-work. Even if he never saw Petrarch he must have taken his literary bearings before he went to Florence.

Let it be repeated that all three poets were fluent in French and Latin. Is it credible that Chaucer could pass a year in Italy and visit Florence, where the novelty of the Dante lectures was common talk among the learned, without knowing Boccaccio's identity and the names of his books? Is not the burden of proof on those who would deny such knowledge?

He was not merely a poet in search of fresh inspiration. He was a man unhappy in his marriage and crossed in his love. Love, women, marriage—these were topics upon which Boccaccio had expended much thought and many words. Later Chaucer paraphrased numbers of these words without losing any of their spirit, which alternated between ardour, fun and realism in a manner never attempted before. His turning-point as a poet occurred immediately upon his return home. In his *House of Fame*, where "Lollius" is so noticeably honoured, he discards the Middle Ages and the French minstrelsy together. Launching out with a passage derived from Dante's invocation at the opening of the *Paradiso*, he revels

in the Italian element until he finds his own with a new strength in *The Canterbury Tales*. But again he draws material from Boccaccio. His vigour flagged before he finished his greatest work. But he had discovered Italy and England together. Or, it might be said that, with his mind enlightened by Italy, he found it in his heart to create England. The break between his earlier work written under French influence, and his later upon which his greatness rests because he had discovered the value of common things to the poet, is startling. This change came about in consequence of his Italian visit. He must have learned something in Italy which helped him to open his eyes to these same common things. Neither Dante nor Petrarch, much as he admired them both, could have done this for him. Boccaccio alone had seen, as no other man of that world had seen, the things nearest, which had always been there, and in the high spirits of his perfect humility, he had written down what he saw.

The scholars have pointed out all Chaucer's more literary debts to Boccaccio. Both the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls* show reflections from the *Amorosa Visione*. The *Legend of Good Women* was suggested by the *De Claris Mulieribus*. It is peopled by the same women. One of its narratives—the *Legend of Ariadne*—"shows definite traces of indebtedness"* to Boccaccio's version in the *De Genealogiis*. Elsewhere Chaucer makes use of Boccaccio's famous defence of poetry from this same work.† The *apologia* of the Wife of Bath has analogies

* Professor G. W. Liddle.

† H. C. Coote. *Athenæum*, 1884. No. 2954. The same writer draws attention to the fact that Sacchetti, who was the contemporary of Boccaccio and Chaucer, speaks in the proem to his own tales, of the fame of the *Decameron* both in France and in England, and refers to "translations" in both languages. As the first complete French translation did not appear before 1414, and the first partial English one not until 1566, the conclusion is that Sacchetti referred to Italian reports of Chaucer's works.

with the self-justification of Madonna Filippa in the *Decameron* story. In the *Canterbury Tales* he uses a framework of a kind unknown in Europe until Boccaccio introduced it for the tales told by the young ladies and gentlemen who made a pilgrimage to escape the Plague. Six out of his score or so of tales occur also in Boccaccio's masterpiece. *Troilus and Cressida* is a literal translation from the *Filostrato* in hundreds of its lines, while hundreds more are Chaucerian amplifications from Boccaccio's original.

These attributions are not equally conclusive. Names of famous women, feminine apologias, discussions upon poetry, classical legends and amusing anecdotes were in the air. Three* out of the half-dozen stories that are common to the Canterbury and the Florentine groups are told by Chaucer with such variants of incident and spirit that we feel he must have had at least additional sources for them.† But the other three are unmistakable. The *Knight's Tale* is taken from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, the *Monk's* from the *De Casibus* (with a written ascription), and the *Clerk's* is an expansion of Boccaccio's Griselda through the Latin of Petrarch. Making all deductions this is a formidable heap to lie in veiled acknowledgment when the far lesser contributions by Dante and Petrarch are so generously admitted.

What if Boccaccio and not Chaucer, is responsible for this queer state of things? If so, would this not argue that the two met?

But if they did meet, although Boccaccio was only about fifteen years his senior, Chaucer found in him a sick old man, who had long ago abjured the *Decameron* and did not wish the world to know him as the author of the *Filostrato*—that story of profane love and a bewitching

* The *Reeve's*, the *Shipman's* and the *Franklin's*.

† A close comparative examination of sources common to the two poets has never been undertaken.

wanton. Further, if Chaucer, avid for new material and full of admiration, asked leave to use such works, Boccaccio would hardly have consented but upon the condition that he be not named as their maker.

Such a condition, it will be allowed, would put Chaucer in a quandary. Acknowledgment could not be wholly denied without dishonesty. He must attach *some* name to what he used that was not his own. But why "Lollius"?

It could hardly have occurred to the English poet without suggestion. It is too peculiar and too appropriate. He could not know quite enough for that—unless he had inside knowledge. Was it Petrarch's nickname—or one of his nicknames at one time for Boccaccio?

That he invented such a name for every friend without exception may be assumed. He applied them even to acquaintances and to political personages. To do so had amused him since boyhood, and he never lost the habit. Besides, classical pseudonyms were useful to a writer of *Eclogues* and to one whose letters were often opened in transit. Dozens of them occur in his surviving correspondence, though they were almost never used as a mode of address or of signature. Sometimes, as with "Socrates," the nickname alone survives. Again, with another lifelong friend, Guido Settimo, we have only the real name, though another there surely was. Where his friends were in pairs we may know the nickname for one and not the other. Mainardo Accursio was "Olympius," Francesco di Nelli was "Simonides": but what were Luca Christiani and Lapo da Castiglionchio? By a mere chance we know Petrarch as "Silvanus," and Petrarch must have had a name for Boccaccio even if he seldom used it. If that name was "Lollius" it could not have been more characteristically chosen nor more apt.

There had lived, in reality, two men by the name of Lollius—father and son—though neither wrote about

Troy. The father, a tribune of the Roman plebs in 71 B.C. is mentioned by Cicero* (one of Petrarch's favourite authors) as an active opponent of the aristocracy. The son, consul in 21 B.C. and Governor of Gaul five years later, was appointed by Augustus as tutor to his grandson. He incurred the imperial displeasure, fell into despair, and is said by Tacitus to have poisoned himself. To the elder Lollius, Horace (another favourite author upon whom Petrarch modelled himself) addressed the *Ode* lv, 9, to the younger (his own junior) the *Epistles* i, 2 and i, 18.

Petrarch had read the first of these *Epistles* so often that he must have known it by heart. He quotes from it at least once when writing to Boccaccio and many of his *Familiar Letters* breathe both its words and its spirit. It is full of praise of Homer—"wiser teacher than all the philosophers" and exemplar of courage and self-control. It condemns human folly and urges a life of simplicity and study.

The second *Epistle* is yet more applicable. Written by a poet who was experienced in the ways of patrons, to his junior who is subjected to them for the first time and hates them, it flows with advice in the vein of Polonius. Is Lollius resentful under a lord who is praiseworthy only as a hunter? None the less he need be neither parasite nor rebel. "A patron's service is a strange career," but the secret of a happy life resides in "a goodly supply of books" and in "a well-balanced mind."

So Petrarch might have written to Boccaccio at Forli, having heard how his friend chafed under the Nimrod, Ordelaffi. So, no doubt, he did, seeing himself as Horace. So, too, if the use of the name by Chaucer was a ruse or a jest between the two younger poets, it has served all purposes, even to the confusion of scholars for five and a half centuries. It fits with all the circumstances.

* Varr., i, 47 and ii, 41.

It also gratifies the reason and the heart, because it could not have come about unless Chaucer and Boccaccio had joined hands and smiled into each other's sad and clever eyes. Chaucer, like Boccaccio, was deeply religious. He too was to give up "profane" writings in middle age. He could understand, and he might be trusted to keep his word.

VII

EARLY in the New Year the lecturer reached that passage in which Dante pictures Fraud.*

> "Lo! the fell monster with the deadly sting,
> Who passes mountains, breaks through fenced walls
> And firm embattled spears, and with his filth
> Taints all the world."

while yet:

> "His face the semblance of a just man wore,
> So kind and gracious was its outward cheer."

Boccaccio's comments upon Geryon must have made good hearing, though not, perhaps, to all his listeners. But before he could survey the "mournful tribe" of sinners who had violated Art for gain, and before he could make, with his fellow-Florentines, that further "steep plunge" on the monster's back which sends the wind of Hell through every reader's hair, he had to break off. Expressing the wish that Benvenuto da Imola, as the most intelligent member of his class, would carry on the work, he collapsed.

He stayed on a while in Florence, hoping to recover soon and to resume the lectures. Writing to Brossano more than ten months later, he says that his indisposition was "rather long and wearisome than dangerous." It was bad enough, however, to force him once more into the hands of the doctors.

This time he speaks of these in the plural. With the

* Opening of Canto XVII of the *Inferno*.

best intentions, which he was too weak to resist, his city friends called in their own medical men, who prescribed medicines and a diet. The patient submitted for four months. At the end of that time he decided that the doctors were not healers but charlatans. Possibly he was prejudiced, for instead of improving he had grown steadily worse. But nobody can read a therapeutic treatise of the time without perceiving that medical theory was pretty equally divided between superstition and ignorance. Heaven knows what poor Boccaccio was forced, and was forbidden, to swallow!

"Wretched man that I am," he wrote in the same letter to Brossano, "you would no longer recognize him whom you saw in Venice. My skin, once well filled, is empty now, my colour is altered, my sight dulled, while my knees and hands tremble."

Seeing their efforts fail his friends now recommended a change. Let him cross the Apennines. Petrarch would be delighted to see him, and there he would recover. But Boccaccio preferred, and was indeed "just able, to creep back" from his native city to the country of his ancestors at Certaldo. Dependent upon the kindness of Bruna, and upon the tender mercies of the good-natured wielder of razors and branding-irons—whom he could keep at arm's length better than he could the Florentine physicians—he chose to wait there, "half dead and restless, utterly idle and uncertain of myself, on God, who alone is able to heal me." It is to be hoped that at least he carried home his fifty florins, or what the Florentine doctors had left of it. He needed it all.

His phrase "utterly idle" must be accepted with reservation. For solace he wrote some more Italian sonnets.

"It is a hard and horrible thing enough," runs the sense of one of these, "to wait for death. One feels afraid. But there is no uncertainty, for nothing else in life is surer.

The course of life is short, and there is no returning upon it. Nor is there any joy on earth so great but that it ends in tears and in regrets. Then why not, by the valour of work, extend ourselves in fame and lengthen our brief days? Thus alone can we serve honour, thus alone redeem the squandered years, thus alone adorn our little life with splendour."*

Further, as at his death he left all things in order, it must be thought that he did this also during the time of waiting. But he began no new book, and he laid the *Commentary* aside, possibly because the promoters of a Dante Chair (to which his lectures had led) had refused the services of Benvenuto. Instead they appointed first Filippo Villani, no great friend to Boccaccio, and then Fra Luigi Marsili, a learned Augustinian who preferred Petrarch to Dante. Boccaccio's judgment is vindicated if we compare Benvenuto's *Commentary* with the performances of those others. But judgment was the last quality for which his fellow-citizens gave Boccaccio credit. Perhaps he did not deliver his opinions with enough solemnity.

Petrarch's letters for some years past had been few and far between. More than a year before, Boccaccio had shrunk from distressing the Laureate by a report of his own ill-health, but this shrinking may be partly accounted for by the report, learned through common friends, that the sage of Arquà disapproved of lectures in the vernacular upon a poet whose "language was coarse." Also, if Petrarch had excused his silence by weariness, he had still found strength to direct an epistolary gush to Avignon, particularly to de Cabassoles, who was still trying to persuade the Pope to grant further sinecures to his old neighbour.†

* Sonnet xxxvi.

† In 1372, de Cabassoles, then a Cardinal, was appointed Archbishop and Governor of Perugia. That spring Petrarch set out to visit him, but was not well enough to go on. Soon afterwards he heard of his faithful friend's death.

News of Petrarch, of course, Boccaccio had. It was difficult to remain ignorant of the doings of the Italian phoenix, even if accounts came spiced with the wit of French Cardinals* or soiled by the irreverence of young Venetians, who, in their enthusiasm for Averrhoes and the dawning of science, had voted Petrarch "a good man, but illiterate."†

Boccaccio must have heard, during his illness, of the troubles between Venice and Padua—troubles due to the conspiracies between Francesco Carrara and Lewis of Hungary against the Venetians to whom Francesco's house owed everything. The war had raged to within two leagues of Petrarch's pleasant country seat and the newly budding vines which he had planted, so that yet another tyrant, the warlike but poetical old Pandolfo Malatesta, had offered Petrarch hospitality at Pesaro and an escort thither. But it had ended in an ignominious submission of the Carrara at Venice, where Petrarch appeared as spokesman. The splendid reception given there to the poetical Canon of Padua, while his patron's son had to bite the dust, was an item of public news. Petrarch's memory deserted him upon his first oration before the Venetian public, but this only served to mark his triumph when he bravely made a second attempt.

Again, the learned Tuscan gossips cannot have neglected to speak of Petrarch's treatise *On the Best Mode of Government*, by means of which flattery and good advice had been equally bestowed upon the lord who had provided his declining years with comfort. Nor can Petrarch's

* Particularly Petrarch's former crony, Guy of Boulogne. Since his attempt, twenty years earlier, to obtain Church preferment for the Laureate, Guy had come to regard him as a pompous bore.

† This being told to Petrarch, he wrote his essay *On Ignorance—His Own and That of Others*. Von Pastor calls people of the stamp of these Venetians heralds of "the false Renaissance."

repeated requests to the new Pope, Gregory XI, by way of Francesco Bruni, have escaped the newsmongers. Petrarch had hastened to applaud Pietro Rogero's accession with the most fervent phrases. Had he not met the new occupant of the Papal chair four years ago at Padua? Was not Pietro the nephew of Clement VI, who, out of seven Popes, had been the most munificent to the dignified darling of Italy? Who more likely to relieve the darling's present embarrassments?

Petrarch's appeals had been truly Petrarcan.

"Were I to say that I want means to lead the life of a canon, I should be wrong, but when I say that my single self have more acquaintances than all the chapter put together, and, consequently, that I am put to more expenses in the way of hospitality, then I am right. This embarrassment increases every day, and my resources diminish. I have made vain efforts to free myself from my difficulties. My prebend, it is true, yields me more bread and wine than I need for my own consumption. I can even sell some of it. But my expenses are very considerable. I have never less than two horses, usually five or six amanuenses. . . . Sometimes . . . behold, a crowd of guests will come in. I must give them something to eat, and I must tell them amusing stories, or else pass for being proud or avaricious.

"I am desirous to found a little oratory for the Virgin Mary; and shall do so, though I should sell or pawn my books. After that I shall go to Avignon if my strength permits. . . . If the Holy Father wishes to stay my old age, and put me into somewhat better circumstances, as he appears to me to wish, and as his predecessor promised me, the thing would be easy. . . . His generosity may inspire my gratitude, but cannot augment my zeal and attachment. If he gives me any benefice, the deposit will be but short; for I feel that I am going, and that I am vanishing away like a shade. I am not conscious, at the same time, of having lived in such a manner as to deserve being extinguished thus. If it be to expiate my sins, so much

the better. I pray to God every day that I may go through my purgatory in this world."*

These are mere extracts from a single letter written by the lover of solitude and preacher of the simple life, but they are typical of many other letters written by him at this time, as at other times.

Boccaccio knew it all and much more, if also much less, as he moved, too slowly dying, about his poorly attended house at Certaldo. But he knew it with a patience so complete that we are almost impatient with him. We might be more than impatient if we did not understand that, asking nothing for himself, Boccaccio could not have loved Petrarch so much had he not loved poetry more. When the news of Petrarch's death first reached him by the mouth of rumour, pure grief overcame him.

The definite news had reached Florence six days after the event, which occurred on the 18th of July. But, considering Boccaccio's condition, neither Benvenuto nor any other friend felt able to tell him. He was left to make his own conclusions from such common talk as came to his ears. Petrarch's death had been falsely announced before. This time, however, Boccaccio was not deceived. In August he made his own will and composed his epitaph. The sonnet upon waiting for death may also belong to the same time.

To Martino da Signa—now that Petrarch was no more—he left his library with instructions that after the Augustinian's death the books were to go to the monastery of Santo Spirito of which da Signa was Prior. There they were to be kept in such a way as to be always accessible

* The appeal failed. Gregory was too much beset by his greedy Cardinals at Avignon to give effective ear to the Laureate's cry, although the cry was repeated at least twice with equal skill and at equal length, Petrarch had to be content with "a most obliging letter."

to the monks.* Between various friends and churches, mostly at Certaldo, he divided the religious pictures and relics he had collected during the last few years of his sadly failing health. To Bruna would go the bed she had occupied in his house, along with plenishings of linen and pillows so dear to the Italian woman, two towels, a walnut table, a wine-cask and some dresses. Other property, with trifling exceptions, he bequeathed to his stepbrother's family. The house, which he had come to love, was never to be sold so long as any descendants, legitimate or otherwise, of his father were alive. If he was to die in Florence he begged to lie near his books, if in Certaldo, in the Augustine Church of SS. Jacopo e Filippo. A group of friends and notaries from Florence, including one of the Bardi, witnessed the will.

Not till early in November did he get the long letter from Brossano which confirmed his knowledge that Petrarch was indeed dead, that he had been grandly buried at Arquà—the place though not the grandeur being according to the wish of the deceased—and that he had bequeathed to Boccaccio those fifty florins with which to buy a warm robe against the chill of winter night studies. This was no contemptible sum, and would have bought some ten robes of the sort Boccaccio might wear, even if these were lined with good Syria cloth. (To his brother Gherardo Petrarch left only 100 florins.) But Petrarch made a gift handsomely, and mention of a robe may be ascribed to his delicacy. "I am ashamed," he said in his will, "to leave so small a sum to so great a man." Thus, perhaps, he makes his apology for former neglect.

To Boccaccio it seemed "a very ample portion," and he assured Brossano that he had received "many benefits from the same hand in times past." He was moved by

* Boccaccio's books and the beautiful manuscripts he copied in his own hand have been faithfully preserved.

Petrarch's kindly thought, and, by nature, he was apt to magnify benefits.

Some men, about to die themselves, might have found a certain comfort in knowing that they had been so closely preceded by a friend. Not so Boccaccio.

"Though none of my friends had written me save you," he wrote, "since every one spoke of it I had known it for some time—to my great sorrow—and for many days I wept without ceasing—not at his going to heaven, but for myself thus unhappy and abandoned. And it is not wonderful, for no one in the world loved him more than I."

When Brossano's letter came, he had "wept anew almost all night long." His tears, he repeated, were for himself, for Brossano, for Petrarch's daughter, and for a world that had lost Petrarch.

With all his heart Boccaccio loved, admired and was charmed by Petrarch. He knew also that Petrarch, though well disposed, had been condescending rather than loving or admiring towards him. At the end of this friendship there was, one must think, regret as well as sorrow. Happily he did not know all that we know about the Laureate, while he was fully exposed to his charm and felt indebted to his talents. But he was aware of much that gave him keen distress, and certainly he knew that Petrarch had loved his Avignonese friends better than he ever loved the man who would have done anything for him short of living with him under the Visconti. Again, making full allowance for Boccaccio's own revised attitude towards the *Decameron*, Petrarch's last cold and discouraging letter concerning that work was scarcely friendly. None the less Boccaccio mourned in all sincerity. His humility was entire.

He did well to weep less for Petrarch, than for himself and others. Because Petrarch's desires for an easy

death, and for "a good end" while engaged in reading, writing or praying—which also he had expressed in a letter to Bruni—had been gratified.

After a period of low fever, not so severe as to curtail his usual pursuits, he had been found, early on the morning of July 19th, seated before his desk. His head had fallen forward, and his cheek rested on the book there laid open before him. It was Boccaccio's Homer. So placid did he seem that, at first, his servants thought he was asleep. But during the happy task of annotation, a stroke had brought swift unconsciousness. Three months earlier he had reached his seventy-first year. Even so, his further wish had been granted. Death found him "still young." The clause in his will forbidding any to weep at his funeral was justified. Yet, while others obeyed without too great an effort, he would doubtless have accepted with his accustomed graciousness the tribute of Boccaccio's disobedience.

VIII

UPON hearing of the death of "his master," Boccaccio's first impulse had been to hurry to the graveside. But weakness and common sense prevailed. His letter to Brossano took three days to write—"with a few intervals to rest my exhausted body," and he signed himself, "Your Giovanni Boccaccio, if he still exists." It was not finished until 7th November.

Brossano had told of the fine funeral—the body, clad in the red satin of Paduan canonicals, upon a bier covered with cloth of gold bordered with ermine and carried by sixteen stately doctors, while the Bishop, Chapter and clergy of Padua attended and Francesco da Carrara with all his nobility walked behind. Crowds of country people from all sides came to hear the oration delivered by one of the leading Augustinian hermits. The immediate place of sepulture was the new little Chapel to the Virgin, which Papal dilatoriness had not deterred Petrarch from building.* Brossano, however, was eager to transfer his father-in-law's body to a grand four-pillared shrine of marble, which he was erecting for it outside, and upon which he would soon place an epitaph in abominable Latin. Everything was to be appropriate, even to the faulty Latinity.

The Pope was not slow to commission an inquiry into the Laureate's literary remains, and to command copies to be made for himself of the *Africa*, the *Bucolics*, the *Epistles*, the *Invectives* and the *Treatise on a Solitary Life*. But Boccaccio did not know this and he was much concerned

* In his will he admits to owing 134 gold ducats to one man, "for the expenses of his house." It is possible, though perhaps not probable, that this was for the Chapel. He leaves this creditor one of his silver gilt cups.

about the dead man's manuscripts and his library. He rejoices in Brossano's determination to build a fitting tomb, though he grudges the honour to Arquà and deplores the fact that Florence is not to have it—not that Florence deserves it.

"Ah, if he had been an artificer of crimes, a contriver of treasons, a master in avarice, envy and ingratitude, thou would'st gladly have given him shelter!"

Still, bad as Florence is, he would have preferred that Petrarch should lie there rather than at Arquà, even as he desired that Dante's body should be brought home from Ravenna, though Ravenna had been kinder than Florence.

He reminds Brossano, however, that a grand tomb is, after all, only to impress the ignorant, who cannot or will not read the works of the poet who lies buried there. Brossano had said nothing about the books.

Though, from the first, Boccaccio had cherished a sound preference for those youthful effusions in Italian by which Petrarch's name would chiefly live, he was particularly anxious about the unfinished Latin epic, *Africa*, which its author had never allowed him to see, albeit it was famous as the work which had won him his laurels. He was far surer than the author for many years had been that Petrarch's only epic was "an inspired work." But it had long been locked away, and Petrarch, doubtful of its merits, had spoken of submitting it to a committee composed of "certain persons" of whom Boccaccio was not one. If these agreed that it was unworthy of his fame it was to be ceremonially burned.*

* Once, upon hearing portions of it read aloud, Petrarch burst into tears of chagrin. His doubts were well founded. That the *Africa* was later extolled by Luigi Marsili, and by the great classicist, Coluccio Salutati himself, proves only that the spell of the Laureate's prestige was powerful even after death. Dry but affected, diffuse but devoid of interesting detail, it was printed sixteen times in the sixteenth century.

He had threatened to do the same with his *Trionfi*—written considerably later than the *Trionfi* contained in Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione*—and Boccaccio was distressed about this too, lest its fate should be entrusted "to the jurists, who because they know law, by which they impudently live, imagine they know everything."

"Besides, I know how many envies still attack the reputation of this illustrious man. They are certain, if they can, to damage his works. They will hide them, they will condemn them. They do not understand. They will spare no trouble to deprive us of them. Use all your vigilance to prevent this. For if these works remain at the mercy of the ignorant and the envious, the future of Italy will be impoverished."

Writing in Italian, because to Brossano and because he wrote in deep emotion, Boccaccio displays astonishing energy in this long letter—long enough for him even in health. At times it seems as though he had to struggle to achieve a correct obituary eloquence. But in those passages concerning Petrarch's books his phrasing is forcible without being forced.

He might well expend what vigour remained in the effort to protect Petrarch's "so very precious library" from the "ignorant enemies of learning." The priceless accumulation of over fifty years, to which Petrarch had honourably given so much of his strength and his money, had not been half so carefully bestowed as his own far poorer collection. Those books which reached Venice were to be damply and inaccessibly housed in an upper room of St. Mark's.* Others were to be sold by Francesco Carrara, who kept, however, a selection for himself, and later, when pressed by war, ceded them to Gian Galeazzo

* When at last examined there, all were found to be ruined. Some were completely solidified by the action of damp and lime.

Visconti. From Pavia, where they lodged for a century in the fine Visconti library, these were to be stolen by the French and carried to Blois. To-day there are twenty-six in Paris and but one apiece in Venice, Florence, Padua, Milan and Rome. Not more than these thirty-seven have been traced out of the two hundred volumes which formed perhaps the most remarkable private library of the time, a library, moreover, of volumes that were annotated by the man who deserves the title of the father of Humanism.*

Of Petrarch's own surviving works—and he burned much in his lifetime—a complete edition, which has never been attempted, would fill seventeen substantial volumes. As it is, his prose books in the Basle edition of 1581 occupy 1,100 folio pages, and if nobody ever reads them for pleasure they are still a storehouse for students of the Renaissance. It is ironic to reflect that Boccaccio's Latin works of learning, which he may be said to have ground out of himself to please Petrarch, achieved a European popularity that was not accorded to a single learned effort by his friend, if we except *The Antidotes for Good and Evil Fortune*, which was translated into six languages, besides running into over twenty Latin editions between 1471 and 1756; and, in a lesser degree, the amusing *Vanity of Earthly Things*, which deals with every frivolity, from the possession of a chaste daughter, to conducting a thriving hen-farm, having the toothache, or growing too fat. But neither of these books can, strictly speaking, be called learned. The well-intentioned *Things Remembered* is masterly chiefly in omitting things we should like to

* M. Pierre de Nolhac has made a partial reconstruction in his catalogue. Petrarch was sparing in his Latin prose authors, but histories were well represented, as were the early Christian Fathers and almost all the Latin poets except Lucretius. Propertius and the less known orations of Cicero were among the vanished treasures. Petrarch possessed also some works of Hugh de Saint Victor and Abelard's Letters.

know. While Boccaccio's *Famous Women* created widespread and lasting interest, Petrarch's *Famous Men* was not printed until our own day—and then only for the curious. Charles James Fox was right when he said that "Petrarch's Latin letters are the best of him."* In the *Familiar Letters* and the *Letter to Posterity* we find and know him. There, in the unconscious revelation of his *Secret*, and in the Italian poems to Laura which he so deprecated, he lives on. The loveliness of the Laura poems, because of the untruth that lurks in them, has wrought incalculable mischief. Yet out of them came also much that was lovely, and some of this was wrought by men who could not be untrue. His fascination endures as an exquisite young poet and as an exquisite middle-aged fraud. The world owes him a great debt.

He will live also as the friend whom Boccaccio loved with only too much of self-effacement, and as the foil to Boccaccio's honest warmth.

In the last lingering year that remained Boccaccio wrote a Latin tribute to Petrarch. He also wrote at least one Italian sonnet to his friend in heaven where Latin and the vulgar tongue are surely merged in praise.

"Have you entered dear, my master," he asks, "that Kingdom to which every soul chosen by God asks admittance when it leaves this wicked world? Are you in that place where so often the longing for your little Laura made you long to be? Are you indeed where my lovely Fiammetta sits beside her in the presence of God? Ah! If on this erring earth I truly seemed worthy in your eyes, draw me, I pray you, to your side, and to where my darling, herself so full of love that she enflamed me, now dwells in joy."†

In that same year he must have written the sonnet,

* Samuel Roger's *Recollections*.

† Sonnet xcvii.

which has its smiles as well as tears, to Fiammetta in the blissful Circle of Venus.

It will perhaps be said that not he but Petrarch had the tranquil heart. But neither the sonnet nor the epitaph he had written for himself—in impeccable Latin—give countenance to any such opinion. Tranquillity is for the heart that has been able in proud simplicity to commit itself to a single ardour. This Petrarch never attained.

On the twenty-first day of December, 1375, Boccaccio's heart ceased to beat. The exact date of his birthday is unknown, but he had lived for sixty-two years. That Christmas he alone of the three great Florentine poets was buried in the earth of Tuscany, though his grave, like Dante's and Petrarch's, was denied to proud Florence. He died in Certaldo and his wishes were carried out. Of men he knew he had written that "long ere the miserable hour of their death, they made the body the grave of an unhappy soul." This was not his fate. His body lies in the countryside he loved, and of his soul the epitaph he wrote for himself, most confidently speaks. In English it might read thus:

Beneath this mound
Lie the mortal remains of John.
Adorned by the merits of its earthly trials,
His soul has a place before God.
Boccaccino was his begetter, Certaldo the place of his fathers,
Most gracious poetry all his passion.

FINIS

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