

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

THE DECAMERON

A NEW TRANSLATION

21 NOVELLE

CONTEMPORARY REACTIONS

MODERN CRITICISM

Selected, Translated, and Edited by

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say that I am free of love) in exchange for what I received—if not to repay those who helped me (since their intelligence and their good fortune will perhaps make this unnecessary), then, at least, to assist those who may be in need of it. And however slight my support or comfort (if you wish) may be to those in need, nevertheless it seems to me that it should still be offered to those who are in most need of it, for it will be most useful and valuable to them.

And who will deny that such comfort, no matter how insufficient, is more fittingly bestowed on gracious ladies than on men? For they, in fear and shame, conceal the hidden flames of love within their delicate breasts, a love far stronger than one which is openly expressed, as those who have felt and suffered know; and besides this, restricted by the wishes, the pleasures, and the commands of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, they remain most of the time enclosed in the confines of their bedrooms where they sit in almost complete idleness, now wishing one thing and now wishing another, turning over in their minds various thoughts which cannot always be pleasant ones. And because of these thoughts, if melancholy brought on by burning desire should arise in their minds, they will be forced to suffer this serious pain unless it be replaced by other thoughts. What's more, they are less able than men to bear these discomforts; this does not happen with men in love, as we can plainly see. If men are afflicted by melancholy or heavy thoughts, they have many ways of alleviating or forgetting them, for if they wish, they can go out and hear and see many things; they can go hawking, hunting, or fishing; they can ride, gamble, or attend to their trades. Each of these pursuits has the power, either completely or in part, to occupy a man's mind and to remove from it a painful thought, even if only for a brief moment; and so, in one way or another, either consolation follows or the pain becomes less. Therefore, I wish to make up in part for the wrong done by Fortune, who is less generous with her support where there is less strength, as we witness in the case of our delicate ladies. As support and comfort for those ladies in love (to those others who are not I leave the needle, spindle, and wool winder), I intend to tell one hundred stories, or fables, or parables, or histories, or whatever you wish to call them, as they were told in ten days (as will become quite evident), by a gracious band of seven ladies and three young men who came together during the time of the plague (which just recently took so many lives) and I shall also include several songs sung for their delight by these same ladies. In these stories will be seen delightful as well as sad examples of love and other adventures, of both modern and ancient times. The ladies, just mentioned, will read them and perhaps derive from the delightful things that happen in these tales both pleasure and useful counsel, inasmuch as they will recognize what should be avoided

and what should be sought after. This, I believe, can only end in the soothing of their melancholy. And if this happens (and may God grant that it does), let them thank Love for it, who, in freeing me from his bonds, has given me the power to attend to their pleasure.

The Author's Introduction

Here begins the first day of The Decameron, in which, after the author has explained why certain people (soon to be introduced) have gathered together to tell stories, they speak on any subject that pleases them most, under the direction of Pampinea.

Whenever, gracious ladies, I consider how compassionate you are by nature, I realize that in your judgment the present work will seem to have had a serious and painful beginning, for it recalls in its opening the unhappy memory of the deadly plague just passed, dreadful and pitiful to all those who saw or heard about it. But I do not wish this to frighten you away from reading any further, as if you were going to pass all of your time sighing and weeping as you read. This horrible beginning will be like the ascent of a steep and rough mountainside, beyond which there lies a most beautiful and delightful plain, which seems more pleasurable to the climbers in proportion to the difficulty of their climb and their descent. And just as pain is the extreme limit of pleasure, so misery ends by unanticipated happiness. This brief pain (I say brief since it contains few words) will be quickly followed by the sweetness and the delight, which I promised you before, and which, had I not promised, might not be expected from such a beginning. To tell the truth, if I could have conveniently led you by any other way than this, which I know is a bitter one, I would have gladly done so; but since it is otherwise impossible to demonstrate how the stories you are about to read came to be told, I am almost obliged by necessity to write about it this way.

Let me say, then, that thirteen hundred and forty-eight years had already passed after the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God when into the distinguished city of Florence, more noble than any other Italian city, there came the deadly pestilence. It started in the East, either because of the influence of heavenly bodies or because of God's just wrath as a punishment to mortals for our wicked deeds, and it killed an infinite number of people. Without pause it spread from one place and it stretched its miserable length over the West. And against this pestilence no human wisdom or foresight was of any avail; quantities of filth were removed from the

city by officials charged with this task; the entry of any sick person into the city was prohibited; and many directives were issued concerning the maintenance of good health. Nor were the humble supplications, rendered not once but many times to God by pious people, through public processions or by other means, efficacious; for almost at the beginning of springtime of the year in question the plague began to show its sorrowful effects in an extraordinary manner. It did not act as it had done in the East, where bleeding from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death, but it began in both men and women with certain swellings either in the groin or under the armpits, some of which grew to the size of a normal apple and others to the size of an egg (more or less), and the people called them *gavoccioli*.² And from the two parts of the body already mentioned, within a brief space of time, the said deadly *gavoccioli* began to spread indiscriminately over every part of the body; and after this, the symptoms of the illness changed to black or livid spots appearing on the arms and thighs, and on every part of the body, some large ones and sometimes many little ones scattered all around. And just as the *gavoccioli* were originally, and still are, a very certain indication of impending death, in like manner these spots came to mean the same thing for whoever had them. Neither a doctor's advice nor the strength of medicine could do anything to cure this illness; on the contrary, either the nature of the illness was such that it afforded no cure, or else the doctors were so ignorant that they did not recognize its cause and, as a result, could not prescribe the proper remedy (in fact, the number of doctors, other than the well-trained, was increased by a large number of men and women who had never had any medical training); at any rate, few of the sick were ever cured, and almost all died after the third day of the appearance of the previously described symptoms (some sooner, others later), and most of them died without fever or any other side effects.

This pestilence was so powerful that it was communicated to the healthy by contact with the sick, the way a fire close to dry or oily things will set them aflame. And the evil of the plague went even further: not only did talking to or being around the sick bring infection and a common death, but also touching the clothes of the sick or anything touched or used by them seemed to communicate this very disease to the person involved. What I am about to say

2. *Gavoccioli*—or *bubboni*, in modern Italian—are called "buboes" in English, the source of the phrase "bubonic plague." The plague of 1348 is often known as the Black Plague because of the black spots Boccaccio describes. One of the most important casualties of this plague in literature was Laura, the woman who inspired the many sonnets

is incredible to hear, and if I and others had not witnessed it with our own eyes, I should not dare believe it (let alone write about it), no matter how trustworthy a person I might have heard it from. Let me say, then, that the power of the plague described here was of such virulence in spreading from one person to another that not only did it pass from one man to the next, but, what's more, it was often transmitted from the garments of a sick or dead man to animals that not only became contaminated by the disease, but also died within a brief period of time. My own eyes, as I said earlier, witnessed such a thing one day: when the rags of a poor man who died of this disease were thrown into the public street, two pigs came upon them, as they are wont to do, and first with their snouts and then with their teeth they took the rags and shook them around; and within a short time, after a number of convulsions, both pigs fell dead upon the ill-fated rags, as if they had been poisoned. From these and many similar or worse occurrences there came about such fear and such fantastic notions among those who remained alive that almost all of them took a very cruel attitude in the matter; that is, they completely avoided the sick and their possessions; and in so doing, each one believed that he was protecting his good health.

There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding all superfluity might help a great deal in resisting this disease, and so, they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else. They shut themselves up in those houses where there were no sick people and where one could live well by eating the most delicate of foods and drinking the finest of wines (doing so always in moderation), allowing no one to speak about or listen to anything said about the sick and the dead outside; these people lived, spending their time with music and other pleasures that they could arrange. Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking too much, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease; so they practiced to the fullest what they believed by going from one tavern to another all day and night, drinking to excess; and often they would make merry in private homes, doing everything that pleased or amused them the most. This they were able to do easily, for everyone felt he was doomed to die and, as a result, abandoned his property, so that most of the houses had become common property, and any stranger who came upon them used them as if he were their rightful owner. In addition to this bestial behavior, they always managed to avoid the sick as best they could. And in this great affliction and misery of our city the revered authority of the laws, both divine and human, had fallen and almost completely disappeared, for, like other men,

the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or sick or so short of help that it was impossible for them to fulfill their duties; as a result, everybody was free to do as he pleased.

Many others adopted a middle course between the two attitudes just described: neither did they restrict their food or drink so much as the first group nor did they fall into such dissoluteness and drunkenness as the second; rather, they satisfied their appetites to a moderate degree. They did not shut themselves up, but went around carrying in their hands flowers, or sweet-smelling herbs, or various kinds of spices; and often they would put these things to their noses, believing that such smells were a wonderful means of purifying the brain, for all the air seemed infected with the stench of dead bodies, sickness, and medicines.

Others were of a crueler opinion (though it was, perhaps, a safer one): they maintained that there was no better medicine against the plague than to flee from it; and convinced of this reasoning, not caring about anything but themselves, men and women in great numbers abandoned their city, their houses, their farms, their relatives, and their possessions and sought other places, and they went at least as far away as the Florentine countryside—as if the wrath of God could not pursue them with this pestilence wherever they went but would only strike those it found within the walls of the city! Or perhaps they thought that Florence's last hour had come and that no one in the city would remain alive.

And not all those who adopted these diverse opinions died, nor did they all escape with their lives; on the contrary, many of those who thought this way were falling sick everywhere, and since they had given, when they were healthy, the bad example of avoiding the sick, they, in turn, were abandoned and left to languish away without care. The fact was that one citizen avoided another, that almost no one cared for his neighbor, and that relatives rarely or hardly ever visited each other—they stayed far apart. This disaster had struck such fear into the hearts of men and women that brother abandoned brother, uncle abandoned nephew, sister left brother, and very often wife abandoned husband, and—even worse, almost unbelievable—fathers and mothers neglected to tend and care for their children, as if they were not their own.

Thus, for the countless multitude of men and women who fell sick, there remained no support except the charity of their friends (and these were few) or the avarice of servants, who worked for inflated salaries and indecent periods of time and who, in spite of this, were few and far between; and those few were men or women of little wit (most of them not trained for such service) who did little else but hand different things to the sick when requested to do so or watch over them while they died, and in this service, they very often lost their own lives and their profits. And since the sick

were abandoned by their neighbors, their parents, and their friends and there was a scarcity of servants, a practice that was almost unheard of before spread through the city: when a woman fell sick, no matter how attractive or beautiful or noble she might be, she did not mind having a manservant (whoever he might be, no matter how young or old he was), and she had no shame whatsoever in revealing any part of her body to him—the way she would have done to a woman—when the necessity of her sickness required her to do so. This practice was, perhaps, in the days that followed the pestilence, the cause of looser morals in the women who survived the plague. And so, many people died who, by chance, might have survived if they had been attended to. Between the lack of competent attendants, which the sick were unable to obtain, and the violence of the pestilence, there were so many, many people who died in the city both day and night that it was incredible just to hear this described, not to mention seeing it! Therefore, out of sheer necessity, there arose among those who remained alive customs which were contrary to the established practices of the time.

It was the custom, as it is again today, for the women, relatives, and neighbors to gather together in the house of a dead person and there to mourn with the women who had been dearest to him; on the other hand, in front of the deceased's home, his male relatives would gather together with his male neighbors and other citizens, and the clergy also came (many of them, or sometimes just a few) depending upon the social class of the dead man. Then, upon the shoulders of his equals, he was carried to the church chosen by him before death with the funeral pomp of candles and chants. With the fury of the pestilence increasing, this custom, for the most part, died out and other practices took its place. And so, not only did people die without having a number of women around them, but there were many who passed away without even having a single witness present, and very few were granted the piteous laments and bitter tears of their relatives; on the contrary, most relatives were somewhere else, laughing, joking, and amusing themselves; even the women learned this practice too well, having put aside, for the most part, their womanly compassion for their own safety. Very few were the dead whose bodies were accompanied to the church by more than ten or twelve of their neighbors, and these dead bodies were not even carried on the shoulders of honored and reputable citizens but rather by gravediggers from the lower classes that were called *becchini*. Working for pay, they would pick up the bier and hurry it off, not to the church the dead man had chosen before his death but, in most cases, to the church closest by, accompanied by four or six churchmen with just a few candles, and often none at all. With the help of these *becchini*, the churchmen would place the body as fast as they could in whatever unoccupied

grave they could find, without going to the trouble of saying long or solemn burial services.

The plight of the lower class and, perhaps, a large part of the middle class, was even more pathetic: most of them stayed in their homes or neighborhoods either because of their poverty or their hopes for remaining safe, and every day they fell sick by the thousands, and not having servants or attendants of any kind, they almost always died. Many ended their lives in the public streets, during the day or at night, while many others who died in their homes were discovered dead by their neighbors only by the smell of their decomposing bodies. The city was full of corpses. The dead were usually given the same treatment by their neighbors, who were moved more by the fear that the decomposing corpses would contaminate them than by any charity they might have felt towards the deceased: either by themselves or with the assistance of porters (when they were available), they would drag the corpse out of the home and place it in front of the doorstep where, usually in the morning, quantities of dead bodies could be seen by any passerby; then, they were laid out on biers, or for lack of biers, on a plank. Nor did a bier carry only one corpse; sometimes it was used for two or three at a time. More than once, a single bier would serve for a wife and husband, two or three brothers, a father or son, or other relatives, all at the same time. And countless times it happened that two priests, each with a cross, would be on their way to bury someone, when porters carrying three or four biers would just follow along behind them; and where these priests thought they had just one dead man to bury, they had, in fact, six or eight and sometimes more. Moreover, the dead were honored with no tears or candles or funeral mourners but worse: things had reached such a point that the people who died were cared for as we care for goats today. Thus, it became quite obvious that what the wise had not been able to endure with patience through the few calamities of everyday life now became a matter of indifference to even the most simple-minded people as a result of this colossal misfortune.

So many corpses would arrive in front of a church every day and at every hour that the amount of holy ground for burials was certainly insufficient for the ancient custom of giving each body its individual place; when all the graves were full, huge trenches were dug in all of the cemeteries of the churches and into them the new arrivals were dumped by the hundreds; and they were packed in there with dirt, one on top of another, like a ship's cargo, until the trench was filled.

But instead of going over every detail of the past miseries which befell our city, let me say that the same unfriendly weather there did not, because of this, spare the surrounding countryside any evil; there, not to speak of the towns which, on a smaller scale,

were like the city, in the scattered villages and in the fields the poor, miserable peasants and their families, without any medical assistance or aid of servants, died on the roads and in their fields and in their homes, as many by day as by night, and they died not like men but more like wild animals. Because of this they, like the city dwellers, became careless in their ways and did not look after their possessions or their businesses; furthermore, when they saw that death was upon them, completely neglecting the future fruits of their past labors, their livestock, their property, they did their best to consume what they already had at hand. So, it came about that oxen, donkeys, sheep, pigs, chickens and even dogs, man's most faithful companion, were driven from their homes into the fields, where the wheat was left not only unharvested but also uncaresed, and they were allowed to roam where they wished; and many of these animals, almost as if they were rational beings, returned at night to their homes without any guidance from a shepherd, satiated after a good day's meal.

Leaving the countryside and returning to the city, what more can one say, except that so great was the cruelty of Heaven, and, perhaps, also that of man, that from March to July of the same year, between the fury of the pestiferous sickness and the fact that many of the sick were badly treated or abandoned in need because of the fear that the healthy had, more than one hundred thousand human beings are believed to have lost their lives for certain inside the walls of the city of Florence whereas, before the deadly plague, one would not have estimated that there were actually that many people dwelling in that city.

Oh, how many great palaces, beautiful homes, and noble dwellings, once filled with families, gentlemen, and ladies, were now emptied, down to the last servant! How many notable families, vast domains, and famous fortunes remained without legitimate heirs! How many valiant men, beautiful women, and charming young men, who might have been pronounced very healthy by Galen,³ Hippocrates,⁴ and Aesculapius⁵ (not to mention lesser physicians), died in the morning with their relatives, companions, and friends and then in the evening took supper with their ancestors in the other world!

Reflecting upon so many miseries makes me very sad; therefore, since I wish to pass over as many as I can, let me say that as our city was in this condition, almost emptied of inhabitants, it happened (as I heard it later from a person worthy of trust) that one Tuesday

3. Greek anatomist and physician (A.D. 130?-201?).

5. The Roman god of medicine and healing, often identified with Asclepius.

4. Greek physician (460?-377? B.C.), to whom the Hippocratic oath, administered to new physicians, is attributed.

lives! When I consider what we have been doing this morning and in the past days and what we have spoken about, I understand, and you must understand too, that each one of us is afraid for her life; nor does this surprise me in the least—rather I am greatly amazed that since each of us has the natural feelings of a woman, we do not find some remedy for ourselves to cure what each one of us dreads. We live in the city, in my opinion, for no other reason than to bear witness to the number of dead bodies that are carried to burial, or to listen whether the friars (whose number has been reduced to almost nothing) chant their offices at the prescribed hours, or to demonstrate to anyone who comes here the quality and the quantity of our miseries by our garments of mourning. And if we leave the church, either we see dead or sick bodies being carried all about, or we see those who were once condemned to exile for their crimes by the authority of the public laws making sport of these laws, running about wildly through the city, because they know that the executors of these laws are either dead or dying; or we see the scum of our city, avid for our blood, who call themselves *becchini* and who ride about on horseback torturing us by deriding everything, making our losses more bitter with their disgusting songs. Nor do we hear anything but “So-and-so is dead,” and “So-and-so is dying”; and if there were anyone left to mourn, we should hear nothing but piteous laments everywhere. I do not know if what happens to me also happens to you in your homes, but when I go home I find no one there except my maid, and I become so afraid that my hair stands on end, and wherever I go or sit in my house, I seem to see the shadows of those who have passed away, not with the faces that I remember, but with horrible expressions that terrify me. For these reasons, I am uncomfortable here, outside, and in my home, and the more so since it appears that no one like ourselves, who is well off and who has some other place to go, has remained here except us. And if there are any who remain, according to what I hear and see, they do whatever their hearts desire, making no distinction between what is proper and what is not, whether they are alone or with others, by day or by night; and not only laymen but also those who are cloistered in convents have broken their vows of obedience and have given themselves over to carnal pleasures, for they have made themselves believe that these things are permissible for them and are improper for others, and thinking that they will escape with their lives in this fashion, they have become wanton and dissolute.

“If this is the case, and plainly it is, what are we doing here? What are we waiting for? What are we dreaming about? Why are we slower to protect our health than all the rest of the citizens? Do we hold ourselves less dear than all the others? Or do we believe that our own lives are tied by stronger chains to our bodies than

morning in the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella⁶ there was hardly any congregation there to hear the holy services except for seven young women, all dressed in garments of mourning as the times demanded, each of whom was a friend, neighbor, or relative of the other, and none of whom had passed her twenty-eighth year, nor was any of them younger than eighteen; all were educated and of noble birth and beautiful to look at, well-mannered and gracefully modest. I would tell you their real names, if I did not have a good reason for not doing so, which is this: I do not wish any of them to be embarrassed in the future because of the things that they said to each other and what they listened to—all of which I shall later recount. Today the laws regarding pleasure are again strict, more so than at that time (for the reasons mentioned above when they were very lax), not only for women of their age but even for those who were older; nor would I wish to give an opportunity to the envious, who are always ready to attack every praiseworthy life, to diminish in any way with their indecent talk the dignity of these worthy ladies. But, so that you may understand clearly what each of them had to say, I intend to call them by names which are either completely or in part appropriate to their personalities. We shall call the first and the oldest Pampinea and the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena, and the fourth Emilia, and we shall name the fifth Lauretta and the sixth Neifile, and the last, not without reason, we shall call Elissa.⁷ Not by prior agreement, but purely by chance, they gathered together in one part of the church and were seated almost in a circle, saying their rosaries; after many sighs, they began to discuss among themselves various matters concerning the nature of the times, and after a while, as the others fell silent, Pampinea began to speak in this manner:

“My dear ladies, you have often heard, as I have, how a proper use of one’s reason does harm to no one. It is only natural for everyone born on this earth to aid, preserve, and defend his own life to the best of his ability; this is a right so taken for granted that it has, at times, permitted men to kill each other without blame in order to defend their own lives. And if the laws dealing with the welfare of every human being permit such a thing, how much more lawful, and with no harm to anyone, is it for us, or anyone else, to take all possible precautions to preserve our own

6. This church, called “novella” or critics with these ladies are as follows: Pampinea (a wise and confident lady, often in love and the most mature of the group); Filomena (wise and discreet and full of desire); Elissa (very young and dominated by a violent passion); Neifile (also young but ingenuous); Emilia (in love with herself); Lauretta (a jealous lover); and Fiammetta (happy to love and to be loved but afraid that she will lose her love).

7. The qualities usually associated by

those of others and, therefore, that we need not worry about anything which might have the power to harm them? We are mistaken and deceived, and we are mad if we believe it. We shall have clear proof of this if we just call to mind how many young men and ladies have been struck down by this cruel pestilence. I do not know if you agree with me, but I think that, in order not to fall prey, out of laziness or presumption, to what we might well avoid, it might be a good idea for all of us to leave this city, just as many others before us have done and are still doing. Let us avoid like death itself the ugly examples of others, and go to live in a more dignified fashion in our country houses (of which we all have several) and there let us take what enjoyment, what happiness, and what pleasure we can, without going beyond the rules of reason in any way. There we can hear the birds sing, and we can see the hills and the pastures turning green, the wheat fields moving like the sea, and a thousand kinds of trees; and we shall be able to see the heavens more clearly which, though they still may be cruel, nonetheless will not deny to us their eternal beauties, which are much more pleasing to look at than the empty walls of our city. Besides all this, there in the country the air is much fresher, and the necessities for living in such times as these are plentiful there, and there are just fewer troubles in general; though the peasants are dying there even as the townspeople here, the displeasure is the less in that there are fewer houses and inhabitants than in the city. Here on the other hand, if I judge correctly, we would not be abandoning anyone; on the contrary, we can honestly say it is we ourselves that have been abandoned, for our loved ones are either dead or have fled and have left us alone in such affliction as though we did not belong to them. No reproach, therefore, can come to us if we follow this course of action, whereas sorrow, worry, and perhaps even death can come if we do not follow this course. So, whenever you like, I think it would be well to take our servants, have all our necessary things sent after us, and go from one place one day to another the next, enjoying what happiness and merriment these times permit; let us live in this manner (unless we are overtaken first by death) until we see what ending Heaven has reserved for these horrible times. And remember that it is no more forbidden for us to go away virtuously than it is for most other women to remain here dishonorably."

When they had listened to what Pampinea had said, the other women not only praised her advice but were so anxious to follow it that they had already begun discussing among themselves the details, as if they were going to leave that very instant. But Filomena, who was most discerning, said:

"Ladies, regardless of how convincing Pampinea's arguments are, that is no reason to rush into things, as you seem to wish to do.

Remember that we are all women, and any young girl can tell you that women do not know how to reason in a group when they are without the guidance of some man who knows how to control them. We are changeable, quarrelsome, suspicious, timid, and fearful, because of which I suspect that this company will soon break up without honor to any of us if we do not take a guide other than ourselves. We would do well to resolve this matter before we depart."

Then Elissa said:

"Men are truly the leaders of women, and without their guidance, our actions rarely end successfully. But how are we to find any men? We all know that the majority of our relatives are dead and those who remain alive are scattered here and there in various groups, not knowing where we are (they, too, are fleeing precisely what we seek to avoid), and since taking up with strangers would be unbecoming to us, we must, if we wish to leave for the sake of our health, find a means of arranging it so that while going for our own pleasure and repose, no trouble or scandal follow us."

While the ladies were discussing this, three young men came into the church, none of whom was less than twenty-five years of age. Neither the perversity of the times nor the loss of friends or parents, nor fear for their own lives had been able to cool, much less extinguish, the love those lovers bore in their hearts. One of them was called Panfilo, another Filostrato, and the last Dioneo, each one very charming and well-bred; and in those turbulent times they sought their greatest consolation in the sight of the ladies they loved, all three of whom happened to be among the seven ladies previously mentioned, while the others were close relatives of one or the other of the three men. No sooner had they sighted the ladies than they were seen by them, whereupon Pampinea smiled and said:

"See how Fortune favors our plans and has provided us with these discreet and virtuous young men, who would gladly be our guides and servants if we do not hesitate to accept them for such service."

Then Neifile's face blushed out of embarrassment, for she was one of those who was loved by one of the young men, and she said: "Pampinea, for the love of God, be careful what you say! I realize very well that nothing but good can be said of any of them, and I believe that they are capable of doing much more than that task and, likewise, that their good and worthy company would be fitting not only for us but for ladies much more beautiful and attractive than we are, but it is quite obvious that some of them are in love with some of us who are here present, and I fear that if we take them with us, slander and disapproval will follow, through no fault of ours or of theirs."

Then Filomena said:
 "That does not matter at all; as long as I live with dignity and have no remorse of conscience about anything, let anyone who wishes say what he likes to the contrary: God and Truth will take up arms in my defense. Now, if they were just prepared to come with us, as Pampinea says, we could truly say that Fortune was favorable to our departure."

When the others heard her speak in such a manner, the argument was ended, and they all agreed that the young men should be called over, told about their intentions, and asked if they would be so kind as to accompany the ladies on such a journey. Without further discussion, then, Pampinea, who was related to one of the men, rose to her feet and made her way to where they stood gazing at the ladies, and she greeted them with a cheerful expression, outlined their plan to them, and begged them, in everyone's name, to keep them company in the spirit of pure and brotherly affection.

At first the young men thought they were being mocked, but when they saw that the lady was speaking seriously, they gladly consented; and in order to start without delay and put the plan into action, before leaving the church they agreed upon what preparations must be made for their departure. And when everything had been arranged and word had been sent on to the place they intended to go, the following morning (that is, Wednesday) at the break of dawn the ladies with some of their servants and the three young men with three of their servants left the city and set out on their way; they had traveled no further than two short miles when they arrived at the first stop they had agreed upon.

The place was somewhere on a little mountain, at some distance away from our roads, full of various shrubs and plants with rich, green foliage—most pleasant to look at; at the top there was a country mansion with a beautiful large inner courtyard with open colonnades, halls, and bedrooms, all of them beautiful in themselves and decorated with cheerful and interesting paintings; it was surrounded by meadows and marvelous gardens, with wells of fresh water and cellars full of the most precious wines, the likes of which were more suitable for expert drinkers than for sober and dignified ladies. And the group discovered, to their delight, that the entire palace had been cleaned and the beds made in the bedchambers, and that fresh flowers and rushes had been strewn everywhere. Soon after they arrived and were resting, Dioneo, who was more attractive and wittier than either of the other young men, said:

"Ladies, more than our preparations, it was your intelligence that guided us here. I do not know what you intend to do with your thoughts, but I left mine inside the city walls when I passed through them in your company a little while ago; and so, you must either make up your minds to enjoy yourselves and laugh and sing with

As I heard of
 some
 servants
 at hand
 but
 not
 in the least

me (as much, let me say, as your dignity permits), or you must give me leave to return to my worries and to remain in our troubled city."

To this Pampinea, who had driven away her sad thoughts in the same way, replied happily:

"Dioneo, you speak very well: let us live happily, for after all it was unhappiness that made us flee the city. But when things are not organized they cannot long endure, and since I began the discussions which brought this fine company together, and since I desire the continuation of our happiness, I think it is necessary that we choose a leader from among us, whom we shall honor and obey as our superior and whose every thought shall be to keep us living happily. And in order that each one of us may feel the weight of this responsibility together with the pleasure of its authority, so that no one of us who has not experienced it can envy the others, let me say that both the weight and the honor should be granted to each one of us in turn for a day; the first will be chosen by election; the others that follow will be whomever he or she that will have the rule for that day chooses as the hour of vespers's approaches; this ruler, as long as his reign endures, will organize and arrange the place and the manner in which we will spend our time."

These words greatly pleased everyone, and they unanimously elected Pampinea queen for the first day; Filomena quickly ran to a laurel bush, whose leaves she had always heard were worthy of praise and bestowed great honor upon those crowned with them; she plucked several branches from it and wove them into a handsome garland of honor. And when it would be placed upon the head of any one of them, it was to be all in the group a clear symbol of royal rule and authority over the rest of them for as long as their company stayed together.⁸

After she had been chosen queen, Pampinea ordered everyone to refrain from talking; then, she sent for the four servants of the ladies and for those of the three young men, and as they stood before her in silence, she said:

"Since I must set the first example for you all in order that it may be bettered and thus allow our company to live in order and

8. According to church practice, special forms of prayers were prescribed by canon law for recitation at specified times during the day. As a result, people often told the time according to these seven canonical hours: matins (dawn); prime (about 6:00 A.M.); tierce (the third hour after sunrise, about 9:00 A.M.); sext (noon); nones (the ninth hour after sunrise, or about 3:00 P.M.); vespers (late afternoon); and compline (in the evening just before retiring).
 9. The leaves of the laurel bush were traditionally used in ancient times to

in a leaf
 commonly

fashion crowns or garlands not only for warriors and heroes but also for outstanding poets, musicians, and artists. Laura, the inspiration of Petrarca's *Canzoniere*, was so named because of her association with the laurel and, therefore, with excellence in poetry. Most medieval and Renaissance illustrations of the great Italian poets Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio picture them with such laurel crowns, implying that they have equaled and perhaps even excelled the poets of classical antiquity.

in pleasure, and without any shame, and so that it may last as long as we wish, I first appoint Parmeno, Dioneo's servant, as my steward, and I commit to his care and management all our household and everything which pertains to the services of the dining hall. I wish Sirisco, the servant of Panfilo, to act as our buyer and treasurer and follow the orders of Parmeno. Tindaro, who is in the service of Filostrato, shall wait on Filostrato and Dioneo and Panfilo in their bedchambers when the other two are occupied with their other duties and cannot do so. Misia, my servant, and Licisca, Filomena's, will be occupied in the kitchen and will prepare those dishes which are ordered by Parmeno. Chimera, Lauretta's servant, and Stratilia, Fiammetta's servant, will take care of the bedchambers of the ladies and the cleaning of those places we use. And in general, we desire and command each of you, if you value our favor and good graces, to be sure—no matter where you go or come from, no matter what you hear or see—to bring us back nothing but pleasant news."

And when these orders, praised by all present, were delivered, Pampinea rose happily to her feet and said:

"Here there are gardens and meadows and many other pleasant places, which all of us can wander about in and enjoy as we like; but at the hour of tierce let everyone be here so that we can eat in the cool of the morning."

After the merry group had been given the new queen's permission, the young men, together with the beautiful ladies, set off slowly through a garden, discussing pleasant matters, making themselves beautiful garlands of various leaves and singing love songs. After the time granted them by the queen had elapsed, they returned home and found Parmeno busy carrying out the duties of his task; for as they entered a hall on the ground floor, they saw the tables set with the whitest of linens and with glasses that shone like silver and everything decorated with broom blossoms; then, they washed their hands and, at the queen's command, they all sat down in the places assigned them by Parmeno. The delicately cooked foods were brought in and very fine wines were served; the three servants in silence served the tables. Everyone was delighted to see everything so beautiful and well arranged, and they ate merrily and with pleasant conversation. Since all the ladies and young men knew how to dance (and some of them even knew how to play and sing very well), when the tables had been cleared, the queen ordered that instruments be brought, and on her command, Dioneo took a lute and Fiammetta a viola, and they began softly playing a dance tune. After the queen had sent the servants off to eat, she began to dance together with the other ladies and two of the young men; and when that was over, they all began to sing

carefree and gay songs. In this manner they continued until the queen felt that it was time to retire; therefore, at the queen's request, the three young men went off to their chambers (which were separate from those of the ladies), where they found their beds prepared and the rooms as full of flowers as the halls; the ladies, too, discovered their chambers decorated in like fashion. Then they all undressed and fell asleep.

Not long after the hour of noons, the queen arose and had the other ladies and young men awakened, stating that too much sleep in the daytime was harmful; then they went out onto a lawn of thick, green grass, where no ray of the sun could penetrate; and there, with a gentle breeze caressing them, they all sat in a circle upon the green grass, as was the wish of their queen. Then she spoke to them in this manner:

"As you see, the sun is high, the heat is great, and nothing can be heard except the cicadas in the olive groves; therefore, to wander about at this hour would be, indeed, foolish. Here it is cool and fresh and, as you see, there are games and chessboards with which all of you can amuse yourselves to your liking. But if you take my advice in this matter, I suggest we spend this hot part of the day not in playing games (a pastime which of necessity disturbs the player who loses without providing much pleasure either for his opponents or for those who watch) but rather in telling stories, for this way one person, by telling a story, can provide amusement for the entire company. In the time it takes for the sun to set and the heat to become less oppressive, you will each have told a little story, and then we can go wherever we like to amuse ourselves; so, if what I say pleases you (and in this I am willing to follow your pleasure), then, let us do it; if not, then let everyone do as he pleases until the hour of vespers."

The entire group of men and women liked the idea of telling stories.

"Then," said the queen, "if this is your wish, for this first day I order each of you to tell a story about any subject he likes."

And turning to Panfilo, who sat on her right, she ordered him in a gracious manner to begin with one of his tales; whereupon, hearing her command, Panfilo, while everyone listened, began at once as follows:

First Day, First Story

Ser Cepparello tricks a holy friar with a false confession and dies; although he was a most evil man during his lifetime, he is after death reputed to be a saint and is called Saint Ciappelletto.

Dearest Ladies, it is fitting that everything done by man should begin with the marvelous and holy name of Him who was the Creator of all things; therefore, since I am to be the first to start our storytelling, I intend to begin with one of his marvelous deeds, so that when we have heard about it, our faith in him will remain as firm as ever and his name be ever praised by us.

It is clear that since earthly things are all transitory and mortal, they are in themselves full of worries, anguish, and toil, and are subject to countless dangers which we, who live with them and are part of them, could neither bear nor defend ourselves from if strength and foresight were not granted to us by God's special grace. Nor should we believe that such special grace descends upon us and within us through any merit of our own, but rather it is sent by his own kindness and by the prayers of those who, like ourselves, were mortal and who have now become eternal and blessed with him, for they followed his will while they were alive. To these saints, as to advocates who from experience are aware of our weakness, we ourselves offer our prayers concerning those matters we deem desirable, because we are not brave enough to offer them to so great a judge directly. And yet in him we discern his generous mercy toward us, and since the human eye cannot gaze into the secrets of the divine mind in any way, it sometimes happens that, fooled by a false judgment, we choose as an advocate before his majesty one who is sentenced by him to eternal exile; nevertheless he, to whom nothing is hidden, pays more attention to the purity of the one who prays than to his ignorance or the damnation of his intercessor and answers those who pray to him just as if these advocates were blessed in his presence. All this will become most evident in the tale I am about to tell: I say evident, in accordance with the judgment of men and not that of God.

Now, there was a very rich man named Musciatto Franzesi; he was a famous merchant in France who had become a knight. He was obliged to come to Tuscany with Messer Charles Landless,¹

1. Charles (1270-1325), count of Valois, forces in Italy. When his eldest son as Maine, and Anjou, and third son of Philip III, king of France. Upon the request of Pope Boniface VIII, Charles became the founder of the royal house of Valois.

crossed the Alps in 1301 to assist Guelf

the brother of the King of France, who had been sent for and encouraged to come by Pope Boniface.² Musciatto found that his affairs, like those of most merchants, were so entangled in every which way that he could not easily or quickly liquidate them, and he decided to entrust them to various people, and he found a means of disposing of everything. Only one difficult thing remained to be done: to find a person capable of recovering certain loans made to several people in Burgundy. The reason for his hesitation was that he had been informed the Burgundians were a quarrelsome lot, of evil disposition, and disloyal; and he could not think of an equally evil man (in whom he could place his trust) who might be able to match their wickedness with his own. After thinking about this matter for a long time, he remembered a certain Ser Cepparello from Prato, who had often been a guest in his home in Paris. This person was short and he dressed very elegantly; and the French, who did not know the meaning of the word "Cepparello" (believing that it meant "chapelet," in their tongue "garland"), used to call him not Ciappello but Ciappelletto, since he was short; and as Ciappelletto he was known to everyone, and few knew him as Ser Cepparello.³

Ciappelletto was, by profession, a notary; he was very much ashamed when any of his legal documents (of which he drew up many) was discovered to be anything but fraudulent. He would have drawn up, free of charge, as many false ones as would have been requested of him, and more willingly than another man might have done for a large sum of money. He gave false testimony with the greatest of pleasure, whether he was asked to give it or not; and since in those days in France great faith was placed in such oaths, and since he did not mind taking a false oath, he won a great many lawsuits by his wickedness every time he was called upon to swear, upon his life, to tell the truth. He took special pleasure and went to a great deal of trouble to stir up scandal, mischief, and enmities between friends, relatives, and anyone else, and the more evil that resulted from it, the happier he was. If he were asked to be present at a murder or at any other evil affair, he went there very gladly, never refusing, and he frequently found himself happily wounding or killing men with his very own hands. He was a great blasphemer of God and the saints, losing his temper on the slightest occasion, as if he were the most irascible man alive. He never went to church, and he made fun of all the church's sacraments,

2. Benedetto Caetani (1235?-1303), elected to the papacy as Boniface VIII on December 24, 1294. Because of his reputation for corruption and simony, Dante provided a place for him in hell (*Inferno*, Canto XIX) even before he passed away.

3. Messer(e) is the equivalent of Sir, Mister, or Master. It is also frequently found in the shortened form of Ser, as in Ser Cepparello. A similar expression commonly used to address women of a certain position is *Madonna*, meaning "my lady," also found in the shortened form *Mona*.

using abominable language to revile them; on the other hand, he frequented taverns and other dens of iniquity with great pleasure. He was as fond of women as dogs are of a beating with a stick; he was, in fact, more fond of men, more so than any other degenerate. He could rob and steal with a conscience as clean as a holy man making an offering. He was such a great glutton and big drinker that it would oftentimes produce bad effects on him; he was a gambler who often used loaded dice. But why am I wasting so many words on him? He was probably the worst man that ever lived! His cunning, for a long time, had served the wealth and the authority of Messer Musciatto, on whose behalf he was often spared both by private individuals (against whom he often committed crimes) and by the courts (against whom he always did).

When this Ser Cepparello came to the mind of Messer Musciatto, who was well acquainted with his life, he decided that he was just the man to deal with the evil nature of the Burgundians; and after summoning him, he spoke to him as follows:

"Ser Ciappelletto, as you know, I am about to leave here for good, and since, among others, I have to deal with these tricky Burgundians, I know of no one more qualified than yourself to recover my money from them; and since you are doing nothing else at the moment, if you look after this matter for me, I shall gain the favor of the court for you and I shall give you a just portion of what you manage to recover."

Ser Ciappelletto, then unemployed and in short supply of worldly goods, saw refuge and support about to depart, and without further delay, constrained, as it were, by necessity, made up his mind and announced that he would be happy to go. After they had made their agreement, and Ser Ciappelletto had received the power of attorney and necessary letters of recommendation from the king, Messer Musciatto departed and Ciappelletto went to Burgundy where hardly a soul knew him: and there, in a kind and gentle manner, unlike his nature, he began to collect the debts and to do what he had been sent to do—it was almost as though he were saving all his anger for the conclusion of his visit. And while he was doing this, he was lodged in the home of two Florentine brothers who lent money there at usurious rates and who showed him great respect (out of their love for Messer Musciatto); during this time he fell ill. The two brothers had doctors and nurses brought in immediately to care for him, and they bought everything necessary to restore his health. But all help was useless, for the good man (according to what the doctors said) was already old and had lived a disordered life, and every day his condition went from bad to worse, like someone with a fatal illness. The brothers were very sorry about this, and one day, standing rather close to the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto lay ill, they began talking to each other:

"What are we going to do with him?" said one to the other. "We're in a fine fix on his account! Sending him away, as sick as he is, would be a great source of reproach for us and an obvious sign of little sense, since people have seen how we received him at first, and then how we had him cared for and treated so well; and now, what will they say if they see him, at the point of death, being thrown out of our house all of a sudden without having done anything to displease us? On the other hand, he has been such a wicked man that he does not wish to confess himself or to receive any of the church's sacraments; and if he dies without confession, no church will wish to receive his body, and he will be thrown into a ditch just like a dead dog. And suppose he does confess? His sins are so many and so horrible that the same thing will happen, since neither friar nor priest will be willing or able to absolve him, and so, without absolution, he will be thrown into a ditch just the same. And if this happens, the people of this city, who already speak badly of us because of our profession (which they consider iniquitous) and who wish to rob us, will rise up in a mob when they see this and cry out: 'These Lombard dogs are not accepted by the church; we won't put up with them any longer!' They will run to our house and rob us not only of our property but of our lives as well; in any case, we are in trouble if he dies."

Ser Ciappelletto, who as we said was lying near where they were talking, had sharp ears, as is often the case with the sick, and he heard what they said about him. He had them summoned and told them:

"I don't want you to be afraid of receiving any harm on my account; I heard what you said about me, and I am very sure that things would happen as you say they would if everything went as you think it might; but things will turn out differently. Since I have committed so many offenses against God during my lifetime, committing one more against him now will make no difference. So find me the most holy and worthy priest that you can (if such a one exists), and leave everything to me, for I guarantee you that I shall set both your affairs and mine in order in a way that will please you."

Although the two brothers did not feel very hopeful about this, they went, nevertheless, to a monastery of friars and asked for some holy and wise priest to hear the confession of a Lombard who was ill in their home; and they were given an old friar who was a good and holy man, an expert in the Scriptures, and a most venerable man, for whom all the citizens had a very great and special devotion; and they took him with them. When the friar reached the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto was lying, he sat down at his side; first, he began to comfort him kindly, and then he asked him how long it had been since his last confession. To this question, Ser

Ciappelletto, who had never in his life made a confession, replied:

"Father, I usually confess myself at least once a week, but there were many weeks that I confessed more often; and the truth is that since I have been ill—almost eight days now—I have not been to confession, so grave has been my illness."

Then the friar said:

"My son, you have done well, and you must continue to do so; and I see that since you have confessed so often, there will be little for me to ask or listen to."

Ser Ciappelletto replied:

"Father, don't say that; I have never confessed so many times or so often that I have not always wished to confess again all the sins I can remember from the day of my birth to the moment I am confessing; therefore, I beg you, my good father, that you ask me point by point about everything, as if I had never confessed before, and do not let my illness stand in your way, for I prefer to mortify this flesh of mine rather than, in treating it gently, to do something which might lead to the perdition of my soul which the Savior has redeemed with his precious blood."

These words pleased the holy man very much, and they seemed to him to be the sign of a well-disposed mind; and after he had commended Ser Ciappelletto highly for his practice, he began by asking him if he had ever sinned in lust with any woman. To this Ser Ciappelletto replied with a sigh:

"Father, on this account I am ashamed to tell you the truth for fear of sinning from pride."

To this the friar answered:

"Speak freely, for the truth was never a sin either in confession or elsewhere."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Since you assure me that this is the case, I shall tell you: I am as virgin today as when I came from my mother's womb."

"Oh, you are blessed by God!" said the friar, "how well you have done! And in so doing, you merit even more praise, for you have more freedom to do the contrary than we and others who are bound by religious rules have."

After this, he asked if he had displeased God through the sin of gluttony. To this, breathing a heavy sigh, Ser Ciappelletto replied that he had, and many times; for in addition to the periods of fasting which are observed during the year by the devout, he fasted every week for at least three days on bread and water, but he had drunk the water with the same delight and appetite as any great drinker of wine would—especially after he had worn himself out in prayer or in going on a pilgrimage; and he had often longed for those rough salads made of wild herbs such as women make when they are in the country, and on occasion eating had seemed better

to him than it should have seemed to someone like himself who fasted out of religious devotion. To this the friar replied:

"My son, these sins are natural ones and are very minor; therefore, I do not want you to burden your conscience with them more than necessary. No matter how very holy he may be, every man thinks that eating after a long fast and drinking after hard work is good."

"Oh, father," said Ser Ciappelletto, "don't say this just to console me; as you well know, things done in God's service should be done completely and without any hesitation; whoever does otherwise, sins."

The friar, who was most pleased to hear this, said:

"I am happy that you feel this way, and your pure and good conscience pleases me very much. But tell me, have you ever committed the sin of avarice by coveting more than was proper or by keeping what you should not have kept?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Father, do not suspect me of this because I am in the home of these usurers. I have nothing whatsoever to do with their profession; on the contrary, I came here to admonish and chastise them and to save them from this abominable kind of profit taking, and I believe that I might have accomplished this if God had not struck me down in this manner. But you should know that my father left me a rich man, and when he died, I gave the larger part of his inheritance to charity; then, to sustain my life and to enable me to aid Christ's poor, I carried on my small business affairs, and in my work I did wish to make a profit, but I always divided these profits with God's poor, giving one half to them and keeping the other half for my own needs; and my creator has aided me so well in this regard that my business affairs have always prospered."

"Well done!" replied the friar, "but have you not often become angry?"

"Oh," said Ser Ciappelletto, "that I have, and often. And who could keep himself from doing so, seeing all around me, every day, men doing evil deeds, disobeying God's commandments, and not fearing his judgments? Many times there have been days I would have rather been dead than to live to see young men chasing after the vanities of this world and to hear them swear and perjure themselves, to see them going to taverns, not visiting the churches, and following the ways of the world rather than those of God."

Then the friar said:

"My son, this is righteous anger, and I can impose no penance upon you for that. But, by any chance, did your wrath ever lead you to commit murder or to vilify anyone or to do any other kind of injury?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Alas, father! How could you say such things and be a man of God? If I had even so much as thought about doing any of those things you mentioned, do you believe that God would have done so much for me? These things are for criminals and evil men, and every time I met such a man, I always said: 'Begone! And may God convert you!'"

Then the friar said:

"May God bless you, my son! Have you ever given false testimony against anyone, or spoken ill of anyone, or taken their property without their permission?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Ser Ciappelletto, "I have spoken ill of others, for I once had a neighbor who did nothing but beat his wife unjustly, and one time I spoke badly about him to his wife's relatives, such was the pity I had for that poor creature; only God can tell you how he beat her every time he had had too much to drink."

Then the friar said:

"Now, you tell me you have been a merchant. Have you ever tricked anyone, as merchants are wont to do?"

"Of course," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "but I do not know who he was; all I know is that he was a man who brought me money which he owed me for some cloth I sold him, and I put it in my strongbox without counting it; a month later I discovered that he had given me four pieces more than he owed me, and since I saved the money for more than a year in order to return it to him but did not see him again, I finally donated it to charity."

"That was a small matter," said the friar, "and you did well in doing what you did with it."

And besides this, the holy friar asked him about many other matters, always receiving from him similar replies. And as he was about to give him absolution, Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Father, there is another sin which I have not mentioned."

The friar asked him what it was, and he answered:

"I recall that one Saturday after the hour of none, I had my servant sweep the house and did, therefore, not show the proper reverence for the holy sabbath."

"Oh," said the friar, "that is a minor matter, my son."

"No," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "don't call it a minor matter. Sunday can never be honored too much, for on that day our Savior rose from the dead."

Then the friar asked:

"What else have you done?"

"Father," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "one time without thinking I spat in the house of God."

The friar began to smile and said:

"My son, that is nothing to worry about; we priests, who are

religious men, spit there all day long."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Then you do great harm, for no place should be kept as clean as a holy temple in which we give sacrifice to God."

And, in brief, he told the friar many things of this sort; and finally he began to sigh and then to weep loudly, which he was very good at doing whenever he wished. The holy friar asked:

"My son, what's the matter?"

Ser Ciappelletto replied:

"Alas, father, there is one remaining sin which I shall never confess, such is the shame I have of mentioning it, and every time I recall it, I cry as you see me doing now, and I feel sure that God will never have mercy on me for this."

Then the holy man said:

"Now there, my son, what's this you're saying? If all the sins which were ever committed by all men, or which will ever be committed as long as the world lasts, were all in one man, and he was as penitent and as contrite as I see you are, the kindness and mercy of God is so great that if he were to confess, God would freely forgive him of all those sins. Therefore, speak without fear."

Still crying loudly, Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Alas, father, mine is too great a sin, and I can hardly believe that God will forgive me unless your prayers are forthcoming."

To this the friar replied:

"Speak freely, for I promise to pray to God for you."

Ser Ciappelletto continued to cry without speaking, while the friar continued to exhort him to speak. But after Ser Ciappelletto had kept the friar in suspense with his extended weeping, he heaved a great sigh and said:

"Father, since you promise to pray to God on my behalf, I shall tell you: when I was a little boy, I cursed my mother one time."

And having said this, he began crying loudly again. The friar answered:

"Now there, my son, does this seem such a great sin to you? Oh! Men curse God all day, and he gladly forgives those who repent for having blasphemed against him; do you not believe that he will forgive you as well? Do not cry; take comfort, for he will surely forgive you with the contrition I see in you—even if you had been one of those who placed him upon the cross."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Alas, father! What are you saying? My sweet mother, who carried me in her womb nine months, day and night, and who took me in her arms more than a hundred times! Cursing her was too evil, and the sin was too great; and if you do not pray to God on my behalf, he will not forgive me."

When the friar saw that Ser Ciappelletto had nothing more to

say, he absolved him and gave him his blessing, thinking him to be a most holy man, just as he fully believed everything Ser Ciappelletto had told him. And who would not have believed it, seeing a man at the point of death confess in such a way? And then, after all this, he said to him:

"Ser Ciappelletto, with the help of God you will soon be well; but if it happens that God calls your blessed and well-disposed soul to himself, would it please you to have your body buried in our monastery?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Yes, father. Nor would I desire to be anywhere else, since you have promised to pray to God for me; moreover, I have always had a special devotion for your order. Therefore, when you return to your monastery, I beg you to send me that most true body of Christ which you consecrate each morning upon the altar—although I am not worthy of it—so that I may, with your permission, partake of it, and afterwards may I receive Holy Extreme Unction, for if I have lived as a sinner, at least I shall die as a Christian."

The holy man said that he would be pleased to do this and that he had spoken well and that he would arrange it so that the Sacrament should be brought to him immediately, which it was. The two brothers, who had strongly suspected that Ser Ciappelletto would trick them, had placed themselves near a partition which divided the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto was lying from another room, and as they listened, they could easily overhear and understand everything Ser Ciappelletto said to the friar; and at times they had such a desire to break out laughing that they would often say to each other:

"What kind of man is this? Neither old age nor illness, nor fear of death (which is so close), nor fear of God (before whose judgment he must soon stand), have been able to turn him from his wickedness, or make him wish to die differently from the manner in which he has lived!"

But when they heard it announced that he would be received for burial in the church, they did not worry about anything else. Shortly afterwards, Ser Ciappelletto took communion, and growing worse, without remedy, he received Extreme Unction; and just after vespers on the same day during which he had made his good confession, he died. Whereupon the two brothers, using his own money, took all the necessary measures to bury him honorably, and they sent word to the friars' monastery for them to watch over the body during the evening, according to custom, and to come for it in the morning. The holy friar that had confessed him, hearing that he had passed away, went with the prior of the monastery and had the assembly bell rung, and to the assembled friars he described what a holy man Ser Ciappelletto had been—according to

what he had been able to learn from his confession; and hoping that God might perform many miracles through him, he convinced his brothers that they ought to receive his body with the greatest reverence and devotion. The prior and all the other friars—all of them gullible—agreed to this, and in the evening, when they all went to where the body of Ser Ciappelletto was lying, they held a great and solemn vigil over it, and the following morning, chanting and all dressed in their vestments with their prayer books in hand, and preceded by their crosses, they sought his body out, and with the greatest ceremony and solemnity they carried it to their church, followed by almost all of the people in the city, both men and women; and when they had placed it in the church, the holy friar, who had confessed him, mounted the pulpit and began to preach marvelous things about him and his life, his fastings, his virginity, his simplicity, innocence, and holiness, recounting, among other things, what Ser Ciappelletto had tearfully confessed to him as his greatest sin, and describing to them how he was scarcely able to convince him that God might forgive him for it; from this he turned to reprove the people who were listening, and he said:

"And you, who are cursed by God, blasphemous against him, his Mother, and all the saints in paradise when a little blade of straw is caught under your feet!"

And besides this, he said a good deal more about his loyalty and his purity; in short, with his words, which were taken by the people of the countryside as absolute truth, he fixed Ser Ciappelletto so firmly in the minds and the devotions of all those who were present there that after the service was over, everyone pressed forward to kiss the hands and feet of the deceased, and all his garments were torn off his corpse, since anyone who could get a hold on a piece of them considered himself blessed. And it was necessary to keep his body there the entire day, so that all those who wished were able to look upon him. Then, the following night, he was honorably buried in a chapel within a marble tomb, and immediately, on the following morning, people began going there to light candles and to worship him and to make vows to him and to hang wax images as *ex votos*.⁴ And meanwhile, the fame of his sanctity and the devotion in which he was held grew so much that no other saint received as many vows as he did from those poor people who found themselves in difficulty; and they called him and still continue to call him Saint Ciappelletto, and they claim that God has performed many miracles through him and continues to perform them to this day for anyone who seeks his intercession.

It was in this manner, then, that Ser Cepparello from Prato lived and died and became a saint, just as you have heard; nor do I wish to deny that it might be possible for him to be in the blessed

4. A votive offering, usually given or dedicated in fulfillment of a vow or pledge.

presence of God, since although his life was evil and sinful, he could have become so truly sorry at his last breath that God might well have had pity on him and received him into his kingdom; this is hidden from us, but from what is clear to us, I believe that he is, instead, in the hands of the Devil in hell rather than in paradise. And if this is the case, we can recognize the greatness of God's mercy towards us, who pays more attention to the purity of our faith than to our errors by granting our prayers in spite of the fact that we choose his enemy as our intercessor—fulfilling our requests to him just as if we had chosen a true saint as intermediary for his grace. And so, that we may be kept healthy and safe through the present adversity and in this joyful company by his grace, praising the name of Him who began our storytelling, let us hold him in reverence and commend ourselves to him when we are in need, being most certain that we shall be heard.

And here Panfilo fell silent.

First Day, Second Story

A Jew named Abraham, encouraged by Giannotto di Civignì, goes to the court of Rome, and after observing the wickedness of the clergy, he returns to Paris and becomes a Christian.

Panfilo's story was praised in its entirety by the ladies and parts of it moved them to laughter; after all had listened carefully and it had come to an end, the queen ordered Neifile, who was sitting next to Panfilo, to continue the order of the entertainment thus begun with a story of her own. Neifile, who was endowed no less with courtly manners than with beauty, answered that she would gladly do so, and she began in this manner:

Panfilo has shown us in his storytelling that God's mercy overlooks our errors when they result from matters that we cannot fathom; in my own tale, I intend to show you how this same mercy patiently endures the faults of those who with their words and deeds ought to bear witness to this mercy and yet do the contrary; I shall show how it makes these things an argument of his infallible truth so that with firmer conviction we may practice what we believe.

I have heard it told, gracious ladies, that in Paris there once lived a great merchant and a good man by the name of Giannotto di Civignì, a most honest and upright man, who had a flourishing business in cloth; and he had a very close friend who was a rich

Jew named Abraham, also a merchant and an upright, trustworthy person. Giannotto, recognizing his friend's honesty and upright qualities, began to feel deep regret that the soul of such a valiant, wise, and good man through lack of faith would have to be lost to hell. Because of this he began to plead with him in a friendly fashion to abandon the errors of the Jewish faith and to turn to the Christian truth, which, as he said, his friend could see prospering and increasing continuously, for it was holy and good, while in contrast, he could observe his own Judaism growing weak and coming to nothing. The Jew replied that he believed no faith was holy or good except the Jewish faith and that since he had been born into it, he intended to live and die within it; nor could anything cause him to turn away from it. Giannotto did not, however, abstain on this account from addressing similar words to him some days later and from indicating to him in a clumsy way, as most merchants are wont to do, the reasons why our faith is better than the Jewish one. Although the Jew was a great master of Jewish law he nonetheless, moved by the great friendship he had for Giannotto or perhaps by the words which the Holy Spirit sometimes places in the mouth of an ignorant man, began to enjoy Giannotto's arguments very much; but he still remained fixed in his own beliefs and would not let himself be converted. And the more stubborn he remained, the more Giannotto continued to entreat him until the Jew, won over by such a continuous insistence, declared:

"Now see here, Giannotto, you want me to become a Christian, and I am willing to do so on one condition: first I want to go to Rome to observe the man you say is God's vicar on earth; I want to observe his ways and customs and also those of his brother cardinals; and if they seem to me to be such men that, between your words and their actions, I am able to comprehend that your faith is better than my own, just as you have worked to demonstrate it to me, I shall do what I told you; but if this is not the case, I shall remain the Jew that I am now."

When Giannotto heard this, he was extremely sad and he said to himself:

"I have wasted my time which I thought I had employed so well, believing that I might have converted him, but if he goes to the court of Rome and sees the wicked and filthy lives of the clergy, not only will he not become a Christian from a Jew, but if he were to have become a Christian before, he would, without a doubt, return to being a Jew."

So, turning to Abraham, he said:

"Listen, my friend, why do you want to go to all that trouble and expense to go from here to Rome? Not to mention the fact that for a rich man like yourself the trip is full of dangers both by sea and by land. Don't you believe you can find someone to baptize

you right here? And should you have any doubts concerning the faith that I have explained to you, where would you find better teachers and wiser men capable of clarifying whatever you wish to ask about than right here? For these reasons, in my opinion, your journey is unnecessary. Remember that the priests there are just like those we have here, except for the fact that they are better insofar as they are nearer to the chief shepherd; therefore, you can save this journey for another time, for a pilgrimage to forgive your sins, and I may, perhaps, accompany you."

To this the Jew replied:

"I am convinced, Giannotto, that things are as you have told me, but to be brief about it, if you want me to do what you have begged me so often to do, I am determined to go there—otherwise I shall do nothing about the matter."

When Giannotto saw his friend's determination he said: "Go, then, with my blessing!"—and he thought to himself that he would never become a Christian once he saw the court of Rome; but, since it would make little difference one way or the other, he stopped insisting. The Jew mounted his horse and set out as quickly as he could for the court of Rome, and upon his arrival, he was received with honor by his Jewish friends. While he was living there, without telling anyone why he had come, the Jew began carefully to observe the behavior of the Pope, the cardinals, and the other prelates and courtiers; and from what he heard and saw for himself—he was a very perceptive man—from the highest to the lowest of them, they all in general shamelessly participated in the sin of lust, not only the natural kind of lust but also the sodomitic, without the least bit of remorse or shame. And this they did to the extent that the power of whores and young boys was of no little importance in obtaining great favors. Besides this, he observed that all of them were open gluttons, drinkers, and sots, and that after their lechery, just like animals, they were more servants of their bellies than of anything else: the more closely he observed them, the more he saw that they were all avaricious and greedy for money and that they were just as likely to buy and sell human (even Christian) blood as they were to sell religious objects, belonging to the sacraments or to benefices, and in this kind of business, they carried on more trade and had more brokers than there were engaged in the textile or other business in Paris; they called their obvious simony "mediation" and their gluttony "maintenance," as if God did not know the intention of these wicked minds (not to mention the meaning of their words), that he might allow himself to be fooled like men by the names things bear. These, along with many other matters best left unmentioned, so displeased the Jew (for he was a sober and upright man) that he felt he had seen

enough and decided to return to Paris, and so he did. When Giannotto learned that he had returned, the last thing he thought about was his conversion, and he went to his friend and together, they celebrated his return; then, when he had rested for a few days, Giannotto asked his friend what he thought of the Holy Father and the cardinals and the other courtiers. To his question the Jew promptly replied:

"I don't like them a bit, and may God condemn them all; and I tell you this because as far as I was able to determine, I saw there no holiness, no devotion, no good work or exemplary life or anything else among the clergy; instead, lust, avarice, gluttony, fraud, envy, pride, and the like and even worse (if worse than this is possible) so totally ruled there that I consider that city more as a forge for diabolic works than for divine ones: in my opinion, that Shepherd of yours (and as a result, all of the others as well) are attempting with all haste and talent and skill to reduce the Christian religion to nothing and drive it from the face of the earth when they really should act as its support and foundation. And since I have observed that in spite of all this, they do not succeed but, on the contrary, that your religion continuously grows and becomes brighter and more illustrious, I am justly of the opinion that it has the Holy Spirit as its foundation and support, as it is truer and holier than any other religion; therefore, although I once was adamant and unheeding to your pleas and did not want to become a Christian, now I tell you most frankly that I would not allow anything to prevent me from becoming a Christian. So, let us go to church, and there, according to the custom of your holy faith, I will be baptized."

Giannotto, who had expected his friend to say exactly the opposite, was the happiest man there ever was when he heard the Jew speak as he did; and then he accompanied him to Notre Dame, and asked the clergy there to baptize Abraham. At his request, they did so immediately, and Giannotto raised him from the baptismal font and renamed him Giovanni, and immediately afterwards he had him thoroughly instructed in our faith by the most distinguished teachers. He learned quickly and became a good and worthy man who lived a holy life.

First Day, Third Story

Melchisedech, a Jew, by means of a short story about three rings, escapes from a trap set for him by Saladin.