

THE DECAMERON

(Volume I)

[Illustrated]

By

Giovanni Boccaccio

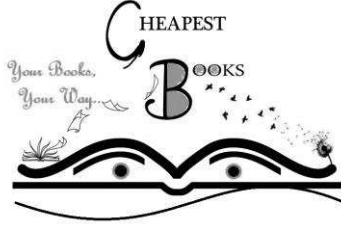
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Giovanni Boccaccio



Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 –1375) was an Italian writer, poet, correspondent of Petrarch, and an important Renaissance humanist. Boccaccio wrote a number of notable works, including ***The Decameron*** and *On Famous Women*. As a poet who wrote in the Italian vernacular, Boccaccio is particularly noted for his realistic dialogue, which differed from that of his contemporaries, medieval writers who usually followed formulaic models for character and plot.

Short Biography:

The details of Boccaccio's birth are uncertain. He was born in Florence or in a village near Certaldo where his family was from. He was the son of a Florentine merchant, Boccaccino di Chelmino, and an unknown woman; he was likely born out of wedlock. Boccaccio's stepmother was called Margherita de' Mardoli.

Early life

Boccaccio grew up in Florence. His father worked for the Compagnia dei Bardi and in the 1320s married Margherita dei Mardoli, who was of a well-to-do family. Boccaccio may have been tutored by Giovanni Mazzuoli and received from him an early introduction to the works of Dante. In 1326, when his father was appointed head of a bank, Boccaccio moved with his family to Naples. Boccaccio was an apprentice at the bank but disliked the banking profession. He persuaded his father to let him study law at the *Studium*, where for the next six years he studied canon law. He also pursued his interest in scientific and literary studies.

His father introduced him to the Neapolitan nobility and the French-influenced court of Robert the Wise (the king of Naples) in the 1330s. At this time he fell in love with a married daughter of the

king, who is portrayed as "*Fiammetta*" in many of Boccaccio's prose romances, including *Il Filocolo* (1338). Boccaccio became a friend of fellow Florentine Niccolò Acciaioli, and benefited from his influence as the administrator, and perhaps the lover, of Catherine of Valois-Courtenay, widow of Philip I of Taranto. Acciaioli later became counselor to Queen Joan I of Naples and, eventually, her *Grand Seneschal*.

It seems Boccaccio enjoyed law no more than banking, but his studies allowed him the opportunity to study widely and make good contacts with fellow scholars. His early influences included Paolo da Perugia (a curator and author of a collection of myths, the *Collectiones*), the humanists Barbato da Sulmona and Giovanni Barrili, and the theologian Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro.

On his request, his mentor, Petrarch translated the two great epics of **Homer, the *Iliad*** and the ***Odyssey*, in Latin**.

—DETAILED CONTENTS—

INTRODUCTION

PROEM

- FIRST DAY -

NOVEL I. - Ser Ciappelletto cheats a holy friar by a false confession, and dies; and, having lived as a very bad man, is, on his death, reputed a saint, and called San Ciappelletto.

NOVEL II. - Abraham, a Jew, at the instance of Jehannot de Cheigny, goes to the court of Rome, and having marked the evil life of clergy, returns to Paris, and becomes a Christian.

NOVEL III. - Melchisedech, a Jew, by a story of three rings averts a danger with which he was menaced by Saladin.

NOVEL IV. - A monk lapses into a sin meriting the most severe punishment, justly censures the same fault in his abbot, and thus evades the penalty.

NOVEL V. - The Marchioness of Monferrato by a banquet of hens seasoned with wit checks the mad passion of the King of France.

NOVEL VI. - A worthy man by an apt saying puts to shame the wicked hypocrisy of the religious.

NOVEL VII. - Bergamino, with a story of Primasso and the Abbot of Cluny, finely censures a sudden access of avarice in Messer Cane della Scala.

NOVEL VIII. - Guglielmo Borsiere by a neat retort sharply censures avarice in Messer Ermino de' Grimaldi.

NOVEL IX. - The censure of a Gascon lady converts the King of Cyprus from a churlish to an honourable temper.

NOVEL X. - Master Alberto da Bologna honourably puts to shame a lady who sought occasion to put him to shame in that he was in love with her.

- SECOND DAY -

NOVEL I. - Martellino pretends to be a paralytic, and makes it appear as if he were cured by being placed upon the body of St. Arrigo. His trick is detected; he is beaten and arrested, and is in peril of hanging, but finally escapes.

NOVEL II. - Rinaldo d'Asti is robbed, arrives at Castel Guglielmo, and is entertained by a widow lady; his property is restored to him, and he returns home safe and sound.

NOVEL III. - Three young men squander their substance and are reduced to poverty. Their nephew, returning home a desperate man, falls in with an abbot, in whom he discovers the daughter of the King of England. She marries him, and he retrieves the losses and re-establishes the fortune of his uncles.

NOVEL IV. - Landolfo Ruffolo is reduced to poverty, turns corsair, is captured by Genoese, is shipwrecked, escapes on a chest full of jewels, and, being cast ashore at Corfu, is hospitably entertained by a woman, and returns home wealthy.

NOVEL V. - Andreuccio da Perugia comes to Naples to buy horses, meets with three serious adventures in one night, comes safe out of them all, and returns home with a ruby.

NOVEL VI. - Madam Beritola loses two sons, is found with two kids on an island, goes thence to Lunigiana, where one of her sons takes service with her master, and lies with his daughter, for which he is put in prison. Sicily rebels against King Charles, the son is recognized by the mother, marries the master's daughter, and, his brother being discovered, is reinstated in great honour.

NOVEL VII. - The Soldan of Babylon sends one of his daughters overseas, designing to marry her to the King of Algarve. By divers adventures she comes in the space of four years into the hands of nine men in divers place. At last she is restored to her father, whom she quits again in the guise of a virgin, and, as was at first intended, is married to the King of Algarve.

NOVEL VIII. - The Count of Antwerp, labouring under a false accusation, goes into exile. He leaves his two children in different places in England, and takes service in Ireland. Returning to England an unknown man, he finds his sons prosperous. He serves as a groom in the army of the King of France; his innocence is established, and he is restored to his former honours.

NOVEL IX. - Bernabo of Genoa, deceived by Ambrogiuolo, loses his money and commands his innocent wife to be put to death. She escapes, habits herself as a man, and serves the Soldan. She discovers the deceiver, and brings Bernabo to Alexandria, where the deceiver is punished. She then resumes the garb of a woman, and with her husband returns wealthy to Genoa.

NOVEL X. - Paganino da Monaco carries off the wife of Messer Ricciardo di Chinzica, who, having learned where

she is, goes to Paganino and in a friendly manner asks him to restore her. He consents, provided she be willing. She refuses to go back with her husband. Messer Ricciardo dies, and she marries Paganino.

- THIRD DAY -

NOVEL I. - Masetto da Lamporecchio feigns to be dumb, and obtains a gardener's place at a convent of women, who with one accord make haste to lie with him.

NOVEL II. - A groom lies with the wife of King Agilulf, who learns the fact, keeps his own counsel, finds out the groom and shears him. The shorn shears all his fellows, and so comes safe out of the scrape.

NOVEL III. - Under cloak of confession and a most spotless conscience, a lady, enamoured of a young man, induces a booby friar unwittingly to provide a means to the entire gratification of her passion.

NOVEL IV. - Dom Felice instructs Fra Puccio how to attain blessedness by doing a penance. Fra Puccio does the penance, and meanwhile Dom Felice has a good time with Fra Puccio's wife.

NOVEL V. - Zima gives a palfrey to Messer Francesco Vergellesi, who in return suffers him to speak with his wife. She keeping silence, he answers in her stead, and the sequel is in accordance with his answer.

NOVEL VI. - Ricciardo Minutolo loves the wife of Filippello Fighinolfi, and knowing her to be jealous, makes her believe that his own wife is to meet Filippello at a bagnio on the ensuing day; whereby she is induced to go thither, where,

thinking to have been with her husband, she discovers that she has tarried with Ricciardo.

NOVEL VII. - Tedaldo, being in disfavour with his lady, departs from Florence. He returns thither after a while in the guise of a pilgrim, has speech of his lady, and makes her sensible of her fault. Her husband, convicted of slaying him, he delivers from peril of death, reconciles him with his brothers, and thereafter discreetly enjoys his lady.

NOVEL VIII. Ferondo, having taken a certain powder, is interred for dead; is disinterred by the abbot, who enjoys his wife; is put in prison and taught to believe that he is in purgatory; is then resuscitated, and rears as his own a boy begotten by the abbot upon his wife.

NOVEL IX. - Gillette of Narbonne cures the King of France of a fistula, craves for spouse Bertrand de Roussillon, who marries her against his will, and hies him in despite to Florence, where, as he courts a young woman, Gillette lies with him in her stead, and has two sons by him; for which cause he afterwards takes her into favour and entertains her as his wife.

NOVEL X. - Alibech turns hermit, and is taught by Rustico, a monk, how the Devil is put in hell. She is afterwards conveyed thence, and becomes the wife of Neerbale.

- FOURTH DAY -

NOVEL I. - Tancred, Prince of Salerno, slays his daughter's lover, and sends her his heart in a golden cup: she pours upon it a poisonous distillation, which she drinks and dies.

NOVEL II. - Fra Alberto gives a lady to understand that she is beloved of the Angel Gabriel, in whose shape he lies with her sundry times; afterward, for fear of her kinsmen, he flings himself forth of her house, and finds shelter in the house of a poor man, who on the morrow leads him in the guise of a wild man into the piazza, where, being recognized, he is apprehended by his brethren and imprisoned.

NOVEL III. - Three young men love three sisters, and flee with them to Crete. The eldest of the sisters slays her lover for jealousy. The second saves the life of the first by yielding herself to the Duke of Crete. Her lover slays her, and makes off with the first: the third sister and her lover are charged with the murder, are arrested and confess the crime. They escape death by bribing the guards, flee destitute to Rhodes, and there in destitution die.

NOVEL IV. - Gerbino, in breach of the plighted faith of his grandfather, King Guglielmo, attacks a ship of the King of Tunis to rescue thence his daughter. She being slain by those aboard the ship, he slays them, and afterwards he is beheaded.

NOVEL V. - Lisabetta's brothers slay her lover: he appears to her in a dream, and shews her where he is buried: she privily disinters the head, and sets it in a pot of basil, whereon she daily weeps a great while. The pot being taken from her by her brothers, she dies not long after.

NOVEL VI. - Andreuola loves Gabriotto: she tells him a dream that she has had; he tells her a dream of his own, and dies suddenly in her arms. While she and her maid are carrying his corpse to his house, they are taken by the Signory. She tells how the matter stands, is threatened with violence

by the Podesta, but will not brook it. Her father hears how she is bested, and, her innocence being established, causes her to be set at large; but she, being minded to tarry no longer in the world, becomes a nun.

NOVEL VII. - Simona loves Pasquino; they are together in a garden, Pasquino rubs a leaf of sage against his teeth, and dies; Simona is arrested, and, with intent to shew the judge how Pasquino died, rubs one of the leaves of the same plant against her teeth, and likewise dies.

NOVEL VIII. - Girolamo loves Salvestra: yielding to his mother's prayers he goes to Paris; he returns to find Salvestra married; he enters her house by stealth, lays himself by her side, and dies; he is borne to the church, where Salvestra lays herself by his side, and dies.

Nova IX. - Sieur Guillaume de Roussillon slays his wife's paramour, Sieur Guillaume de Cabestaing, and gives her his heart to eat. She, coming to wit thereof, throws herself from a high window to the ground, and dies, and is buried with her lover.

NOVEL X. - The wife of a leech, deeming her lover, who has taken an opiate, to be dead, puts him in a chest, which, with him therein, two usurers carry off to their house. He comes to himself, and is taken for a thief; but, the lady's maid giving the Signory to understand that she had put him in the chest which the usurers stole, he escapes the gallows, and the usurers are mulcted in moneys for the theft of the chest.

INTRODUCTION



Son of a merchant, Boccaccio di Chellino di Buonaiuto, of Certaldo in Val d'Elsa, a little town about midway between Empoli and Siena, but within the Florentine "contado," Giovanni Boccaccio was born, most probably at Paris, in the year 1313. His mother, at any rate, was a Frenchwoman, whom his father seduced during a sojourn at Paris, and afterwards deserted. So much as this Boccaccio has himself told us, under a transparent veil of allegory, in his *Ameto*. Of his mother we would fain know more, for his wit has in it a quality, especially noticeable in the Tenth Novel of the Sixth Day of the *Decameron*, which marks him out as the forerunner of Rabelais, and prompts us to ask how much more his genius may have owed to his French ancestry. His father was of sufficient standing in Florence to be chosen Prior in

1321; but this brief term of office—but two months—was his last, as well as his first experience of public life. Of Boccaccio's early years we know nothing more than that his first preceptor was the Florentine grammarian, Giovanni da Strada, father of the poet Zanobi da Strada, and that, when he was about ten years old, he was bound apprentice to a merchant, with whom he spent the next six years at Paris, whence he returned to Florence with an inveterate repugnance to commerce. His father then proposed to make a canonist of him; but the study of Gratian proved hardly more congenial than the routine of the counting-house to the lad, who had already evinced a taste for letters; and a sojourn at Naples, where under the regime of the enlightened King Robert there were coteries of learned men, and even Greek was not altogether unknown, decided his future career. According to Filippo Villani his choice was finally fixed by a visit to the tomb of Vergil on the Via Puteolana, and, though the modern critical spirit is apt to discount such stories, there can be no doubt that such a pilgrimage would be apt to make a deep, and perhaps enduring, impression upon a nature ardent and sensitive, and already conscious of extraordinary powers. His stay at Naples was also in another respect a turning point in his life; for it was there that, as we gather from the *Filocolo*, he first saw the blonde beauty, Maria, natural daughter of King Robert, whom he has immortalized as Fiammetta. The place was the church of San Lorenzo, the day the 26th of March, 1334. Boccaccio's admiring gaze was observed by the lady, who, though married, proved no Laura, and forthwith returned his love in equal measure. Their liaison lasted several years, during which Boccaccio recorded the various phases of their passion with exemplary assiduity in verse and prose. Besides paying her

due and discreet homage in sonnet and canzone, he associated her in one way or another, not only with the Filocopo (his prose romance of Florio and Biancofiore, which he professes to have written to pleasure her), but with the Ameto, the Amorosa Visione, the Teseide, and the Filostrato; and in L'Amorosa Fiammetta he wove out of their relations a romance in which her lover, who is there called Pamfilo, plays Aeneas to her Dido, though with somewhat less tragic consequences. The Proem to the Decameron shews us the after-glow of his passion; the lady herself appears as one of the "honourable company," and her portrait, as in the act of receiving the laurel wreath at the close of the Fourth Day, is a masterpiece of tender and delicate delineation.

Boccaccio appears to have been recalled to Florence by his father in 1341; and it was probably in that year that he wrote L'Amorosa Fiammetta and the allegorical prose pastoral (with songs interspersed) which he entitled Ameto, and in which Fiammetta masquerades in green as one of the nymphs. The Amorosa Visione, written about the same time, is not only an allegory but an acrostic, the initial letters of its fifteen hundred triplets composing two sonnets and a ballade in honour of Fiammetta, whom he here for once ventures to call by her true name. Later came the Teseide, or romance of Palamon and Arcite, the first extant rendering of the story, in twelve books, and the Filostrato, nine books of the loves and woes of Troilus and Cressida. Both these poems are in ottava rima, a metre which, if Boccaccio did not invent it, he was the first to apply to such a purpose. Both works were dedicated to Fiammetta. A graceful idyll in the same metre, Ninfale Fiesolano, was written later, probably at Naples in 1345. King Robert was then dead, but Boccaccio enjoyed

the favour of Queen Joan, of somewhat doubtful memory, at whose instance he hints in one of his later letters that he wrote the Decameron. Without impugning Boccaccio's veracity we can hardly but think that the Decameron would have seen the light, though Queen Joan had withheld her encouragement. He had probably been long meditating it, and gathering materials for it, and we may well suppose that the outbreak of the plague in 1348, by furnishing him with a sombre background to heighten the effect of his motley pageant, had far more to do with accelerating the composition than aught that Queen Joan may have said.

That Boccaccio was not at Florence during the pestilence is certain; but we need not therefore doubt the substantial accuracy of his marvellous description of the state of the stricken city, for the course and consequences of the terrible visitation must have been much the same in all parts of Italy, and as to Florence in particular, Boccaccio could have no difficulty in obtaining detailed and abundant information from credible eye-witnesses. The introduction of Fiammetta, who was in all probability at Naples at the time, and in any case was not a Florentine, shews, however, that he is by no means to be taken literally, and renders it extremely probable that the facetious, irrepressible, and privileged Dioneo is no other than himself. At the same time we cannot deem it either impossible, or very unlikely, that in the general relaxation of morale, which the plague brought in its train, refuge from care and fear was sought in the diversions which he describes by some of those who had country-seats to which to withdraw, and whether the "contado" was that of Florence or that of Naples is a matter of no considerable importance. (1) It is probable that Boccaccio's father was one of the vic-

tims of the pestilence; for he was dead in 1350, when his son returned to Florence to live thenceforth on the modest patrimony which he inherited. It must have been about this time that he formed an intimacy with Petrarch, which, notwithstanding marked diversity of temperament, character and pursuits, was destined to be broken only by death. Despite his complaints of the malevolence of his critics in the Proem to the Fourth Day of the Decameron, he had no lack of appreciation on the part of his fellow-citizens, and was employed by the Republic on several missions; to Bologna, probably with the view of averting the submission of that city to the Visconti in 1350; to Petrarch at Padua in March 1351, with a letter from the Priors announcing his restitution to citizenship, and inviting him to return to Florence, and assume the rectorship of the newly founded university; to Ludwig of Brandenburg with overtures for an alliance against the Visconti in December of the same year; and in the spring of 1354 to Pope Innocent VI. at Avignon in reference to the approaching visit of the Emperor Charles IV. to Italy. About this time, 1354-5, he threw off, in striking contrast to his earlier works, an invective against women, entitled *Laberinto d'Amore*, otherwise *Corbaccio*, a coarse performance occasioned by resentment at what he deemed capricious treatment by a lady to whom he had made advances. To the same period, though the date cannot be precisely fixed, belongs his *Life of Dante*, a work of but mediocre merit. Somewhat later, it would seem, he began the study of Greek under one Leontius Pilatus, a Calabrian, who possessed some knowledge of that language, and sought to pass himself off as a Greek by birth.

Leontius was of coarse manners and uncertain temper, but Boccaccio was his host and pupil for some years, and eventually procured him the chair of Greek in the university of Florence. How much Greek Boccaccio learned from him, and how far he may have been beholden to him in the compilation of his elaborate Latin treatise *De Genealogia Deorum*, in which he essayed with very curious results to expound the inner meaning of mythology, it is impossible to say. In 1361 he seems to have had serious thoughts of devoting himself to religion, being prodigiously impressed by the menaces, monitions and revelations of a dying Carthusian of Siena. One of the revelations concerned a matter which Boccaccio had supposed to be known only to Petrarch and himself. He accordingly confided his anxiety to Petrarch, who persuaded him to amend his life without renouncing the world. In 1362 he revisited Naples, and in the following year spent three months with Petrarch at Venice. In 1365 he was sent by the Republic of Florence on a mission of conciliation to Pope Urban V. at Avignon. He was employed on a like errand on the Pope's return to Rome in 1367. In 1368 he revisited Venice, and in 1371 Naples; but in May 1372 he returned to Florence, where on 25th August 1373 he was appointed lecturer on the *Divina Commedia*, with a yearly stipend of 100 fiorini d'oro. His lectures, of which the first was delivered in the church of San Stefano near the Ponte Vecchio, were discontinued owing to ill health, doubtless aggravated by the distress which the death of Petrarch (20th July 1374) could not but cause him, when he had got no farther than the seventeenth Canto of the *Inferno*. His commentary is still occasionally quoted. He died, perhaps in the odour of sanctity, for in later life he was a diligent collector of relics, at Certaldo on 21st December 1375, and was buried

in the parish church. His tomb was desecrated, and his remains were dispersed, owing, it is said, to a misunderstanding, towards the close of the eighteenth century. His library, which by his direction was placed in the Convent of Santo Spirito at Florence, was destroyed by fire about a century after his death.

Besides the *De Genealogia Deorum* Boccaccio wrote other treatises in Latin, which need not here be specified, and sixteen Eclogues in the same language, of which he was by no means a master. As for his minor works in the vernacular, the earlier of them shew that he had not as yet wrought himself free from the conventionalism which the polite literature of Italy inherited from the Sicilians. It is therefore inevitable that the twentieth century should find the *Filocolo*, *Ameto*, and *Amorosa Visione* tedious reading. The *Teseide* determined the form in which Pulci, Boiardo, Bello, Ariosto, Tasso, and, with a slight modification, our own Spenser were to write, but its readers are now few, and are not likely ever again to be numerous. Chaucer drew upon it for the *Knight's Tale*, but it is at any rate arguable that his retrenchment of its perhaps inordinate length was judicious, and that what he gave was better than what he borrowed. Still, that it had such a redactor as Chaucer is no small testimony to its merit; nor was it only in the *Knight's Tale* that he was indebted to it: the description of the Temple of Love in the *Parlement of Foules* is taken almost word for word from it. Even more considerable and conspicuous is Chaucer's obligation to Boccaccio in the *Troilus and Criseyde*, about a third of which is borrowed from the *Filostrato*. Nor is it a little remarkable that the same man, that in the *Teseide* and *Filostrato* founded the chivalrous epic, should also and in the

same period of his literary activity, have written the first and not the least powerful and artistic of psychologic romances, for even such is *L'Amorosa Fiammetta*.

But whatever may be the final verdict of criticism upon these minor works of Boccaccio, it is impossible to imagine an age in which the *Decameron* will fail of general recognition as, in point alike of invention as of style, one of the most notable creations of human genius. Of few books are the sources so recondite, insomuch that it seems to be certain that in the main they must have been merely oral tradition, and few have exercised so wide and mighty an influence. The profound, many-sided and intimate knowledge of human nature which it evinces, its vast variety of incident, its wealth of tears and laughter, its copious and felicitous diction, inevitably apt for every occasion, and, notwithstanding the frequent harshness, and occasional obscurity of its at times tangled, at times laboured periods, its sustained energy and animation of style must ever ensure for this human comedy unchallenged rank among the literary masterpieces that are truly immortal.

The *Decameron* was among the earliest of printed books, Venice leading the way with a folio edition in 1471, Mantua following suit in 1472, and Vicenza in 1478. A folio edition, adorned, with most graceful wood- engravings, was published at Venice in 1492. Notwithstanding the freedom with which in divers passages Boccaccio reflected on the morals of the clergy, the Roman Curia spared the book, which the austere Savonarola condemned to the flames. The tradition that the *Decameron* was among the pile of "vanities" burned by Savonarola in the Piazza della Signoria on the last day of the Carnival of 1497, little more than a year before he was

himself burned there, is so intrinsically probable—and accords so well with the extreme paucity of early copies of the work—that it would be the very perversity of scepticism to doubt it. It is by no means to the credit of our country that, except to scholars, it long remained in England, an almost entirely closed book. (2) Indeed the first nominally complete English translation, a sadly mutilated and garbled rendering of the French version by Antoine Le Macon, did not appear till 1620, and though successive redactions brought it nearer to the original, it remained at the best but a sorry *faute de mieux*. Such as it was, however, our forefathers were perforce fain to be content with it.

The first Englishman to render the whole Decameron direct from the Italian was Mr. John Payne; but his work, printed for the Villon Society in 1886, was only for private circulation, and those least inclined to disparage its merits may deem its style somewhat too archaic and stilted adequately to render the vigour and vivacity of the original. Accordingly in the present version an attempt has been made to hit the mean between archaism and modernism, and to secure as much freedom and spirit as is compatible with substantial accuracy.

(1) As to the palaces in which the scene is laid, Manni (*Istoria del Decamerone*, Par. ii. cap. ii.) identifies the first with a villa near Fiesole, which can be no other than the Villa Palmieri, and the second (*ib.* cap. lxxvi.) with the Podere della Fonte, or so-called Villa del Boccaccio, near Camerata. Baldelli's theory, adopted by Mrs. Janet Ann Ross (*Florentine Villas*, 1901), that the Villa di Poggio Gherardi was the first, and the Villa Palmieri the second, retreat is not to be reconciled with Boccaccio's descriptions. The Villa Palmieri

is not remote enough for the second and more sequestered retreat, nor is it, as that is said to have been, situate on a low hill amid a plain, but on the lower Fiesolean slope. The most rational supposition would seem to be that Boccaccio, who had seen many a luxurious villa, freely combined his experiences in the description of his palaces and pleasaunces, and never expected to be taken au pied de la lettre.

(2) Nevertheless Shakespeare derived indirectly the plot of *All's Well that Ends Well* from the Ninth Novel of the Third Day, and an element in the plot of *Cymbeline* from the Ninth Novel of the Second Day.

— Beginneth here the book called *Decameron*, otherwise *Prince Galeotto*, wherein are contained one hundred novels told in ten days by seven ladies and three young men. —

PROEM

'T is humane to have compassion on the afflicted and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure aflame with a most aspiring and noble love (1) more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead. But, as it pleased Him, who, being infinite, has assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time me abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be

grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful. But the cessation of the pain has not banished the memory of the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death. And as among the virtues, gratitude is in my judgment most especially to be commended, and ingratitude in equal measure to be censured, therefore, that I show myself not ungrateful, I have resolved, now that I may call myself to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so far as in me lies, some solace, if not to those who succoured and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least to such as may be apt to receive it.

And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it. Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers, they live, so to say, a life of vacant ease, and, yearning and renouncing in the same moment, meditate divers matters which cannot all be cheerful. If thereby a melancholy bred of amorous desire make entrance into their minds, it is like to tarry there to their sore distress, unless it be dispelled by a change of ideas. Besides which they have

much less power to support such a weight than men. For, when men are enamoured, their case is very different, as we may readily perceive. They, if they are afflicted by a melancholy and heaviness of mood, have many ways of relief and diversion; they may go where they will, may hear and see many things, may hawk, hunt, fish, ride, play or traffic. By which means all are able to compose their minds, either in whole or in part, and repair the ravage wrought by the dumpish mood, at least for some space of time; and shortly after, by one way or another, either solace ensues, or the dumps become less grievous. Wherefore, in some measure to compensate the injustice of Fortune, which to those whose strength is least, as we see it to be in the delicate frames of ladies, has been most niggard of support, I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel), do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation. In which pleasant novels will be found some passages of love rudely crossed, with other courses of events of which the issues are felicitous, in times as well modern as ancient: from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue. Which cannot, I believe, come to pass unless the dumps be banished by diversion of mind. And if it so happen (as God grant it may) let them give thanks to Love, who,

liberating me from his fetters, has given me the power to devote myself to their gratification.

(1) For Fiammetta, i. e. Maria, natural daughter of Robert, King of Naples.

— Beginneth here the first day of the Decameron, in which, when the author has set forth, how it came to pass that the persons, who appear hereafter met together for interchange of discourse, they, under the rule of Pampinea, discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn. —

As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eye-witnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. To this brief exordium of woe—brief, I say, inasmuch as it can be put within the compass of a few letters—succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which I have promised you, and which, perhaps, had I not done so, were not to have been

expected from it. In truth, had it been honestly possible to guide you whither I would bring you by a road less rough than this will be, I would gladly have so done. But, because without this review of the past, it would not be in my power to shew how the matters, of which you will hereafter read, came to pass, I am almost bound of necessity to enter upon it, if I would write of them at all.

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

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

Not such were they as in the East, where an issue of blood from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death;

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

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

or aught else that had been touched or used by them, seemed thereby to contract the disease.

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

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

In which circumstances, not to speak of many others of a similar or even graver complexion, divers apprehensions and imaginations were engendered in the minds of such as were left alive, inclining almost all of them to the same harsh resolution, to wit, to shun and abhor all contact with the sick and all that belonged to them, thinking thereby to make each his own health secure. Among whom there were those who

thought that to live temperately and avoid all excess would count for much as a preservative against seizures of this kind. Wherefore they banded together, and, dissociating themselves from all others, formed communities in houses where there were no sick, and lived a separate and secluded life, which they regulated with the utmost care, avoiding every kind of luxury, but eating and drinking very moderately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines, holding converse with none but one another, lest tidings of sickness or death should reach them, and diverting their minds with music and such other delights as they could devise. Others, the bias of whose minds was in the opposite direction, maintained, that to drink freely, frequent places of public resort, and take their pleasure with song and revel, sparing to satisfy no appetite, and to laugh and mock at no event, was the sovereign remedy for so great an evil: and that which they affirmed they also put in practice, so far as they were able, resorting day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking with an entire disregard of rule or measure, and by preference making the houses of others, as it were, their inns, if they but saw in them aught that was particularly to their taste or liking; which they were readily able to do, because the owners, seeing death imminent, had become as reckless of their property as of their lives; so that most of the houses were open to all comers, and no distinction was observed between the stranger who presented himself and the rightful lord. Thus, adhering ever to their inhuman determination to shun the sick, as far as possible, they ordered their life. In this extremity of our city's suffering and tribulation the venerable authority of laws, human and divine, was abased and all but totally dissolved, for lack of those who should have administered and enforced them, most of whom, like

the rest of the citizens, were either dead or sick, or so hard bested for servants that they were unable to execute any office; whereby every man was free to do what was right in his own eyes.

Not a few there were who belonged to neither of the two said parties, but kept a middle course between them, neither laying the same restraint upon their diet as the former, nor allowing themselves the same license in drinking and other dissipations as the latter, but living with a degree of freedom sufficient to satisfy their appetites, and not as recluses. They therefore walked abroad, carrying in their hands flowers or fragrant herbs or divers sorts of spices, which they frequently raised to their noses, deeming it an excellent thing thus to comfort the brain with such perfumes, because the air seemed to be everywhere laden and reeking with the stench emitted by the dead and the dying and the odours of drugs.

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

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

been a woman, submitting of necessity to that which her malady required; wherefrom, perchance, there resulted in after time some loss of modesty in such as recovered. Besides which many succumbed, who with proper attendance, would, perhaps, have escaped death; so that, what with the virulence of the plague and the lack of due tendance of the sick, the multitude of the deaths, that daily and nightly took place in the city, was such that those who heard the tale—not to say witnessed the fact—were struck dumb with amazement. Whereby, practices contrary to the former habits of the citizens could hardly fail to grow up among the survivors.

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

to their health. Few also there were whose bodies were attended to the church by more than ten or twelve of their neighbours, and those not the honourable and respected citizens; but a sort of corpse-carriers drawn from the baser ranks who called themselves becchini (1) and performed such offices for hire, would shoulder the bier, and with hurried steps carry it, not to the church of the dead man's choice, but to that which was nearest at hand, with four or six priests in front and a candle or two, or, perhaps, none; nor did the priests distress themselves with too long and solemn an office, but with the aid of the becchini hastily consigned the corpse to the first tomb which they found untenanted. The condition of lower, and, perhaps, in great measure of the middle ranks, of the people shewed even worse and more deplorable; for, deluded by hope or constrained by poverty, they stayed in their quarters, in their houses, where they sickened by thousands a day, and, being without service or help of any kind, were, so to speak, irredeemably devoted to the death which overtook them. Many died daily or nightly in the public streets; of many others, who died at home, the departure was hardly observed by their neighbours, until the stench of their putrefying bodies carried the tidings; and what with their corpses and the corpses of others who died on every hand the whole place was a sepulchre.

It was the common practice of most of the neighbours, moved no less by fear of contamination by the putrefying bodies than by charity towards the deceased, to drag the corpses out of the houses with their own hands, aided, perhaps, by a porter, if a porter was to be had, and to lay them in front of the doors, where any one who made the round

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

As consecrated ground there was not in extent sufficient to provide tombs for the vast multitude of corpses which day and night, and almost every hour, were brought in eager haste to the churches for interment, least of all, if ancient custom were to be observed and a separate resting-place assigned to each, they dug, for each graveyard, as soon as it was full, a huge trench, in which they laid the corpses as they arrived by hundreds at a time, piling them up as mer-

chandise is stowed in the hold of a ship, tier upon tier, each covered with a little earth, until the trench would hold no more. But I spare to rehearse with minute particularity each of the woes that came upon our city, and say in brief, that, harsh as was the tenor of her fortunes, the surrounding country knew no mitigation, for there—not to speak of the castles, each, as it were, a little city in itself—in sequestered village, or on the open champaign, by the wayside, on the farm, in the homestead, the poor hapless husbandmen and their families, forlorn of physicians' care or servants' tendance, perished day and night alike, not as men, but rather as beasts. Wherefore, they too, like the citizens, abandoned all rule of life, all habit of industry, all counsel of prudence; nay, one and all, as if expecting each day to be their last, not merely ceased to aid Nature to yield her fruit in due season of their beasts and their lands and their past labours, but left no means unused, which ingenuity could devise, to waste their accumulated store; denying shelter to their oxen, asses, sheep, goats, pigs, fowls, nay, even to their dogs, man's most faithful companions, and driving them out into the fields to roam at large amid the unsheaved, nay, unreaped corn. Many of which, as if endowed with reason, took their fill during the day, and returned home at night without any guidance of herdsman. But enough of the country! What need we add, but (reverting to the city) that such and so grievous was the harshness of heaven, and perhaps in some degree of man, that, what with the fury of the pestilence, the panic of those whom it spared, and their consequent neglect or desertion of not a few of the stricken in their need, it is believed without any manner of doubt, that between March and the ensuing July upwards of a hundred thousand human beings lost their lives within the walls of the city of Florence, which

before the deadly visitation would not have been supposed to contain so many people! How many grand palaces, how many stately homes, how many splendid residences, once full of retainers, of lords, of ladies, were now left desolate of all, even to the meanest servant! How many families of historic fame, of vast ancestral domains, and wealth proverbial, found now no scion to continue the succession! How many brave men, how many fair ladies, how many gallant youths, whom any physician, were he Galen, Hippocrates, or Aesculapius himself, would have pronounced in the soundest of health, broke fast with their kinsfolk, comrades and friends in the morning, and when evening came, supped with their forefathers in the other world.

Irksome it is to myself to rehearse in detail so sorrowful a history. Wherefore, being minded to pass over so much thereof as I fairly can, I say, that our city, being thus well-nigh depopulated, it so happened, as I afterwards learned from one worthy of credit, that on a Tuesday morning after Divine Service the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella was almost deserted save for the presence of seven young ladies habited sadly in keeping with the season. All were connected either by blood or at least as friends or neighbours and fair and of good understanding were they all, as also of noble birth, gentle manners, and a modest sprightliness. In age none exceeded twenty-eight, or fell short of eighteen years. Their names I would set down in due form, had I not good reason to withhold them, being solicitous lest the matters which here ensue, as told and heard by them, should in after time be occasion of reproach to any of them, in view of the ample indulgence which was then, for the reasons heretofore set forth, accorded to the lighter hours of

persons of much riper years than they, but which the manners of to-day have somewhat restricted; nor would I furnish material to detractors, ever ready to bestow their bite where praise is due, to cast by invidious speech the least slur upon the honour of these noble ladies. Wherefore, that what each says may be apprehended without confusion, I intend to give them names more or less appropriate to the character of each. The first, then, being the eldest of the seven, we will call Pampinea, the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena, the fourth Emilia, the fifth we will distinguish as Lauretta, the sixth as Neifile, and the last, not without reason, shall be named Elisa.

'Twas not of set purpose but by mere chance that these ladies met in the same part of the church; but at length grouping themselves into a sort of circle, after heaving a few sighs, they gave up saying paternosters, and began to converse (among other topics) on the times.

So they continued for awhile, and then Pampinea, the rest listening in silent attention, thus began:—"Dear ladies mine, often have I heard it said, and you doubtless as well as I, that wrong is done to none by whoso but honestly uses his reason. And to fortify, preserve, and defend his life to the utmost of his power is the dictate of natural reason in everyone that is born. Which right is accorded in such measure that in defence thereof men have been held blameless in taking life. And if this be allowed by the laws, albeit on their stringency depends the well-being of every mortal, how much more exempt from censure should we, and all other honest folk, be in taking such means as we may for the preservation of our life? As often as I bethink me how we have been occupied this morning, and not this morning only,

and what has been the tenor of our conversation, I perceive—and you will readily do the like—that each of us is apprehensive on her own account; nor thereat do I marvel, but at this I do marvel greatly, that, though none of us lacks a woman's wit, yet none of us has recourse to any means to avert that which we all justly fear. Here we tarry, as if, methinks, for no other purpose than to bear witness to the number of the corpses that are brought hither for interment, or to hearken if the brothers there within, whose number is now almost reduced to nought, chant their offices at the canonical hours, or, by our weeds of woe, to obtrude on the attention of every one that enters, the nature and degree of our sufferings.

"And if we quit the church, we see dead or sick folk carried about, or we see those, who for their crimes were of late condemned to exile by the outraged majesty of the public laws, but who now, in contempt of those laws, well knowing that their ministers are a prey to death or disease, have returned, and traverse the city in packs, making it hideous with their riotous antics; or else we see the refuse of the people, fostered on our blood, becchini, as they call themselves, who for our torment go prancing about here and there and everywhere, making mock of our miseries in scurrilous songs. Nor hear we aught but:—Such and such are dead; or, Such and such art dying; and should hear dolorous wailing on every hand, were there but any to wail. Or go we home, what see we there? I know not if you are in like case with me; but there, where once were servants in plenty, I find none left but my maid, and shudder with terror, and feel the very hairs of my head to stand on end; and turn or tarry where I may, I

encounter the ghosts of the departed, not with their wonted mien, but with something horrible in their aspect that appals me. For which reasons church and street and home are alike distressful to me, and the more so that none, methinks, having means and place of retirement as we have, abides here save only we; or if any such there be, they are of those, as my senses too often have borne witness, who make no distinction between things honourable and their opposites, so they but answer the cravings of appetite, and, alone or in company, do daily and nightly what things soever give promise of most gratification. Nor are these secular persons alone; but such as live recluse in monasteries break their rule, and give themselves up to carnal pleasures, persuading themselves that they are permissible to them, and only forbidden to others, and, thereby thinking to escape, are become unchaste and dissolute. If such be our circumstances—and such most manifestly they are—what do we here? what wait we for? what dream we of? why are we less prompt to provide for our own safety than the rest of the citizens? Is life less dear to us than to all other women? or think we that the bond, which unites soul and body is stronger in us than in others, so that there is no blow that may light upon it, of which we need be apprehensive? If so, we err, we are deceived. What insensate folly were it in us so to believe! We have but to call to mind the number and condition of those, young as we, and of both sexes, who have succumbed to this cruel pestilence, to find therein conclusive evidence to the contrary. And lest from lethargy or indolence we fall into the vain imagination that by some lucky accident we may in some way or another, when we would, escape—I know not if your opinion accord with mine—I should deem it most wise in us, our case being what it is, if, as many others

have done before us, and are still doing, we were to quit this place, and, shunning like death the evil example of others, betake ourselves to the country, and there live as honourable women on one of the estates, of which none of us has any lack, with all cheer of festal gathering and other delights, so long as in no particular we overstep the bounds of reason. There we shall hear the chant of birds, have sight of verdant hills and plains, of cornfields undulating like the sea, of trees of a thousand sorts; there also we shall have a larger view of the heavens, which, however harsh to usward yet deny not their eternal beauty; things fairer far for eye to rest on than the desolate walls of our city. Moreover, we shall there breathe a fresher air, find ampler store of things meet for such as live in these times, have fewer causes of annoy. For, though the husbandmen die there, even as here the citizens, they are dispersed in scattered homesteads, and 'tis thus less painful to witness. Nor, so far as I can see, is there a soul here whom we shall desert; rather we may truly say, that we are ourselves deserted; for, our kinsfolk being either dead or fled in fear of death, no more regardful of us than if we were strangers, we are left alone in our great affliction. No censure, then, can fall on us if we do as I propose; and otherwise grievous suffering, perhaps death, may ensue. Wherefore, if you agree, 'tis my advice, that, attended by our maids with all things needful, we sojourn, now on this, now on the other estate, and in such way of life continue, until we see—if death should not first overtake us—the end which Heaven reserves for these events. And I remind you that it will be at least as seemly in us to leave with honour, as in others, of whom there are not a few, to stay with dishonour."

The other ladies praised Pampinea's plan, and indeed were so prompt to follow it, that they had already begun to discuss the manner in some detail, as if they were forthwith to rise from their seats and take the road, when Filomena, whose judgment was excellent, interposed, saying:—"Ladies, though Pampinea has spoken to most excellent effect, yet it were not well to be so precipitate as you seem disposed to be. Bethink you that we are all women; nor is there any here so young, but she is of years to understand how women are minded towards one another, when they are alone together, and how ill they are able to rule themselves without the guidance of some man. We are sensitive, perverse, suspicious, pusillanimous and timid; wherefore I much misdoubt, that, if we find no other guidance than our own, this company is like to break up sooner, and with less credit to us, than it should. Against which it were well to provide at the outset." Said then Elisa:—"Without doubt man is woman's head, and, without man's governance, it is seldom that aught that we do is brought to a commendable conclusion. But how are we to come by the men? Every one of us here knows that her kinsmen are for the most part dead, and that the survivors are dispersed, one here, one there, we know not where, bent each on escaping the same fate as ourselves; nor were it seemly to seek the aid of strangers; for, as we are in quest of health, we must find some means so to order matters that, wherever we seek diversion or repose, trouble and scandal do not follow us."

While the ladies were thus conversing, there came into the church three young men, young, I say, but not so young that the age of the youngest was less than twenty-five years; in whom neither the sinister course of events, nor the loss of

friends or kinsfolk, nor fear for their own safety, had availed to quench, or even temper, the ardour of their love. The first was called Pamfilo, the second Filostrato, and the third Dioneo. Very debonair and chivalrous were they all; and in this troublous time they were seeking if haply, to their exceeding great solace, they might have sight of their fair friends, all three of whom chanced to be among the said seven ladies, besides some that were of kin to the young men. At one and the same moment they recognised the ladies and were recognised by them: wherefore, with a gracious smile, Pampinea thus began:—"Lo, fortune is propitious to our enterprise, having vouchsafed us the good offices of these young men, who are as gallant as they are discreet, and will gladly give us their guidance and escort, so we but take them into our service." Whereupon Neifile, crimson from brow to neck with the blush of modesty, being one of those that had a lover among the young men, said:—"For God's sake, Pampinea, have a care what you say. Well assured am I that nought but good can be said of any of them, and I deem them fit for office far more onerous than this which you propose for them, and their good and honourable company worthy of ladies fairer by far and more tenderly to be cherished than such as we. But 'tis no secret that they love some of us here; wherefore I misdoubt that, if we take them with us, we may thereby give occasion for scandal and censure merited neither by us nor by them." "That," said Filomena, "is of no consequence; so I but live honestly, my conscience gives me no disquietude; if others asperse me, God and the truth will take arms in my defence. Now, should they be disposed to attend us, of a truth we might say with Pampinea, that fortune favours our enterprise." The silence which followed betokened consent on the part of the other ladies,

who then with one accord resolved to call the young men, and acquaint them with their purpose, and pray them to be of their company. So without further parley Pampinea, who had a kinsman among the young men, rose and approached them where they stood intently regarding them; and greeting them gaily, she opened to them their plan, and besought them on the part of herself and her friends to join their company on terms of honourable and fraternal comradeship. At first the young men thought she did but trifle with them; but when they saw that she was in earnest, they answered with alacrity that they were ready, and promptly, even before they left the church, set matters in train for their departure. So all things meet being first sent forward in due order to their intended place of sojourn, the ladies with some of their maids, and the three young men, each attended by a man-servant, sallied forth of the city on the morrow, being Wednesday, about daybreak, and took the road; nor had they journeyed more than two short miles when they arrived at their destination. The estate (2) lay upon a little hill some distance from the nearest highway, and, embowered in shrubberies of divers hues, and other greenery, afforded the eye a pleasant prospect. On the summit of the hill was a palace with galleries, halls and chambers, disposed around a fair and spacious court, each very fair in itself, and the goodlier to see for the gladsome pictures with which it was adorned; the whole set amidst meads and gardens laid out with marvellous art, wells of the coolest water, and vaults of the finest wines, things more suited to dainty drinkers than to sober and honourable women. On their arrival the company, to their no small delight, found their beds already made, the rooms well swept and garnished with flowers of every sort that the season could afford, and the floors carpeted with rushes. When

they were seated, Dioneo, a gallant who had not his match for courtesy and wit, spoke thus:—"My ladies, 'tis not our forethought so much as your own mother-wit that has guided us hither. How you mean to dispose of your cares I know not; mine I left behind me within the city-gate when I issued thence with you a brief while ago. Wherefore, I pray you, either address yourselves to make merry, to laugh and sing with me (so far, I mean, as may consist with your dignity), or give me leave to hie me back to the stricken city, there to abide with my cares." To whom blithely Pampinea replied, as if she too had cast off all her cares:—"Well sayest thou, Dioneo, excellent well; gaily we mean to live; 'twas a refuge from sorrow that here we sought, nor had we other cause to come hither. But, as no anarchy can long endure, I who initiated the deliberations of which this fair company is the fruit, do now, to the end that our joy may be lasting, deem it expedient, that there be one among us in chief authority, honoured and obeyed by us as our superior, whose exclusive care it shall be to devise how we may pass our time blithely. And that each in turn may prove the weight of the care, as well as enjoy the pleasure, of sovereignty, and, no distinction being made of sex, envy be felt by none by reason of exclusion from the office; I propose, that the weight and honour be borne by each one for a day; and let the first to bear sway be chosen by us all, those that follow to be appointed towards the vesper hour by him or her who shall have had the signory for that day; and let each holder of the signory be, for the time, sole arbiter of the place and manner in which we are to pass our time."

Pampinea's speech was received with the utmost applause, and with one accord she was chosen queen for the