

LETTERS FROM ITALY ON THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF ITALY.

I HAVE promised to write to you from Italy of the Italians. Not of those of to-day, late and imperfectly ripened fruits of the great tree, beneath which the nations once feasted in the shade, but of the great ones who represent the June day in the garden of the world.

When we were most devoted to the literature of Italy, and found no repose from the bustle and noise of every-day life, so sweet and profound as in the solitudes of Vaucluse, or the garden of Boccaccio, you would say, after declaiming some favorite passage with a superabundant emphasis, which would, perhaps, have called a smile to the lip even of the Italian most addicted to the *issimos*. "But, after all, we do not entirely feel the beauty of this. No work of literature or art can be felt as it ought, except in those relations of climate and scenery, in which it was produced. This, true of all countries, it is peculiarly so of Italy; for the Italian is educated by his climate, and lives in the open air. The Italian sun paints this description, the Italian breeze breathes in these cadences, the happy constitution of the people gives a smoothness and subtle delicacy to this witticism, which we cannot appreciate beside a coal fire, and with the keen wind of our hills blowing the snow drifts before our eyes."

I often laughed at this theory; yet here upon the spot I find it true. The Italian sonnet is another thing to me, since I heard the language day by day; and the wine and honey of the Italian prose never, I find, were tasted in their true flavor till my eye became acquainted with the sky beneath which it grew up.

Of none is this truer than of our friend Boccaccio. And I will begin the promised correspondence by noting down a few thoughts suggested by my new acquaintance with the Decameron. They are not many, for I do not read or think much; in this climate mere living is enjoyment enough.

Giovanni Boccaccio; it is a famous name, and yet how few seem to appreciate or even know anything about him, except that he is one of three whose names we are in the habit

of jingling together,—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Neither is there much chance of his being better known, for the world grows more and more delicate as it grows older, and Boccaccio is nature itself, and the most unclad nature withal. And here, once for all, let me say what occurs to me on this subject. When we see a picture or statue, on what is our judgment of it founded? We look to see if the sentiment is true to nature, if the drawing is correct, if the *nature* is beautiful and true, if the spirit in which it is conceived be refined, and if we find these we are satisfied. But do we ask ourselves, when we see a drunken and sensual faun carved in Parian stone, whether the subject is moral, whether it is decent? Thank Heaven! I believe not, naturally,—such an inquiry is always suggested to the mind by the habit of using a conventional standard. When a Michael Angelo carves a Bacchus, (and his was no ideal Bacchus, but the deity of drunkenness,) do we ask such a question? Never. The art is its own reason. We recognise the presence of a wider law than that of our conventions, and, self-forgetful, are lost in the power of design. We recognise in the artist, not a law-giver to man, but a seer of the law of God. I saw, not long since, an engraving of an ancient marble, which represented a sea-monster, half-fish, half-man, carrying away a woman over the ocean, who seems to struggle and look back in vain, and rarely have I received from any design more pure delight. For the whole was full of Grecian grace; you could fancy the gentle waves, curling about the group, the blue sky above, all the earth young and loving about them. The genius of the artist so carried you at once to his ideal world, that it required an effort of thought to remember the actual subject, or figure to yourself that some Philistine, with no idea of any world beyond the one present at this moment, might say, "What a disgusting subject!" And so, Giovanni Boccaccio, do I think of thee! In thy noble mind this world was no decrepid debauchee, shunning the light, and hiding his unseemly person; but young, as if fresh from creation, not ashamed to utter all the thoughts that came into its head, sad or gay, tragic or fantastic. And this leads me to speak of a characteristic of Boccaccio; it is this perpetual youth. If he would describe a delicious scene, it is always with the dewy freshness of sunrise on

every leaf,—his descriptions of morning are unrivalled. His persons are always “*giovani, e costumati, e piacevoli assai* ;” young and fair to look upon, gentle, and of good manners, but frank and free ; so that, if you were now to see such an one, fresh and full of fun and feeling, you would say, “*There is one of Boccaccio’s young men.*” His characters have not those minute and delicate traits, marking man from man as an individual, which Shakspeare, and, in a less degree, so many moderns have taught us to look for. Rather are they all drawn after one noble pattern ; not like the work of a mannerist, but as if the author had lived in an early stage of society, when the lines are rather between class and class than between man and man. But I am afraid of making my distinction too marked, without making plain enough what it consists in. You will understand me, if I recall to your mind some of the painters whose figures have no mannerism, and yet seem all of one homogeneous race.

Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio,—I repeated to myself ; and then asked what is it that entitles the author of the *Decameron* to such companionship ? For I need not tell you in what estimation I hold the two first, and how they seem to me, with Shakspeare, to make the great Three in modern literature. Now, I will own Boccaccio as a not unworthy fourth. For I should say that it belongs to them more than any other modern writers, to have sprung from the earth,—original, sitanic, the first of their race. We like to trace back the filiations of genius, to see how circumstances, or the contact with other minds, have influenced its growth ; to trace an idea growing toward perfection through many minds, till at last it comes to flower in one, but we look in vain for the progenitors of these. Most men are the sons of time,—these are its “*prophetic lords.*” Many a poet has expressed what his century taught him. These wrote as if they stood at the beginning of time, and had the centuries to teach. To sympathize with me here, you must look through the costume, the manners of their times, their systems of religion and morals, to the elemental forms they cover. In Boccaccio, what delights me is his constant freedom. He saw through the spirit of his time. He understood its littleness and bigotry. He despised its prejudices. What is mean, or low, or vicious,

he attacks, sometimes with bitter and unsparing reproof, (as in his denunciation of the Florentines, for their treatment of Dante,) with grave irony, or, more often, and this suits better his cheerful nature, with overpowering wholesale ridicule. At what is deformed or vicious he will rather laugh than weep, but what is true or beautiful finds no more sincere lover and interpreter than he.

At a time when the church was preëminent ; when all Europe was filled with monks and monasteries ; he feared not their power nor their enmity ; but gaily and gravely, decorously and indecorously, attacked their saintly and respected hypocrisy in the most vulnerable parts. Dante’s bitter, though often veiled denunciation, had opened the minds of the few ; the gay and fearless assaults of Boccaccio dragged the cowl from the satyr, and exposed him to the ridicule of the mob. He had no compassion for a class, or for a sanctity that was cut off by its very nature from the common sympathies of humanity ; and yet true religion never encountered an enemy in him. As a proof of this, I translate the opening of the first novel, which seems to me admirable and most truly christian in its spirit, at once devout and liberal.

“It is meet, O dearest ladies ! that whatsoever work a man enters upon, should be prefaced with the wondrous and holy name of him who was the Creator of all. Wherefore, since I am to begin our story-telling, I mean to make a beginning with one of his wonderful truths, so that by hearing it our faith in Him, as in something not to be changed, may become stronger, and we may always give praises to his name. It is manifest, that as all things temporal are transitory and mortal, so both within and without they are full of annoy, and anguish, and labor, and subject to infinite dangers, so as to be beyond the endurance and the powers of us who are mixed up with, and are a part of them, if the special grace of God did not afford us strength and light,—the which, let us not suppose, descends upon us for any merit of ours ; but moved by its own goodness, and vouchsafed to the prayers of those who were once mortal as we are, and doing his will while they were in this life, are now become eternal and happy in his presence. To whom we address our prayers for those things we desire, as if to solicitors, acquainted by experience with our frailty, and as if fearful to bring our prayers before the face of so great a judge. And still more does his compassion and goodness towards us become manifest, when we consider that since the brightness of mortal eye cannot pierce the secrets

of the divine mind, it may happen that we, deceived in our estimation, have chosen as our intercessor before his face, one who is driven thence into eternal banishment; and still, He from whom nothing is hidden, regarding the purity of him that prays, and not his ignorance, or the absence of his intercessor, hears the prayers, as if he through whom it is addressed were among the happy in his presence. The which will appear plainly in the novel I mean to relate,—plainly, I mean, to the judgment of man—not to that of God.”

One must know the narrow and unsparing dogmatism of the church in those times, to appreciate the liberality of this,—and how far he was in advance of his time. And is not the doctrine of the intercession of saints beautiful in this simple statement? The same liberality may be seen in his treatment of the Jews. It seems as if prejudice against them were inborn in the nations. Scott has a Rebecca to be sure, and Shakspeare a Jessica; and among a thousand heroines in modern fictions, we now and then see an amiable Jewess; but here liberality stops,—and we remember with how little tenderness Shylock and Isaac are pictured by their creators. Not so Boccaccio, whose Jews are noble figures, and the only novels in which, so far as I remember, he has introduced them, he has chosen to set forth lessons that we too have not come so late into the world that we can derive no profit from them. The first of these relates to a Jew, by name Abraham, who lived in Paris, and who, as the story goes, was in all things an upright and honorable man. Now he had a Christian friend,—Giannotto da Civigni, a great merchant and excellent man, who was much attached to him, and who, seeing the life he led, sought by every means in his power to turn him from his belief, and make him a Christian. The Jew, after a while, began to take a pleasure in hearing him, but was not to be shaken in his faith. At last he announced his intention of going to Rome, to see and judge for himself how far their faith rendered the pastors of the church more excellent than other men. Now was Giannotto at his wit's end; for, thinks he, if Abraham goes to Rome and sees what the heads of the church really are, alas! it is all over with making him to a Christian. However, the Jew was not to be moved from his purpose, and accordingly goes to Rome; when he finds the vices and depravity of the clergy beyond belief,—finds them sensual, avaricious, and given without remorse

to more sins than he can number. When he has satisfied himself, he returns home and tells Giannotto what he has seen, and how all seem to be striving to destroy the faith from its foundation. “And yet,” he says, “I do not see that they succeed, but day by day your religion grows, and becomes more clear, so that I plainly perceive that, by its truth and holiness, it has a deeper foundation and support in the divine spirit than any other. So that I, who before so stiffly opposed your arguments, and would not become a Christian, would now by all means become so.”

The power of the Roman Church has passed away. The clergy, among ourselves, are not possessed of wealth and power. We cannot accuse them of avarice, or luxury, or pride; we are, beside, too little rather than too much given to cherishing things sacred. Still, when we recollect that a class set apart from the rest to satisfy one want of humanity, must always be in danger of one-sidedness and narrowness, and when we know that, in being thus divided from the rest, they are not necessarily made better than the rest, not certainly made sacred in being separated, we feel the force of Abraham's words, and say with him, Let us cherish the priest, but believe the religion.

The other story is the well known one of the “Three Rings.”

The true commentary on the writings of an author is his life, if we can but get at it as a whole. That of Boccaccio, in the mere outline I have before me, speaks plainly enough. His father was a Tuscan of the little town of Certaldo, his mother born in Paris. Their condition was neither high nor low, but of that middle class, in which the heart's blood of society flows with strongest pulse. He received a tolerable education, and was then by his father introduced to trade, and remained a merchant till his eight-and-twentieth year. During this time he led a life of travelling, which, in those days, must have been one of continual adventure; above all, to the romantic, bold, fun-loving and woman-loving Boccaccio. This is the life best suited to bring a man closely in contact with the realities as well as the romance of his time. The history goes on to say that, by his father's command, he established himself at Naples, and that, walking one day alone, he came to the place where lie the ashes of Virgil. There he fell to medi-

tating on the glory acquired by this great poet, and thereat took so great a despite to traffic, that, returning home, he gave himself entirely to the study of poetry.

This seems an extravagance, till we feel who it was that took this sudden determination, one of no weak or doubting mind. For to one of his "altezza d'animo," to know his course false to himself, and to forsake it, is but one act. And his stories contain many examples of characters of the same large and simple mould; there is, for instance, the story of a miser, who, reproved by a single word of a wise and witty man, saw so clearly the baseness of his avarice and discourtesy, that from that day forward, he abandoned them. The story of Abraham, which I have given above, is of the same sort; and this largeness and singleness of soul, which he who so felt could so well paint, gives a charm to the story of Ghismonda, which makes it a sublime tragedy.

The life goes on to say, that he gave his time to the study of the ancients, and became one of the most learned men of his time. He wrote, in Latin, a genealogy of the gods, and a list of ancient names of rivers and mountains; these are tasks, which seem even pedantic, and yet so free and incapable of fetters was his spirit, that his Decameron, is perhaps, the first book of modern times which is completely modern, showing no trace of the study of the classics, unless in the amenity and uniformity of its design.

I do not know that I can better confirm my thought, than by giving you here a translation of the Preface to the Fourth Day.

"Dearest ladies; from all that I had heard of the words of the wise, and all that I myself had seen or read, I had judged that the impetuous and fiery blast of envy should attack only the highest towers and most lofty tree-tops. But alas! how wofully has my judgment gone astray, since I, who have always bent my forces to avoid the fierce enmity of this rabid spirit; as you may plainly see, if you will consider these novels of mine, how I have written them not only in the vulgar Florentine, and in prose, and without a name, but also in the most humble and unambitious style I could, yet for all this could not escape being fiercely shaken, and torn almost up by the roots by this tempest, and all scarred by the teeth of envy. From whence, most plainly do I see how true is what the wise say, 'that misery alone in this world escapes envy.' For there are some, O discreet ladies! who, in reading these stories, say that I delight too much in you,

and that it is a shame for me to take so much pains to please and console; and some even say, commend you as I do, and others, who would fain seem to speak more sapiently say, that it becomes not my time of life to be following after such things; namely, to reason about women, or to entertain them; and many, who show themselves most tender of my fame, say that I should do more wisely to stay with the Muses on Mount Parnassus, than to employ myself among you about these trifles; and some, speaking more spitefully than wisely, say, that I should act with more discretion, if I looked about to get my daily bread, than in feeding the wind behind the bushes. And there are some, besides, who trouble themselves to show, that the things which I relate happened differently from the way in which I tell them, and this in spite of all the pains which I have taken. In fine, you see, most esteemed dames, with what cruel and sharp teeth they attack me, and wrong and bite even to the quick, while I am thus enlisted in your service; to all which things, God knows, I listen with undisturbed spirit; and although in this matter, my defence belongs properly to you, yet do I not mean to spare my own strength, but, without so fully answering them as I might, with some light reply, take myself out of their hearing. For if already, when I have not accomplished the third of my task, they are so many and so presuming, it seems to me that if they do not receive some check, before I reach the end, they may be so multiplied, that without much trouble they could completely overset me; nor in such case could your powers, great as they are, prevail. But before I begin my reply to any, I wish in my own defence to tell a story,—not a whole one, lest it may seem that I wish to mix up my stories with those of the gentle company that I have told you of,—but a part of one only, so that its very deficiency may show that it is not one of those. And so, my assailants! here is my story.

"It happened, a long time ago in our city, that there was a citizen, named Philip Balducci, a man of not the highest rank, but rich and well nurtured, and a master of all things belonging to one of his standing. And he had a wife, whom he loved the best of all things, and she loved him in like manner, and they lived a quiet and even life together, having their thoughts on nothing so intent, as how to please each other. Now it happened, as it does to all, that this good lady died, leaving to Philip no other memorial of herself than one child of his begetting, then some two years old. Never was man more inconsolable at the loss of that he loved, than was Philip Balducci; and seeing himself thus solitary, deprived of her he loved, he determined that he would no longer remain in the world, but would give himself to the service of God, and do the like with his little son. So having given away all he had for the love of God, he went with-

out delay up to Mount Asinajo, to live there in a little cell, along with his son, and there with him he passed his time in fasting and prayer, subsisting upon alms; and took the greatest care when the boy was by never to speak of any temporal affair, nor to let any such be seen, lest they might seduce him from the service of the Lord, but ever discoursed of the glory of life eternal, and of God and the saints, and taught him nothing but holy orisons.

“The worthy man was in the habit of coming sometimes to Florence, and then as fortune favored, being succored by the piously disposed, returned again to his cell. Now it happened that the youth having reached his nineteenth year, and his father having grown old, he asked him one day whither he was going. Philip told him; at which the youth said; ‘My father, you are now getting in years, and can ill endure fatigue; why not take me with you once to Florence, and point out to me the devout and the friends of God, and yours, and I, who am young and can bear fatigue better than you, shall afterwards be able to go to Florence and provide for our wants whenever you please, whilst you can stay at home?’ The good man, considering that his son was already grown up, and so trained to the service of God, that the things of the world could hardly draw him aside, said to himself, ‘the boy is right;’ and so next time he went took him with him. There the youth, seeing the palaces, the houses, the churches, and all the other things, of which the city is full, and having no recollection of ever having seen them before, was struck with admiration; and asked his father about a thousand things, what they were, and how they were called. His father told him all; and he, one question satisfied, had soon another to ask. And thus they went along, the son inquiring and the father replying, until they chanced to meet a band of ladies, all fair and nicely drest, who were come from a wedding, and whom the youth no sooner saw, than he asked his father what manner of things they were. His father answered, ‘cast down thine eyes, my son, on the ground, and look not at them, for they are an evil thing.’ ‘But what do they call them?’ said the son. The father, fearing to arouse some mischievous demon in his son’s ready imagination, would not name them by their proper name as women, but said, they call them ‘pápere.’ Wonderful to tell, this boy, who had never seen a woman, forgetting palaces and oxen, and horses and asses, and all the other things that he had seen, said at once; ‘O! father mine! do manage to get one of these pápere for me.’ ‘Alas! my son,’ replied the father, ‘be silent, I pray you; they are an evil thing.’ ‘What,’ asked the son, ‘look evil things so?’ ‘No otherwise,’ said his father. ‘Then,’ said he, ‘you know better than I; but I do not see why they are an evil thing. As for me, I never saw anything so beautiful nor so agreeable before. They are more lovely than the painted an-

gels you have so often shown me. O! if you love me now, do let us take one of these pápere up home with us, and I will take care and feed it.’ The father said, ‘I would rather you should not know how to feed them;’ and felt at once that nature was stronger than his teachings, and repented of having ever brought him to Florence. But so much is enough to tell of this story, and now I will return to those, for whose benefit I have related it.

“Some of these fault-finders take me to task, O, youthful dames, because I take so much pains to do you a pleasure, and because I take so much delight in you. These are things which I openly confess, namely, that I delight in you, and would fain please you. And I ask of them if this is to be wondered at, when they consider (we will not speak of the loving kisses, the passionate embraces, and the many delights they owe you, sweetest ladies) how they live in your presence, and see continually your gracious manners, your gentle beauty, your bewitching grace, and, above all, your womanly dignity. When they see how this youth, brought up on a savage and solitary mountain, within the bounds of a narrow cell, with no other company than his father, the moment he saw you, you were his sole desire, for you alone he asked, — and you he followed with affection. Let them, then, reprove, and persecute, and tear me without mercy for this, that I delight in you, and strive to delight you, I, whom heaven made with a frame all alive to your love, and who from boyhood have devoted my soul to you, feeling the virtue there is in the light of your eyes, and the sweetness of your honey-flowing words, and the flame lighted by your pitying sighs, — above all, when I recollect how you first fixed the eyes of this little hermit, this rude child, or rather wild animal. For surely who loves you not, nor desires to be loved by you, he repels me like one who cannot feel or understand the pleasures nor the virtue of natural affection, and little care I for him. As to them that reprove me in respect of my age, they show that they do not understand. But leaving jesting aside, to these I answer, that as long as I live I shall never count it to my shame to strive to please those whom Guido Cavalcanti, and Dante Alighieri, in their old age, and Messer Cino da Pistoja, to the extreme of life, held in honor, and to please whom was so dear to such as these. And were it not out of the usual course of argument, I would bring forward the histories, and show you how full they are of examples of brave men in old times, who placed their highest aim in that which should be for the service and honor of woman. And if my antagonists are ignorant of these, let them go and learn.

“That I should remain with the Muses on Parnassus I allow is good counsel, and not amiss. But we may not dwell ever with the Muses, nor they with us. And when it happens that a man

must leave their company, that he should delight himself with that which is nearest to their likeness, is this blameworthy? The Muses are women, and though women be not their peers, yet do they bear in their aspect a likeness to them, so that if they pleased me for nought else, here were a reason. Moreover, in past times women have been the cause of my making thousands of verses, but the Muses never of one. They have assisted me, indeed, and shown me how to compose those thousands; and perhaps also in the writing of these things, humble as they are, they have come sometimes to stand beside me, and lend their aid perchance in honor of the likeness between themselves and the subject of my stories. For while I weave them I leave neither Parnassus nor the Muses so far behind as many perhaps may think.

“But what shall we say to those who have so much compassion on my hunger, that they advise me rather to look out for my bread? Alas, I know not, unless I consider what would be their answer to me, if I, in time of need, should come to ask bread of them. They might, like enough, say, Go look for it among your novels. And, indeed, the poets have oftener found it among their fables than many a rich man among his treasures. And many poets, from beneath their fables, have made green their age. While, on the other hand, many, seeking more bread than they needed, have perished premature. What else? It is time for them to repulse me when I ask something of them, for now, thank God, I have no need; and when need does come, I know, in the words of the Apostle, ‘To abound and to suffer want.’ And as to that my affairs are so important to no one as to myself.

“For those who say that the facts I relate happened not as I relate them, I should be much their debtor if they would procure me the originals, and if they differ from that I write, I will confess their reprehension just and strive to mend. But till they bring me something better than words, I shall leave them in their belief, and follow mine own,—and report of them that which they report of me. And as I would now fain bring my answer to an end, I say that, armed with the assistance of God, and yours, Oh, gentle ladies, in which I hope, and with the aid of patience, I will go on with my undertaking,—and turning my back to the tempest, let it blow as it will. I see not but it must needs be with me as happens to the fine dust, which when the whirlwind comes, perhaps rests quiet on the ground, or if the blast raises it, it is borne aloft and left often on the heads of men,—on the crowns of kings and emperors, and sometimes on the tops of high palaces and lofty towers,—whence if it fall, it falls no farther than its place from which it rose. And if I have ever bent all my powers to your service, now more than ever am I disposed so to do,—for I know that all that can with reason be

said of me, and all who love you, is that we act after nature; to oppose whose laws too great strength is needed,—and if it is applied, it is often in vain,—and with great loss to him that attempts it. The which strength, I confess, I have not,—nor for such purposes do I desire it, and if I had it, would be more glad to furnish it to others, than to use it myself. Wherefore give me peace, ill-willers,—and remaining in your own delights, or rather corrupt appetites, let me rest in peace in this short life that is allotted us.”

A delicacy, a gentle irony, which seems to throw dust in the eyes of his bat-like adversaries, rather than take the trouble to confute them, charms me throughout this passage, and it seems to veil in its light grace an abounding wisdom. Thus, where he answers those who say that he should have remained with the Muses on Parnassus, rather than be looking to women for inspiration, his reply seems to say that we must leave the outworn traditions of the past, and seek our inspiration in the living world about us. I see running through the whole a defence of nature, a trust in natural impulses, a contempt for artificial distinctions and limitation. I am never tired of repeating to myself the image, so full of high wisdom, which occurs near the close, in which he likens himself and his labors to the impalpable dust, which the breeze may pass over and leave quiet on the ground, or which, borne aloft, may be left on the high palace tops, or the crowns of kings, but can fall no lower than its native home.

There is no truth which Boccaccio more delights in bringing forward than that there is no human condition so low, but that virtue may be found there; no outward disadvantage that mind, and heart, and soul, may not make null and void.

As in this noble passage, which I will rather transcribe than injure by translation, so rough and careless as mine is wont to be.

“E certo io maledicerei la natura parimente a la Fortuna, se is non conoscessi la natura esser discretissima, e la fortuna aver mille occhi, comechè gli sciocchi lei cieca figurino. Le quali io avviso, che siccome molto avvelute, fanno quello che i mortali, spesse volte, fanno: li quali incerti de’ futuri casi, per le loro opportunità, le loro piu care cose, ne più vilé luoghi delle lor case, siccome meno sospetti, seppelliscono, e quindi ne’ maggiori bisogni ne traggono, avendo le il vil luogo piu sicuramente ser-

vate, che la bella camera non avrebbe. E così le due ministre del mondo, spesso le lor cose più care nascondono sotto l'ombra dell'arti riputati vili, acciò di quelle alle necessità traendole, più chiara appaja il loro splendore."

And in this connection I cannot refrain from transcribing the following story, not only as it illustrates what I was saying, but because it has all the air of being an authentic record of a man in whom we all take peculiar interest, Giotto.

"Pamfilo now began. It often happens, most dear ladies, that, as fortune hides the greatest treasures of virtue under mean occupations, so nature sometimes makes the basest forms the habitations of wonderful talents,—a plain demonstration of this truth you shall find in the case of two of our citizens, who are the subject of my short story. One of these two was Messer Forese da Rabatta, a little man, deformed, and with a face as ugly as possible, but yet of so great legal learning, that he was esteemed by the most sagacious to be an armory of the civil law. The other, by name Giotto, was possessed of so excellent a genius, that there was no work of nature, the mother of all things, whose labors are as unceasing as the revolutions of the heavens, that he did not imitate with pen and pencil, so that it seemed not so much like as the same. So that many times we find the sense of men deceived by his works, taking that for true which is only painted. He it was that restored to the light that art, which had been many ages buried beneath the errors of those who painted to please the eyes of the ignorant, and not the intellect of the wise. Wherefore he may be worthily reckoned one of the stars of the glory of Florence, and the more, when we consider with what humility, though the head of all those of his calling, he refused the title of Maestro. Which refusal shone so much the more to his honor, when the title was usurped by those who knew less than he or his disciples. But if his art was great, not so was his person, nor was his aspect by any means more comely than that of Messer Forese. To come to my story. Both Messer Forese and Giotto had possessions in Mugello, and the former, having been out to visit his in the season when they hold the festivals at the farms, and returning home on a broken-down carriage-horse, fell in with the aforesaid Giotto, on the way to Florence, having in like manner been to visit his lands. Now Giotto was in no wise better off than he in horse or harness, or anything else. Both being old men, and going at a gentle pace, they joined company, when it happened, as it often does in summer, they were overtaken by a sudden shower. They took shelter, as soon as they could, in the house of a peasant, who was acquainted with them both. But

after a while, as there were no signs of fair weather, and they wished to be in Florence before night, they borrowed of the countryman two old cloaks, and two hoods, all ragged with age, but the best that were to be had, and set out. As they went along they soon found themselves soaked with water and covered with mud, by the splashing of their horses' feet, circumstances which do not add much to the respectability of one's appearance. For a while they rode in silence, but as the weather cleared up a little entered into conversation. And Messer Forese, riding along and listening to Giotto, who had a remarkable talent for conversation, began to consider him, his body, and head, and all over, and seeing everything so unshapely and out of order, without thinking of himself, began to laugh, and said, 'Giotto! suppose a stranger should come to meet us, who had never seen you, how long would it be before he would suspect you of being the greatest painter in the world, as you are?' To which Giotto presently replied: 'As soon, Messere, as he would suppose, from looking at you, that you knew your a, b, c.' At which Messer Forese perceived his error, and found himself paid in his own coin."

Since writing the above some days have passed, and I have nearly read through the Decameron. Naturally the subject has grown upon me, and I feel that it would be a work of time to give a complete account of my view of it. So take these imperfect notes in good part for the present.

Boccaccio did not act upon me with immediate attraction; to me he was not what we call "magnetic." My respect and liking for him grow each time I renew the acquaintance. Manliness, tenderness, nobleness, simplicity, nature, I find and admire in him. He is a true painter of man, *the creature of passion and circumstance*. "The plant man," he knows; but on the nobler side of this subject is unsatisfactory. With delicacy, refinement, *morbidezza*, he has little to do, and it is because we are aware of his almost entire deficiency in these attributes, that the broad jokes and broad nature of Boccaccio do not disgust us. Here is both his wealth and his poverty. But for us moderns, who, inheriting the civilization of all past time, have run the gauntlet of sentiment and refinement, so busy in adjusting the drapery of feeling, that the bone and sinew it should cover are well nigh forgotten, it is well to come back to Boccaccio, and his healthy morning freshness. One feeling, of which I am often aware, yet am not sure,

is this, that he is in a sense a mechanical artist. His figures seem too much made, too little conceived from within outwards. This effect may be attributable to the advanced age at which he embraced literature as a profession. What say you?
