

AWARD BOOKS

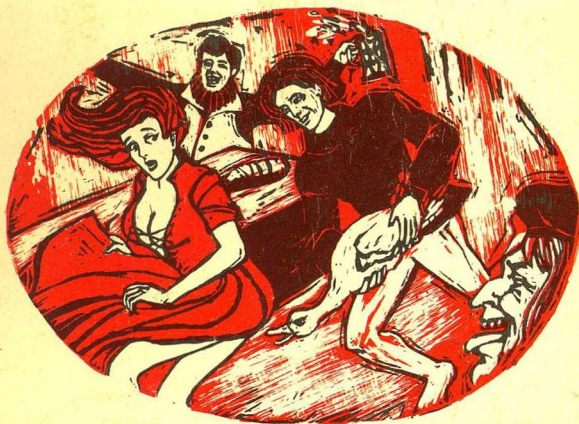


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FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ENGLISH—
A COMPLETE AND UNEXPURGATED EDITION
OF THE WORLD'S FIRST BESTSELLER

The Facetiae

OF
GIOVANNI FRANCESCO
POGGIO
BRACCIOLINI



THE RIBALD CLASSIC THAT SHOCKED—AND DELIGHTED
—RENAISSANCE ROME

a new translation by Bernhardt J. Hurwood

THE GENESIS OF THE JOKE

The *facetia*, or coarse jest, had its origins in Oriental, Greek and Roman antiquity, but it remained virtually unchanged until the 1400's when Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini brought his own wry turn of phrase, his own particular witty twist to the lusty collection of jokes and stories that bears his name. Poggio, it might be said, shaped the future of the joke, adding the barbed social comment, the sly wink, the occasional broad leer, the laugh that comes louder for being spurred by recognition.

Have you heard the one about the prostitute's daughter? The passionate friar with the infected finger? The pompous preacher? The promising psychic? No? Well, you will find them all in Poggio, along with a merry collection of roughtish knaves, cuckolded husbands, roistering prelates and abandoned women of all castes from court ladies to guttersnipes. *The Facetiae* is Poggio's Renaissance tapestry, woven from bright, satiric threads shot through with an earthy, ribald coarseness. For five hundred years it has rippled in gales of laughter. Now, for the first time, the complete *Facetiae* has been translated into modern English in a bold and vigorous version that would have delighted Poggio himself.

***THE FACETIAE
OF
GIOVANNI FRANCESCO
POGGIO
BRACCIOLINI***

A new translation by
BERNHARDT J. HURWOOD



AWARD BOOKS
NEW YORK



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Dedication

To my wife, whose faith, patience, and hard work above and beyond the line of duty helped make this book a reality.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The appearance of Poggio's *Facetiae* in English is long overdue. The work was published in a limited edition in 1879, but numerous passages which were considered too indelicate for translation were included in the original Latin. Despite this somewhat limiting factor the edition proved so popular that copies are virtually impossible to find today. Only two libraries in the world are known to have complete sets.

By examining Poggio's *Facetiae*, one discovers the genealogy of the joke as it is known today. We know that the *facetia*, or coarse jest, has its roots in Oriental, Greek, and Roman antiquity. In the deft hands of Poggio, however, we see it was given the witty twist that made it the basic pattern for jesters, wags, and comics.

In Poggio's *Facetiae*, we see a barbed, satiric comment on almost every aspect of Renaissance life. Virtually all women are depicted as whores, and all husbands as cuckolds. Doctors, lawyers, priests, and monks appear as scoundrels, fools, or a combination of both. Peasants run the gamut from homely philosopher to raving maniac. The supreme virtue in the eyes of Poggio, however, transcended sex, class, or station in life. It was to possess a witty tongue which enabled one to be absolute master of the devastating comeback. Here, then, is a bold and merciless picture of life, drawn with an acid pen as a series of distinctive, verbal cartoons.

Despite the fact that Poggio's book of *Facetiae* was placed on the *Index Expurgatorius* of the Catholic Church during the Council of Trent, on grounds of obscenity, insolence, and impertinence, Poggio the man never lost the respect of the Church fathers. They recognized that his satirical genius was a product of decadent 15th century Rome, where wit and vulgarity went hand in hand and acknowledged that the very "indecentcy" of Poggio's work was due more to the times than to any private predilections of the author.

The present translation is a blend of the original Latin text, with the Italian, French, and 19th century English versions. Every attempt has been made to offer a narrative that will read well in a modified present day idiom that at the same time preserves the spirit intended by Poggio himself. Thus, epithets or obscenities have been translated into their 20th century equivalents. No attempt has been made to euphemize, soft-pedal, or expurgate, but rather to present the reader with the spirit of Poggio's original.

PREFACE

In the age when proper young ladies and gentlemen walked about on limbs instead of legs, the Latin tongue was highly regarded for a number of reasons. Aside from endowing the cognoscenti with an ingredient essential to the maintenance of an erudite air, the knowledge of Latin imparted to them another fringe benefit. It was a key to a forbidden garden of "indecent books," an inviolable precinct, jealously guarded by custodians whose zeal was exceeded only by their sanctimonious purity.

An incident that occurred during the early years of the reign of Queen Victoria clearly illustrates this point. An English schoolboy made the mistake one hot summer's day, of browsing uninvited among the shelves of his headmaster's private library. The first thing to strike the boy as odd was the complete absence of familiar names. Instead of the friendly old classics there were rows of strange volumes with such captivating titles as *The Terrors of the Rod*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, and *The Battles of Venus*. He was in the grip of a dilemma. Which one of these fascinating tomes should he examine first? Instinctively he knew that each contained hitherto unrevealed mysteries of particular interest to adolescent boys. Pondering his decision, a venerable brown leather book, hoary with age, caught his attention. Inscribed on the cover in a meticulous hand was the title *Liber Facetiarum Poggii*. This one intrigued him more than the others. After all, he had

just won honors in Latin, besides, he had heard that *certain* books were so improper that even "those Frenchmen" denied them the use of their language—perhaps this was such a book.

Cautiously, he reached out for *Liber Facetiarum Poggii*, removing it from the shelf with extreme care. Unfortunately, he never had a chance to open the book. Due to one of those exasperating coincidences that perpetually plague misbehaving schoolboys, the headmaster chose that precise moment to arrive on the scene. Appraising the situation at once, he brandished his cane, glaring at his victim with a brand of pedagogal ferocity that has cowed generations of English students.

"Sir!" he thundered. "How dare you touch that book? Put it back at once!"

Then, advancing, and punctuating each phrase with a whack, he continued. "That is one of the most infamous books in the Latin language, and no Christian or gentleman ought to read it!"

The helpless lad was so busy dodging blows that he hardly had time to question why, then, such a book should have been there in the first place.

The headmaster's attitude toward the *Liber Facetiarum*, or *Facetiae*, as it was more commonly known, was typical of the universal one, for the book was not translated into English until 1879. But what really would have sent Poggio into gales of laughter was the curious fact that the work was not completely translated into his native Italian until 1924, nearly five-hundred years after it was written.

What was this book that for centuries caused shudders at the merest mention of its name, a book that even today (if found at all) is kept in special

collections under lock and key? Since 1450 when it was written it has been called many things but never has the *Liber Facetiarum* been accused of dullness. But then, a book that was used as source material by such eminent authors of ribaldry as Marguerite of Navarre and Rabelais, could hardly be called dull. Neither was the man who wrote it.

Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini was born on February 11, 1380, in the little Tuscan village of Terranuova. When Poggio showed an early inclination for scholarship, his father, a poor notary, sent him to Florence for an education. There the young man studied Greek under the celebrated Byzantine humanist, Emmanuel Chrysoloras, and Latin with Giovanni Malpoghino, better known as John of Ravenna. Influenced and encouraged by two of the most illustrious teachers of the age, Poggio made up his mind to pursue a literary career. This, of course, presented a choice peculiar to the times. A writer could either seek the patronage of a wealthy nobleman, and risk becoming nothing more than a glorified secretary, or he could take holy orders and enter the church. Always an independent thinker, Poggio resisted both courses. Desiring to be neither "a private servant nor a public slave," he wanted freedom to express his strong opinions whenever he chose.

"To the ecclesiastical profession I have always entertained an invincible objection," he said. Many years later he enumerated his reasons in a letter to his lifelong friend, Julian, Cardinal of San Angelo.

"I am determined," wrote Poggio, "not to assume the sacerdotal office; for I have seen many good men whom I have regarded as persons of good character and liberal dispositions, degenerate into avarice,

sloth, and dissipation, in consequence of their introduction into the priesthood . . .” Fearing that he might fall into the same trap, he concluded by reminding his friend, “I have too frequently observed that your brethren, at the time of their tonsure not only part with their hair, but also with their conscience and their virtue.”

Nevertheless, at the very dawn of the fabled quattrocento, Poggio journeyed to Rome. It was 1403. The eternal city with its panorama of squalor and splendor made a lasting impression on this ambitious youth of twenty-three. He saw naked *ragazzi* playing in dungheaps that rose malodorously alongside fragmentary remnants of Rome’s ancient grandeur. He marvelled to see richly garbed noblemen conversing with bearded merchants from Byzantium, ragged pilgrims and mendicant friars, courtesans, jugglers, troubadours, and thieves. More than before, Poggio was convinced that the world was too intriguing to be renounced by holy vows. But he had to earn the wherewithal to enjoy this fascinating *beau monde*, so, with understandable reservations, he entered the service of Pope Boniface IX as an apostolic secretary.

Despite his youth, Poggio’s fluency in Greek and Latin was outstanding. Vatican officials, quick to recognize such linguistic talent and to appreciate Poggio’s superb handwriting, assured the young man of a good position with no strings. As long as he agreed to wear clerical garb, he was not compelled to take holy orders.

Poggio’s duties were sufficiently light to afford ample leisure time, which he spent in pursuit of his personal interests, ranging from pretty girls to the deciphering of ancient inscriptions on Roman ruins.

Like so many other brilliant men, Poggio became something of an intellectual snob, firmly convinced that anyone unfamiliar with Greek and Latin was little better than an illiterate peasant. No class of society was exempt. His disrespect for certain members of the clergy became legendary. In one of his many outbursts on the subject he wrote, "By one word of the pontiff, the ignorant become in the estimation of the vulgar, learned; the stupid, wise; the uninstructed, accomplished—though, at the same time, the real character of the man is precisely the same as it was before."

In 1417 Poggio attended the historic Council of Constance. While the other delegates devoted their spare time to seeking out the 1,500 courtesans reported to be in town for the occasion, Poggio plunged into other business. One of his favorite pastimes—the one for which posterity was to honor him most highly—was literary sleuthing. Before the Council ended, he had managed to search out several dusty monastery libraries and dank, gloomy dungeons in Germany, Switzerland, and France. His success was staggering. He discovered, among other things, a complete works of Quintilian, several previously unknown orations of Cicero, the last twelve works of Plautus, and fragments of Petronius, Tacitus, and Aulus Gellius.

Poggio also had time to visit the hot baths at Baden. His reaction to them was not unlike that of a modern American businessman visiting Japan for the first time. The Germans captivated him. "They are rich by the mere disposition of their minds," he said. "Their motto is, *live while you live*." Describing the public baths in a letter to his friend, Niccolo Niccoli, Poggio wrote, "The baths are exposed to view on

every side, and are frequented by the lower order of people, of all ages and of each sex. Here males and females, entertaining no hostility toward each other, are separated by a simple railing. It is a droll sight to see decrepit old women and blooming maidens stepping into the water and exposing their charms to the profane eyes of the men . . .”

The private baths, Poggio extolled as demonstrating a superior attitude toward the *dolce vita* . . . “It is a pleasant sight,” he wrote, “to see young lasses tuning their lyres, like nymphs, with their scanty robes floating on the surface of the waters. They look indeed like so many Venuses emerging from the ocean. The women have a custom of playfully begging the men who come to see them bathe. The latter throw down small pieces of money, which they direct to the fairer damsels.”

He went on to describe in rich detail sumptuous banquets on floating tables, surrounded by dozens of nude guests, lying hastily, that although he did not attend any such parties himself, many of his colleagues did.

When the Council finally ended in 1418 with the deposition of the Pope, Poggio went to England. Some say he went there to look for old manuscripts, others infer that he fled to escape possible punishment for having expressed favorable sentiments about Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague. Since both men were burned as heretics, that supposition may be justified, although in Poggio’s case, it seems highly improbable. Poggio had become acquainted with Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, and uncle of Henry V. Accepting Beaufort’s invitation to visit England, Poggio spent three and a half years there as the bishop’s guest. Britain was a woeful disappoint-

ment to Poggio, who firmly believed the adage that English was the language in which one addressed horses. Cursing the British climate, Poggio reluctantly accepted it as one of God's eccentricities. The people, however, appalled the cultured Florentine. He regarded them as having barely graduated from the ranks of barbarism. Not only did the nobility scorn cities and live like rustics on country estates—horror of horrors—they often behaved like merchants, demeaning themselves by trading in wool and other commodities. They even treated wealthy tradesmen as social equals on occasion. Worst of all, however, were their table manners, described by Poggio as verging upon raw savagery.

To illustrate his point, Poggio told of a group of foreign drinkers, including a single Englishman, who had between them but a single goblet. Each drinker, upon swallowing his portion, passed the vessel to his neighbor. After a firkin or so of wine had been consumed, and it was the Englishman's turn to drink again, he peered blearily into the mug, reached in with his finger, and fished out a soggy fly. Then, after draining the goblet, he replaced the insect, hiccupped, passed the tankard to the man on his right, and remarked, "I have no taste for flies in my wine, sir, but as for you I cannot say."

On his return to Rome, Poggio was given another important secretarial post with the curia. By then, not only had he achieved a formidable reputation as a scholar and wit, but his meticulously legible script was in great demand. It was later said that "the bookhand of Poggio's best period is regarded . . . as representing the most highly developed form of the humanistic [Roman] script." So superb was his hand-

writing that when printing was invented, his style served as the model for Roman type.

Poggio's career as a Vatican secretary spanned a period of fifty years and eight popes. During that time he acquired a catholicity of taste and a diversity of talents seldom achieved by others. Like many of his contemporaries, he engaged in frequent bitter literary feuds with colleagues. Developing a mastery of the scurrilous invective, Poggio was so skilled that only the bravest dared cross quills with him on the parchment battlefield. Few developed an ability to match his vitriolic pen. For some years one of Poggio's staunchest enemies was his onetime friend and fellow humanist, Francesco Filelfo. After being compared by Filelfo to "a black viper, whose pestiferous breath spreads through the ambient air the seeds of death," Poggio replied with matching venom.

"You stinking billy-goat, you horned monster, you malevolent vituperator, father of lies and author of chaos . . . May Divine vengeance destroy you as an enemy of virtue, a parricide who tries to ruin wives and decency by mendacity, slanders, and most foul, false imputations. If you must be so scornfully arrogant, write your satires against those who debauch your wife. Vomit the putrescence of your stomach upon those who put horns on your forehead."

This attack went on to cast the vilest imaginable aspersions upon Filelfo's ancestry. It was hardly the sort of language one would expect from the pen of a pontifical secretary. Yet, in spite of such mutual vilification, these two men, who in another age might cheerfully have sought to slit each other's throats, reconciled their differences and remained friends to the end. Neither man forgot, however, that the

lashes of poetic wit produce lasting stings, and they continued to unleash their diatribes upon other, more vulnerable enemies. To keep in practice, Poggio would periodically reread the more scabrous epigrams of Martial and Horace. Then, whenever the gauntlet was thrown in his face, he would sharpen his pen, stir up his inkpot, and hurl shattering apothegms of his own at anyone who dared to arouse his ire.

By the time he reached early middle age, Poggio had seen a great deal of the world. He had travelled extensively in the company of the intellectual elite, yet, he had frequently rubbed shoulders with the stupid, the indigent, and the corrupt. As a member of the Vatican inner circle, he developed a powerful sense of cynical skepticism. He and his companions were the most enlightened members of the curia. As the most sophisticated men in all Italy, if not in all Europe, they evolved a sardonic philosophy that modern observers would find almost agnostic in outlook. It was a time much like our own, in that dishonest politics, flagrant abuse of power, morality, and propriety were open and commonplace. Incompetent fools often occupied positions of authority. Gradually, Poggio and his colleagues came to regard such incompetent leadership with contempt. This reaction to the moral hypocrisy which permeated not only the church, but all of society was the only one possible for this group of humanists. Consequently, since they were vested with no real power themselves, the most effective way for them to express their feelings was through bitter satire and searing invective. In the writing produced by these angry middle-aged men, licentiousness became the symbol of freedom, and lewdness, that of knowledge.

What began as an informal nightly assemblage of papal secretaries, developed into a kind of ecclesiastical club providing the members with a forum where they could indulge in their own brand of fun. Poggio called it "... our *Bugiale*, a kind of laboratory for fibs, which the Pope's secretaries formerly instituted for their amusement. Until the reign of Pope Martin we were in the habit of selecting, within the precincts of the court, a secluded room where we collected the news of the day, and conversed on various subjects, mostly with a view to relaxation, but sometimes also with serious intent. There no one was spared, and we freely attacked whomever or whatever met with our disapproval; often the Pope himself was the subject of our criticisms, so that many attended our gatherings, lest, in their absence, they be the object of our first chapter."

Although none of the secretaries attending knew it, their *Bugiale* was destined to become the birthplace of the first book of jokes in western literature. It was here that Poggio collected the anecdotes and pithy tales that would later fill his *Liber Facetiarum*. There society was dissected, ground up, and reshaped to resemble a grotesque harlequin who howled impudently and gestured with calculated indecency. Reality and stereotype were blended until it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. The world at large became a kaleidoscopic carnival; earthy, materialistic, and inhabited by cuckolded husbands, cheating wives, lascivious clergymen, and monumental fools. It was a topsy-turvy place where the rich were stupid, and the wise, poor; where robbers and whores were virtuous. Where virtue itself was a sin.

While many of the tales told had no moral at all,

and were merely calculated to win the biggest laugh of the evening, some had very penetrating morals. What all had in common, however, was a concern with basic human shortcomings—plus absolute impiety and utter cynicism. A few, while lacking punch lines, and tending to ramble, were so caustic and witty that their shortcomings mattered not at all in the long run. All of them bear testimony that the *quattrocento* was in some ways an age of freer expression than our own. Nothing was sacred as long as the point of the story was made. Such uninhibited lack of restraint, especially in regard to bodily functions, sexual and otherwise, provoked bitter attacks in later, less tolerant times. It was the irreverence, however, that incurred the wrath of the church nearly a century after Poggio had collected his *Facetiae*. At the Council of Trent in 1545, Poggio's book of *Facetiae* was placed on the *Index Expurgatorius* by a gathering of churchmen who, unfortunately, had been born too late to enjoy the personal friendship of the author.

When Poggio reached the age of fifty-five, he finally decided to settle down, marry, and think about raising a family. There were certain sentimental problems though, that were not resolved without a sigh or two of regret. With some reluctance, he put aside his faithful old mistress and fourteen children, and returned to Florence. There, upon accepting a governmental post, he married Vaggia Manente de Bondelmonti, an eighteen-year-old beauty of a noble and wealthy family. This was very much in keeping with Poggio's firm belief that "There have been more lovers than despisers of riches amongst philosophers."

The marriage was opportune in more ways than

one. The bridegroom had recently suffered a stinging financial loss, as well as the deep humiliation of having been kidnapped by a gang of Tiber River pirates who were, alas, no lovers of literature. The entreaties of friends on the unfortunate victim's behalf had no effect. Only gold, said the pirates, would save Poggio. When the ransom money did not materialize, Poggio had to bail himself out. Thus, the six-hundred-florin dowry that accompanied Vaggia's hand was a welcome gift indeed.

Although everyone wished the newly wedded pair the best of everything, there were the usual pessimists who predicted a dire future. The most notable of these was the Pope, Eugenius IV.

Commenting on the matter to his old friend, the cardinal of San Angelo, Poggio wrote in April, 1436, "It is a common observation that there are few, if any, married men who do not become weary of their wives in the course of one year; the pontiff has allowed me six months for my period of probation. The fifth month is now expired; and my wife daily grows upon my esteem, and is daily more agreeable to me and the more compliant with my wishes."

Poggio and Vaggia fooled them all, for they brought five sons and a daughter into the world.

It was not until he was seventy that Poggio actually set his *Facetiae* down on paper. Some say he wrote the book merely for his own amusement, and others attribute it to a desire to improve his Latin style. In all likelihood the former theory is the most valid one. Poggio was too old and too self-assured to worry about improving a talent already acclaimed one of the world's best. On the other hand he missed the warm, laughter-filled evenings of the *Bugiale*, for

he said, "Now that most of those boon companions have departed this life, the *Bugiale* has come to an end; whether men or the times are to be held responsible, it is a fact that genial talk and merry conversations have gone out of fashion."

It was undoubtedly with a deep nostalgia that he sat down at his desk and recorded from memory the anecdotes and tales that comprised his *Facetiae*. What set the work apart from all the imitations that followed, was Poggio's own touch. Although the writing lacked the grace and poetry of Boccaccio, it had a simplicity which made it the prototype of anything similar that was ever to follow.

Anticipating future criticisms, Poggio wrote in his *Apologia*, "It is . . . an honorable, indeed a necessary thing, praised by the philosophers, to comfort the mind weighed down by troubles and reflections, and to lead it to gaiety by means of some light recreation . . . and in any case, let any who are over zealous censors and too bitter critics spare themselves the reading of these conversations—for . . . I like my readers to be of serene and happy mind."

As Poggio soon discovered, his most frivolous work was destined to delight more readers than he had ever thought possible. Men who never troubled themselves to read Poggio's history of Florence or his life of Marco Polo went out of their way to obtain the *Facetiae*. The ink had barely dried on his fine Roman script when movable metal type was invented. Suddenly Poggio's *Facetiae* was a best seller—perhaps the first ever printed.

Of the numerous editions of his work, Poggio said himself, "They flooded all Italy, overflowed into France, Spain, Germany, England, and every other country where Latin was understood."

Even after he was gone, Poggio's love of the belly laugh seemed to follow him, thus, to a degree, cheating the grave of its somber melancholy. After his death, the citizens of Florence commissioned the celebrated sculptor, Donatello, to execute a statue of Poggio. It was duly completed and placed with appropriate ceremony in the church of Santa Maria del Fiore. In 1560, however, Francesco, Grand Duke of Tuscany, ordered alterations on the church. Poggio was moved—unless, as a few wags have suggested, he reached from beyond to take a hand in the proceedings. For to this day, the statue of Poggio Bracciolini, with its subtly knowing grin, stands surrounded by the twelve Apostles. But then, Poggio was always a devotee of the improbable ending.

Tale I *Of a poor sailor of Gaeta*

For the most part, the common people of Gaeta make their living from the sea. A sailor among them who was very poor left his young wife and meagerly furnished house to travel anywhere he could in search of a living.

After being absent for nearly five years, he rushed home to see his wife, who, in desperation, had become the mistress of another man and never expected to see her husband again. On entering his house, the sailor observed that a major part of it had been repaired, redecorated, and enlarged. Wondering at this, he asked his wife how it had happened that the ugly shack had become so attractive.

"By the Grace of God, who gives help to all men," replied the wife.

"God be praised!" said the sailor, "for having bestowed such kindness on us."

Then in the bedroom he saw an elegant bed and other pieces of furniture far beyond his wife's means and again he asked where everything had come from. Once more she replied that it had come through the Grace of God. And again the sailor said, "Thank God for His great bounty."

The man began to see other strange and unfamiliar things around the house. These were also gifts of God. He wondered, however, at the great favors lavished upon him by the good Lord, when a pretty little boy over three years old appeared, and began caressing his mother. Looking at the child, the hus-

band asked whose he was, to which the wife answered, "He is mine." In amazement, the husband asked how the wife could have had a child while he was absent. The woman replied that the boy, too, was hers by the Grace of God. The man became indignant at such an overabundance of Divine Grace, which had gone so far as to procreate children for him, and he said, "Indeed, my obligations to God are great for his having taken such good care of my interests." It did seem to him, however, that God had been much too considerate, providing him even with children in his absence.

Tale II *Of a doctor who cured madmen*

One of our conversations turned to the senselessness, if not the utter stupidity, of those who kept dogs and hawks with which to hunt game. Paul the Florentine got up and said, "The madman of Milan was quite right in laughing at such people." When asked to tell the story, he continued, saying, "There was once a Milanese citizen who practiced as a doctor for the demented and the insane, and he attempted to cure within a specific time all those who were entrusted to his care.

"The way his cure worked was this. He had in the courtyard of his house an obscenely filthy ditch of fetid water. The madmen who were brought to him, he kept tied naked to stakes in it. Some he immersed to the knees, some to the genitals, others even deeper, depending upon the gravity of their condition.

He left them there without food to steep in the water until they appeared to be sane.

"Among his patients there was a man he kept in the water up to his thighs, who after fifteen days regained his senses, and begged to be taken from the water. He was exempted from this cruelty on condition that he would not leave the courtyard. After five days of obedience he was given the freedom of the house on condition that he remain strictly within it. Since his companions were still in the water, he followed the doctor's orders scrupulously.

"One day while standing at the threshold of the front door, which he dared not cross for fear of being returned to the ditch, he saw a young nobleman approach on horseback. The nobleman had a hawk on his arm, and was followed by two hunting dogs. It was a novel sight to the patient, for his madness had caused him to lose all memory of the world he had once known, so he called out to the youth and asked, 'Please listen to me for a moment and answer me if you will. What is that thing you are seated on, and what good is it to you?'

"'A horse,' replied the young man, 'and I use it to hunt birds.'

"'And the thing you carry on your wrist, what is it, and what do you use it for?'

"'It is a hawk, trained to catch ducks and partridges.'

"'And the creatures following you, what are they, and of what use are they to you?'

"'They are dogs, trained to hunt down the game.'

"'Ah!' exclaimed the madman. 'But this game, which requires so much preparedness, how much does it bring you in during the course of a year?'

“‘I don’t know,’ replied the youth. ‘Not more than six ducats.’

“‘And how much do the horse, hawk, and dogs cost you?’

“‘Fifty ducats.’

“Astounded at the young nobleman’s foolishness, the madman hooted, ‘Ho, ho! Get away from here as fast as you can before the doctor returns! If he catches you here he will regard you as the craziest man on earth, and to cure you he will plunge you into the ditch right up to your neck!’

“Thus he illustrated the folly of hunting, unless indulged in occasionally by the rich for the purpose of bodily exercise.”

Tale III *Bonaccio de Guasci, who rose late from bed*

When he was with us in Constance, Bonaccio, a fine young man of the Guasci family, always arose late from bed. Upon being criticized for his laziness by friends, he smiled and told them,

“I listen to fascinating conversations. The moment I wake up every morning I see two female figures, Industry and Laziness. The first one urges me to get up and do things, not to waste my time in bed. The other chides the first, and insists that I must remain quiet, that because of the cold weather I would be wise to remain between the sheets and keep myself warm, that the body needs quiet, and should not be exerted by overwork. Industry keeps arguing to the contrary. Meanwhile, all during their arguments, I

remain an impartial judge, leaning neither to one side nor to the other. I keep listening to them carry on so in hopes that they will eventually agree. So if I rise late, it is actually because I am waiting for the matter to be settled."

Tale IV *Of a Jew who had been converted to Christianity*

A Jew who had been urged by many people to embrace the Christian faith was not eager to part with his worldly goods. He was advised by many to give them to the poor, since, according to the Gospel, which is truth itself, he would be repaid a hundred times over.

Convinced at last, he converted, and distributed all his possessions to the poor, the needy, and the mendicants. As a result, for a month, many Christians competed with each other for the privilege of showing him their hospitality. He was showered with praise on all sides. But since he made a precarious living at best, he found himself in a state of perpetual anxiety, hoping for the promised hundredfold return. Meanwhile, people grew weary of feeding him, and he became so impoverished that he fell ill with diarrhea and had to be hospitalized.

He despaired of ever recovering either his health or the hundredfold of his wealth. One day upon being forced by his discomfort to get some fresh air, he got out of bed and went to a nearby meadow to relieve himself. When he was finished, as he looked

for some grass to wipe his bottom, he found a piece of linen rolled up and filled with precious gems.

Having again become rich, he consulted a doctor, regained his health, bought a house and property, and lived from then on in the most gracious opulence. Then everyone said to him, "See, did we not tell you that God would repay you a hundred-fold?"

"Absolutely," acknowledged the man. "He certainly has, but not before my turds had nearly bled me to death."

The saying refers to those who are slow to give or acknowledge a favor.

Tale V *Of the fool who thought his wife had two vaginas*

A peasant of our district, an idiotic fool who knew absolutely nothing about sex, got married. Now it happened one night that his wife rolled over in bed so that her bottom fit right in his lap. His spear was standing and accidentally landed right in the target. Delighted by his effortless entrance, he asked his wife if she had two vaginas.

"Of course," she replied.

"Ho, ho!" he answered at once. "I am satisfied with one, the second is indeed superfluous."

With that, the crafty wife, who was having a secret affair with the parish priest, said, "In that case we can give the second one away. Let's donate it to the church, and to our priest, who will be very

grateful to have it. You won't be depriving yourself of anything, since one is enough for you."

The peasant agreed at once, believing that this was a good way to rid himself of an unnecessary responsibility. They accordingly invited the priest to dinner and explained the matter to him. After the meal all three climbed into bed, the woman in the middle, facing her husband, and the priest behind her. The gluttonous priest, hungering after this delicate morsel for a long time, finally made the first move. The wife, equally anxious, whispered back softly. At this, the peasant, fearing that his property was being trespassed upon, cried out, "Hold it, friend! Remember our bargain, use your own part and leave mine alone!"

To which the priest replied, "God forbid! I don't envy your property in the slightest as long as I can use the church's portion."

These words reassured the stupid peasant, who then told the priest to go ahead and take advantage of the concession granted to the church.

Tale VI *Of a widow whose lust was kindled by a friar*

Hypocrites are the worst species alive. They happened to be the subject of conversation at a party I attended once, where someone remarked that they always have an abundance of everything. They are invariably covetous of rank and wealth, yet they manage to fool everyone into believing that they

will only accept honors against their will, and then, only out of obedience to their superiors.

One of those present then said, "They are like a certain Blessed Paolo who lived in Pisa, one of those who are commonly referred to as Apostles, and who sit humbly in doorways without begging for anything."

Upon being asked for an explanation, he went on to say, "This Paolo was known as *Il Beato* (the holy one) because of the holiness of his life. Occasionally he sat in the doorway of a certain widow who always gave him alms in the form of food and drink."

He was so handsome that after seeing him many times she was thoroughly smitten with him. After having fed him, she would urge him to return the next day, at which time she would make certain that he had a fine meal. Consequently he came to her door often, and at last, she invited him in for dinner. He accepted at once, and proceeded to stuff his belly with food and drink. When he was done, the woman, unable to restrain her lust, began hugging and kissing him. She declared that she would not let him out of her sight until he had satisfied her burning passion.

He pretended to detest the woman's fervent desires, which only made her press him more ardently until he finally gave in, saying, "Since you are determined to commit such a sin, I call upon God to witness that you alone are to blame. I proclaim myself free of guilt. Here! Take the cursed flesh! (The shaft was indeed already erect.) Do with it as you will, I won't even touch it!"

He was thus forced to submit to the woman, and because he refused to touch his own meat, he was able to shift all guilt upon her.

Tale VII *Of a bishop on horseback*

One day I was going to the palace of the pontiff, when one of our bishops rode by on horseback. He was apparently so absorbed in thought that he failed to notice a passerby bare his head and greet him. Ascribing the affront to pride or arrogance, the man said, "There goes someone who has not left half his ass at home, he takes it around with him." Signifying him to be an ass for not acknowledging a token of respect.

Tale VIII *Zuccaro's witty saying*

As we were strolling through a town whose name I have forgotten, Zuccaro (one of the wittiest men who ever lived) and I came upon a place where a wedding was taking place. It was the day after the bride had moved into her new home, and we stood there for a while enjoying the sight of the young men and women dancing. Zuccaro smiled and said, "These people have gone through their matrimony, whereas I have long since gone through my patrimony." He was, of course, making himself the butt of his own joke, for he had squandered his inheritance in gambling and high living.

Tale IX *Of a magistrate*

Upon his arrival in Florence, a new magistrate called a meeting of the most prominent citizens. When they gathered at the cathedral he delivered the customary speech which proved to be long and wearisome.

In the effort to aggrandize himself he opened by explaining that he had been a Roman senator. He then expounded with windy verbosity on all of his previous accomplishments, going on to quote at length all the praises others had given him. Next he enumerated all the details of his departure from the eternal city with his retinue, followed by the events of his first day's journey, which had taken him to Sutri. Then he gave a minute account of everything he had done there. This was followed in turn by a day by day description of where he had been, who had entertained him, and what he had done.

Many hours had already been wasted, yet, he had not even reached Sienna. Everyone was exhausted by this long and dreary speech. The end seemed nowhere in sight, and it appeared as though the entire day would be wasted in listening to his foolish prattle. As night approached, a subordinate, who was a bit of a wag, whispered in the magistrate's ear, "My lord, it's getting late. You'd better hurry, for if you don't get to Florence today, which has been set for your arrival, your mission will have failed."

On hearing this, the fool being as stupid as he was

loquacious, finally told his listeners that he would have to terminate the meeting and resume his journey, quite unmindful of the fact that he had already arrived in Florence.

Tale X *Of a woman who deceived her husband*

My countryman, Pietro, once told me this ridiculous tale which illustrates the craftiness of women. He had been having an affair with the wife of a peasant who spent most of his nights sleeping in the fields in order to avoid his creditors. One night when my friend was in the woman, her husband unexpectedly came home. Hastily hiding her lover under the bed, she turned to her husband and upbraided him bitterly for having returned, accusing him of doing his best to make certain that he would spend the rest of his life in prison.

"The governor's soldiers just searched this whole place so they could arrest you and haul you off to jail," she said. "But when I told them that you usually sleep outdoors, they went away threatening to return."

Terrified, the peasant tried to think of a way to escape, but the gates of the town were already closed. So the wife said, "You poor thing, what will you do? If they capture you, you're finished!"

Trembling with fear, he kept asking his wife for advice. She, prepared to deceive, said, "Climb up to the dovecote and spend the night. I'll close the trap door and take away the ladder, and no one will suspect that you're there."

He followed his wife's advice, she, meanwhile, locked the trapdoor after him so that he could not get out, and freed her lover from his hiding place. He came out and simulated the return of the governor and his soldiers, kicking up a great rumpus, while the woman defended her husband, who shivered with terror in his concealment. Finally after the tumult was allowed to die down, the lovers went to bed and dedicated the night to Venus, while the husband was left to sulk among the pigeons and their dung.

Tale XI *Of a priest who did not know when Palm Sunday fell*

Aello is a rustic little town in our Apennine mountains where there once lived a village priest who was more crude and ignorant than the peasants themselves. Since he was unable to keep track of the seasons or times of the year, he was hardly in a position to tell the people when Lent came.

He went one year to the annual market which was always held at Terranuova on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. When he saw the priests preparing palm and olive branches for the next day he was amazed at first, until he realized his error and saw that Lent had passed without his observing it.

He hurried home and began preparing branches and palms for the following day, then called his people together and said, "Today is the day when it is customary to give out olive branches and palm leaves, for next week is Easter. We won't have to fast

long this year, though, for our penitence will last only seven days. The reason is this. Carnival was quite late because of the cold weather, and had difficulty crossing the mountains on account of the bad roads. Thus Lent was also late and could only make the journey with great effort, barely managing to carry along one week after being forced to leave the others behind. Therefore, come, all of you, make your confessions and do your penance in the short time that still remains."

*Tale XII Of some peasants sent to buy a
crucifix who asked whether it should be dead or
alive*

Some peasants from the same town were sent to Arezzo to buy a wooden crucifix for their church. When the crucifix maker saw that he was dealing with a bunch of thickheaded numbskulls, he decided to play a joke on them. After listening to their request he asked them if they wanted their crucifix dead or alive. After taking some time and deliberating over the matter thoroughly, they told him that they would prefer a live one. This way, if their people weren't satisfied, they could put it to death at once.

Tale XIII *The retort of a cook to the most
illustrious Duke of Milan*

The old Duke of Milan, a prince of most elegant taste in all matters, had an excellent cook who had been sent to France to perfect his art. During the great war that he was waging against the Florentines, the Duke received some bad news that upset him severely. Shortly afterwards, when he sat down to eat, he strenuously disapproved of every dish that was set before him. This tasted badly, that was poorly prepared, and so forth. He sent everything back and summoned the cook, upon whom he proceeded to heap vituperations for not knowing his business. The cook, who was not afraid to be brutally outspoken, snapped back, "If the Florentines have ruined your appetite, what fault is it of mine? My dishes are savory and prepared with great skill. It is the Florentines who have made your blood boil and have taken away your appetite." At this, the Duke, who was a most human man, laughed at his cook's bluntness.

Tale XIV *Another reply of the same cook to the
Duke*

The same cook, during the aforementioned war, once upon seeing the Duke looking nervous and

upset, quipped, "No wonder he looks that way, he is trying to accomplish two impossible things, first to be completely unrestrained, and second to fatten Francesco Barbavara, that opulent wretch of such consummate cupidity." In this way he chided both the overpowering ambition of the Duke, and the insatiable greed of Francesco.

Tale XV *The request of the same cook to the same Duke*

The same cook, seeing hordes of people coming to the Duke to solicit favors, approached him at the dinner table and asked to be transformed into an ass. Astounded by such a request, the Duke demanded an explanation.

"Because," said the cook. "I see that all those you have elevated to power and have given high honors or offices, have gotten so swollen with pride and arrogance that they've become veritable asses. Therefore, I would like you to make an ass of me, too."

Tale XVI *Of Gianozzo Visconti*

Antonio Lusco, a witty and learned man, was asked by an acquaintance once to look over a letter which the man wanted to send to the Pope. After examining it, Lusco advised the fellow to correct and change a certain passage.

The next day the man brought the letter back and presented it as if the changes had been made, although they had not. After inspecting it, Lusco said, "What do you take me for, Gianozzo Visconti?" When we asked him what he meant by this, he explained, "Gianozzo, who used to be the governor of Vicenza, was a very good natured man. But he was very thick, both in body and mind. He frequently called his secretary in and asked him to write a letter to the old Duke of Milan. He would only dictate an insignificant part of it, the part which contained the compliments and polite platitudes. The rest, he left up to the secretary, who shortly afterwards would bring back the finished letter. Gianozzo would pretend to read it, and never failed to find something wrong. "This is no good!" he would say, "Go and fix it." The secretary, wise to his master's foolishness, came back ere long with the letter unchanged, pretending to have rewritten it. Gianozzo would then take it in his hand as though he were going to read it, then after giving it a superficial glance, would say, "Now it is fine. Go seal it and send it to the Duke." And this was what he did with all his letters.

Tale XVII *Concerning one of Visconti's tailors,
by comparison*

Once Pope Martin commissioned Antonio Lusco to write a letter. After reading it, the pontiff ordered him to show it to a friend of mine in whom he had the greatest confidence. The friend, however, being

at the dinner table, and slightly drunk on wine at the time, thoroughly disapproved of the letter, and insisted that it be rewritten in an entirely different fashion.

Antonio then told Bartolomeo de Bardi, who was there, "I'll do with my letter exactly what Giovanni Galeazzo Visconti's tailor did with his master's breeches. I shall come back tomorrow before he has had anything to eat or drink, and my letter will be satisfactory."

Bartolomeo asked what this meant, and Antonio explained, saying, "Giovanni Galeazzo Visconti, father of the old Duke of Milan, was a huge, fat, and corpulent man. Many times, after stuffing his belly with huge quantities of food and drink he would go to bed, summon his tailor, and heap upon him vituperations, accusing him of having made his breeches too tight. He would then order the tailor to alter them so that they would no longer cause such discomfort. "I will obey your commands," the tailor would say. "Tomorrow they will fit you perfectly." Then he would take the garment and throw it on a hook without altering it in the slightest. Sometimes the others would ask, "Why don't you alter this article of clothing which squeezes our master's belly so?" To which he would answer, "Tomorrow when his lordship arises after digesting his food and empties his bowels, the garment will be wide enough."

In the morning after he had brought back the breeches, Visconti would pull them on and say, "They are fine now, they don't offend me at all."

In the same way, Antonio explained, his letter would please after the wine had been digested.

Tale XVIII *A complaint of robbery before Facino Cane*

Someone complained to Facino Cane, who was a cruel man and one of the leading condottieri of our age, that he had been robbed of his cloak by one of the captain's soldiers. Seeing that he was clad in a good tunic, Facino asked the man if he had been wearing it when he was robbed. When the fellow said, "Yes," Facino retorted, "Get out of here! The man you say robbed you couldn't possibly be one of my soldiers. None of them would ever have left you with such good clothing."

Tale XIX *A cardinal's exhortation to the Pope's troops*

When the Spanish cardinal waged war against the Pope's enemies in Piceno, the armies stood face to face, and the followers of the pontiff had to kill or be killed. With many militant words, the cardinal exhorted the soldiers to fight, assuring them that those who fell in battle would dine with God and the angels and be absolved of all their sins. He was certain that this prospect would encourage them to face death with all alacrity. When his exhortation was finished, he withdrew from the battlefield. Then one of the soldiers called out to him, "And you," the

man asked. "Aren't you going to dine in our company?"

"No," replied the cardinal. "It isn't my dinner time yet and I'm not hungry."

Tale XX *A retort to the Patriarch*

One day the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who ruled the entire Apostolic Chancery, called a meeting of the lawyers, and castigated some of them bitterly. One of them, Tommaso Biraco, acting as spokesman for the group, made a sharp reply. Turning towards him, the Patriarch declared, "You have a bad head!"

But Biraco, who was a man quick to attack with his wit, retorted, "You are absolutely right. If I had a good head our business would be in a much better state and there wouldn't be any necessity for all this squabbling."

"Then you take the blame?" asked the Patriarch.

"Not I," replied Biraco. "It's my head that I blame."

Thus he made fun of the Patriarch, head of all the lawyers, who was reputed to have a thick skull himself.

Tale XXI *Of Pope Urban VI*

Someone else made a similar facetious remark at the expense of the former pope, Urban VI. During a

bitter argument with this man, Urban finally exclaimed, "You have a bad head!" To which the other replied, "That's exactly what the common people say about you, Holy Father."

Tale XXII *Of a priest who brought his bishop capons instead of clerical garb*

Angelo, Bishop of Arezzo, a friend of ours, once summoned his priests to a synod, instructing all those who were vested with dignity to wear their clerical garb, or, as they say in Italian, with *cappe e cotte* [cassock and cloak]. A certain priest who did not have these vestments brooded at home wondering where he would get them. His housekeeper, seeing him so glum, asked him what was wrong. He explained that he had to attend the synod with *cappe e cotte*, which he plainly did not possess. "Oh, good sir," exclaimed the housekeeper. "You didn't understand your instruction at all. The bishop didn't ask you to bring *cappe e cotte*. It was *capponi cotti* [cooked capon] he wanted. *That* is what you must bring him."

So the priest took the woman's advice and took cooked capons with him. He was well received by the bishop, who laughed and told him that he was the only one who had really understood his instructions.

Tale XXIII *Of a friend who suffered to see
his inferiors, both in learning and integrity, attain
preference over himself*

Luck dominates the Roman Court and there is little room for ability or integrity. Everything is gained by intrigue or chance, not to mention money, which seems to rule the world.

A friend of mine, bitter over the preference given to his moral and intellectual inferiors, complained to Angelotto, Cardinal of San Marco. He said that no one took into account his true worth, and that he was bypassed by people who could not compare with him. He told of the pains he had taken to educate himself and acquire knowledge.

Then promptly attacking the vice of the curia, the Cardinal said, "Here learning and science mean nothing. However, do not lose heart. Spend some of your time unlearning what you know, and learning the vices that you do not, if you wish to be accepted by the pontiff."

Tale XXIV *A Madwoman*

A woman from my city who seemed to be mad was taken by her husband and relatives to a sooth-sayer, who, they hoped would cure her. In order to cross the Arno River they put her on the shoulders of

the strongest man. Suddenly she began wriggling her buttocks simulating the movements of coitus, screaming at the top of her lungs, "I want to be fucked!" Thus she revealed the source of her affliction.

The man carrying her fell into such a fit of laughter that he tumbled into the water. The others burst out laughing also when they learned the cure for this insanity, asserting that incantations would not do the job, but that coition would restore her to health. Then turning to the husband they said, "You will be your wife's best doctor."

So they all went home, and when the husband had fulfilled his marital obligations, the woman's mind returned to its former state. This is the best remedy for the insanity of women.

Tale XXV *Of a woman who stood on the bank of the Po*

Two women of the sort who serve the needs of men were being taken to Ferrara by two members of the curia in a boat. A woman standing on the bank of the Po, seeing the two females, shouted, "Oh you fools! You think there aren't enough whores in Ferrara already? You'll find more of them there than you will decent women in Venice!"

Tale XXVI *About the Abbot of Septimo*

The Abbot of Septimo, a great fat man, met a peasant on the way to Florence one evening and asked if he would get through one of the gates to the city. What the abbot meant was would he get to the city before the gates were closed. The peasant, however, joking about the abbot's fatness, said, "Of course. If my haywagon gets through, why shouldn't you?"

Tale XXVII *The pregnant sister of a citizen of Constance*

To illustrate the kind of freedom that was demanded by many during the Council of Constance, a noble English Bishop related the following story to a grand conclave of the prelates:

There lived in Constance a citizen whose unmarried sister had gotten pregnant. When he learned the cause of her swelling belly, he drew his sword under the pretence of running her through, and demanded to know the cause of it. Terrified, the girl cried out that it was the work of the Council, that the Council had made her pregnant. Learning this, the brother refrained from punishing her out of fear and reverence of the Council. While certain others

sought different liberties, he preferred sexual freedom.

Tale XXVIII *A saying of the Emperor
Sigismund*

Someone objected before the Emperor Sigismund that there was no freedom in Constance. "On the contrary," he said. "If there wasn't the greatest freedom here, you would not speak out so freely. Indeed, free speech is the greatest sign of freedom."

Tale XXIX *A saying of the Roman priest,
Lorenzo*

On the day that Pope Eugenius made a cardinal of the Roman, Angelotto, a humorous priest named Lorenzo went home cheerfully applauding, and bubbling over with laughter and joy. When his neighbors asked him what good fortune he had encountered that made him so lively and happy, he said, "It is wonderful, there is great hope for me. After seeing fools and madmen made into cardinals, and what with Angelotto being crazier than I, it seems certain that in the near future I too, will be a cardinal."

Tale XXX *A Miracle*

This year, nature has brought a number of monsters into the world in various places. In the territory of Sinigallia, which is in the Picentino country, a cow gave birth to a dragon of amazing size. Its head was larger than that of a calf, and its neck was as long as a man's forearm, while its body was doglike, only longer. When the cow saw what she had spawned, she bellowed as loud as she could and tried to flee in terror. But the dragon arose and wrapped its tail around her hind legs, put its mouth to her udders, sucked out all the milk, then left the cow and fled to the nearby woods. After this, the cow's teats and other parts of her body touched by the dragon's tail became blackened as though burned, and remained that way for a long time.

The cowherds (in whose fields the cow had been) affirmed what they had seen, and that the cow has since had calves. All of this was in a letter from Ferrara.

Tale XXXI *Told by the master, Hugo of Sienna*

That distinguished man, Hugo of Sienna, the principal physician of our time, has also told me that he himself saw a two-headed cat born in Ferrara.

Tale XXXII *About another monster*

In the vicinity of Padua during the month of June there was born a calf with two heads and a single body, having two sets of connected fore and hind legs. This monster was put on display for profit, and many people affirm that they saw it.

Tale XXXIII *About still another monster*

It is beyond doubt that the replica of a sea monster found recently on the coast of Dalmatia was brought to Ferrara. From the navel up it had the body of a man, and below, that of a fish, this lower, fishlike portion being bifurcated. It had a long beard, two prominent horns above the ears, huge breasts, a wide mouth, and hands with only four fingers. From the hands to the armpits and belly there protruded fins which it used to swim.

Here is how it was captured. There were several women by the shore, washing linen rags. Driven by hunger, they say, the creature approached one of them, grabbed her with his hands, and tried to drag her off. She was able to resist because the water was shallow, and she screamed loudly to her friends for help. Five of them rushed to her aid, and since the monster could not return to deep water, they destroyed it with sticks and stones. When it was

dragged up to the beach it struck no small terror into those who saw it. The body was a little longer and somewhat heavier than that of a man. I have seen the wooden image of it that was brought to Ferrara. What lends credence to the belief that the thing seized the woman to feed on her is that several children who had gone to wash at that beach on different occasions have never been heard of again. They are now believed to have been captured and killed by the monster.

Tale XXXIV *A beautiful jest by an actor on Pope Boniface*

Pope Boniface IX, a Neapolitan, belonged to the Tomacelli family. It happens that the Italians commonly refer to chopped pork liver puddings rolled up in lard as *tomacelli*. In the second year of his reign, Boniface went to Perugia. Accompanying him were his brothers and relatives, who, as it usually transpires, had flocked around him from their homes, eager for wealth and honors. Boniface entered the city surrounded by a crowd of satellites, among whom were his brothers and other miscellaneous relatives. Some of the eager bystanders asked for the names of those making up the entourage, and the answers came from one side to the other, "This is Andreas Tomacelli." Then, "This is Giovanni Tomacelli." After so many Tomacellis were called by name, a wag called out, "Ho, ho! That pork liver must really have been a big one to have produced so many large *tomacelli*."

Tale XXXV *Of a priest who buried a little dog*

There was a country priest in Tuscany who was exceedingly rich. A small dog of which he was very fond died, and he buried it in the cemetery. When the bishop, who was very anxious to get hold of the priest's money, heard about this he summoned the priest before him to be punished for this grave offense. The priest, who understood his bishop perfectly, appeared with fifty gold ducats. Upon being accused of the serious crime of burying a dog in consecrated ground, he was ordered to prison. "Oh, father," said the shrewd man. "If only you knew how intelligent that little dog was you wouldn't be surprised at my having buried him among men. Actually he was more intelligent than many of them in life, and even more so before he died."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the bishop.

"Toward the end of his life," explained the priest, "he left a will, and knowing that you lived in poverty, he left you fifty gold ducats which I have with me."

Now the bishop approved, both of the will and of the burial, and taking the gold, he absolved the priest.

Tale XXXVI *Of a tyrant who unjustly accused
a rich man*

There was a very rich man in the town of Cingoli in the district of Piceno. The local tyrant heard about his wealth and, wanting it for himself, sought an excuse to accuse the man of some crime in order to deprive him of his money. He summoned the man and accused him of treason. When the fellow insisted that he had done nothing to injure the tyrant's status or position, the latter persisted in his accusation, and threatened to cut the man's head off. The unhappy man then asked what he had done to which the tyrant replied, "You have my enemies in your house, rebels who have conspired against me." At that point the man understood what was going on. It was his wealth that was the bone of contention. But placing a greater value on his head, he said, "It is true, my lord. If you will send a few of your men with me I will turn those enemies and rebels over to them." He then took them home to the chest where he kept his money, opened it, and said, "Take these, for they are bitter enemies and rebels, not only to our lord, but to me as well." Thus by relinquishing all to the tyrant, the man evaded all persecution.

Tale XXXVII *Of a friar who delivered a very
short sermon*

There is a town in our mountains to which many people had come from different places to celebrate the feast of St. Stephen. As usual the friar was going to preach a sermon to the people, but it was late and the other priests began getting hungry and feared a long winded sermon. So as the friar passed them on his way to the pulpit, they began whispering in his ear, begging him to keep it short. He was not slow to take the hints. For after a few preliminary remarks, he went on to say, "My brethren, last year when I stood before you and spoke of our saint, his holy life and his miracles, I omitted nothing that I had either heard or read in the Holy Scriptures about him. I assume then, that none of the things has been forgotten by you. I have not heard of his doing anything new since then, therefore, make the sign of the cross, say your confessions, and what have you, and leave." With that he turned and went away.

Tale XXXVIII *The facetious advice of Minaccio
to a peasant*

A peasant who had climbed up into a chestnut tree to shake out some of its fruit fell down and broke a rib. Minaccio, who was always a facetious

man, came over to console him and, among other things, give him a foolproof method by which he could avoid falling from trees. "You should have given it to me before," said the injured man. "But tell me anyway, I may be able to use it some other time." To which Minaccio said, "Be careful always never to come down faster than you go up. If you climb slowly, come down slowly. If you adhere to this, you will never fall."

Tale XXXIX *An answer of Minaccio the gambler*

The same Minaccio, after losing his money and his clothes at dice, sat weeping in a tavern doorway, for he was a poor man. A friend, seeing him shed tears, asked what was wrong. "What have you?" he said. "Nothing," answered Minaccio. "If that's the case, if you're crying for nothing, why cry?"

"For the simple reason that I have *nothing*."

"But," said the friend, surprised, "since you have nothing to cry about, why are you crying?"

"For that very reason! Because I *have* nothing," he insisted. His friend thought that he was weeping for nothing, while Minaccio wept because he had nothing left after losing it at gambling.

Tale XL *Of a one-eyed pauper who went to
buy wheat*

Once when food was very expensive in Florence, a pauper who was blind in one eye came to the market with the intention, so he said, of buying a small measure of wheat. After he had asked the price, someone came up and asked him what a measure cost. "A man's eye," he said, meaning that wheat was extremely expensive. Hearing this, a boy wandered over and asked, "Why are you carrying such a big sack then, when you can't even afford half a measure?"

Tale XLI *A man who begged his sick wife to
forgive him*

A man was consoling his dying wife, reminding her that all through life he had been a good husband. He asked her to forgive him for any wrongs he might have done her. He declared, among other things, that he had never failed in his conjugal duties except upon those occasions when she was ill, and he had not wanted to tire her by coitus. Then, despite the fact that she was gravely stricken by disease, the woman exclaimed, "By my faith, that is something I can never forgive you! At no time was I

ever so sick or infirm that I wasn't able to lay back and shake it."

Therefore, men should beware never to ask their wives for that sort of forgiveness because they run the risk of being deservedly turned down.

*Tale XLII Of a young woman who accused
her husband of having too small a penis*

A young and handsome nobleman married the daughter of a Florentine knight, Nereo de Pazzi, one of the most eminent and distinguished men of his time. Several days after the wedding the youthful wife came to visit her father, as was the custom, but instead of being lively and cheerful as brides usually are, she appeared languid and melancholy. Taking her to a private room, the mother asked if everything was all right. "Alas!" wept the girl. "I'm not married to a man! He is lacking in virility. He has nothing, or hardly anything of the necessary equipment for marriage."

Saddened by her daughter's ill fortune, the mother told everything to her husband, and before long the whole story leaked out to the relatives and women who had been invited for the festivities, and soon the entire house was echoing with sadness and despair that such a lovely girl had not been married, but sacrificed.

When he arrived, the bridegroom, in whose honor the party was being given, observed the grim and pained expressions on everyone's faces. Wondering at this peculiar state of affairs, he asked what was

wrong, but no one dared to admit the real reason for the general gloom. Finally, one who was more daring than the others, told him that the girl had said he lacked the virility of his sex. To this the young man replied cheerfully, "That isn't true at all. There is no reason for you to be upset, or for us not to enjoy ourselves. Believe me, that charge will soon be dropped."

Then they all sat down at the table, men and women alike, and when dinner was almost over, the young man stood up and said, "Relatives, you will see for yourselves whether or not I am guilty of this accusation against me."

Then, from beneath his short tunic (which was fashionable in those days) he took out a prick of elegant form and placed it on the table. Everyone was swayed by the freshness and magnitude of it, and he asked whether they still believed that he should be judged guilty as charged. Most of the women shared the wish that their husbands were so well endowed. The men flocked about to gape at this superb bit of furniture, which they had to concede, surpassed their own. So they all turned to the young wife and severely reproved her for her stupidity.

"Why blame me or reproach me?" she protested. "Our ass, which I saw in the country, is a mere beast, yet he has a member as long as this (she extended her arms). My husband, who is a man, doesn't have one half that long."

The simple girl had assumed that a man's virile member was longer than a beast's as a matter of course.

Tale XLIII *Of a preacher who preferred ten
virgins to one married woman*

A friar of Tivoli, who was not very considerate of the people, was once thundering away with many words about the detestability of adultery. Among other things, he declared that this sin was so grave that he would prefer to lie with ten virgins than with one married woman. And many of those present shared his opinion.

Tale XLIV *Of Paolo, who aroused the
concupiscence of his flock*

Another preacher I knew, named Paolo, while delivering a sermon at Secia, a town of Campania, exclaimed that some people were so lascivious and intemperate, that in order to increase their pleasure during sexual intercourse, they would place a pillow under their wives' buttocks. As a result, many of those who were not familiar with the practice became so curious that at the very next opportunity they performed this difficult experiment to see if it really was as shameful as Paolo had suggested.

Tale XLV *Of a confessor*

A young woman, who afterwards told me the whole story, had gone to confession, as is usual during Lent, to confess her sins. Among other things, she admitted having been unfaithful to her husband. At that, her confessor, who was a friar, became inflamed with lust, lifted his robe, and placed a stiff prick in the young woman's hand, begging her to have mercy on him. Blushing profusely, she ran off to her mother, who was not far away, and upon being asked the cause of her perturbation, told what her confessor had asked.

Tale XLVI *A woman's facetious reply*

A woman was once asked by a man why, if sexual pleasure was the same for both men and women, it was usually the man who pursued and propositioned the woman rather than the woman the man. To this she replied, "It is the wisest state of affairs that men pursue us. We are always ready and prepared for sex, whereas you aren't. If we went around pursuing you when you were not ready, we would be in a state of perpetual frustration." A witty and facetious answer.

Tale XLVII *Of a mendicant friar who, during
wartime, suggested peace to Bernardo*

During the first war waged by the Florentines with the late Duke of Milan, it was decreed to be a capital offense for anyone to speak words of peace. Bernardo Manetti, one of the town's wittiest citizens, was in the old market place to buy something or other, when one of those mendicant friars who go about the streets begging for their needs from passersby approached him. The friar began begging with the usual preliminary of, "Peace be with you." To which Bernardo cried, "How dare you speak of peace? Don't you know that it's a capital crime to talk about peace? I'm leaving! Somebody is liable to accuse me of being your accomplice!" With this he left, and saved himself from being further molested by the wretch.

Tale XLVIII *One of Francesco Filelfo's stories*

A group of us were having a friendly discussion about what sort of punishment should be meted out to unfaithful wives. Boniface Salutati thought that one of the most effective penalties was one which a Bolognese friend had threatened to impose on his wife. When asked what it was, he replied, "This man of Bologna, who was not the most estima-

ble of fellows, had a wife who was rather liberal with her favors, which I myself enjoyed upon occasion. One night as I was going to their house, I overheard them quarreling bitterly. The husband was denouncing his wife furiously for her treachery. As one might expect, she denied everything. Finally the man roared, 'Giovanna, Giovanna! I won't beat you, I won't even hit you. I'll keep you in check by seeing to it that you bear enough children to fill up the house. After that I intend to pull out for good.' We all laughed at the exquisite punishment by which this fool sought to avenge himself on his wife's infidelity.

Tale XLIX *The story of an entertainer, told by
the Cardinal of Bordeaux*

Before he was elected pope, Gregory XII had made a number of pledges to overcome the schism which split the church at the time. For a period of time he even went so far as to promise that he would step down from the pontificate should he fail in his endeavors. But before long he was seduced by power. He reneged on all of the oaths and assurances he had made earlier. The Cardinal of Bordeaux, a man of wisdom and integrity, was very upset about this, and once spoke to me about it, saying, "He has done to us what a certain actor of Bologna once did when he said that he could fly." When I asked him about it he told me the story.

"There was an actor recently in Bologna, who openly proposed to fly from a tower across from the

bridge of San Raffaelo to more than a mile beyond the city. On the appointed day nearly everyone in Bologna gathered under the hot sky and waited there until sundown. They hung in suspense, watching the tower, waiting for the man to fly. When he showed himself atop the tower and went through the motions of flying, a lusty cheer went up from the crowd. Then they stared, slack jawed in anticipation. Finally, after sundown, for lack of anything better to do, the actor turned and exposed his ass to the people. Thus tricked, hungry, and disgusted, the people went home in the dark. And in this way," said the cardinal, "our friend, after making all these promises, intends to satisfy us by exposing his posterior to us."

Tale L *Ridolfo's answer to Bernabo*

A very wise saying is attributed to Ridolfo of Camerino. The city of Bologna was being besieged by Bernabo of the Visconti family, rulers of Milan. Ridolfo, however, a man of esteem both in peace and war, had been appointed by the Pope to protect the city. He kept within the walls in order to hold it more securely, but one day after a skirmish, when Ridolfo was not on the spot, a knight was captured and taken before Bernabo. Among other things, Bernabo enquired why Ridolfo would not come out to fight. The knight, after making one excuse after another, finally was released and sent back to the city. Ridolfo then asked what was going on in the enemy camp, and what Bernabo had asked. Upon hearing

the knight's answers to those questions put to him, Ridolfo said, "No good! Go back and say to Bernabo, 'Ridolfo stays in the city to keep *you* from coming in.'"

Tale LI *Another of Ridolfo's facetious replies*

In the same war with the Florentines, waged against Pope Gregory X, the aforementioned Ridolfo changed sides a number of times, now going to one faction, now to the other. When asked why he was forever changing sides, he quipped, "Because I cannot lie for too long on one side."

Tale LII *How the Florentines called Ridolfo a traitor*

Shortly afterwards, the Florentines accused Ridolfo of being a traitor, and hung posters to this effect in a number of places throughout the city. A bit later, when he heard that the Florentines were going to send him ambassadors to negotiate a peace, he went to bed on the day of their arrival, closed the windows, lit a fire (it was, incidentally the month of August), and had himself covered up with fur clothing. When he called in the ambassadors they asked him the nature of his illness. "Cold," he replied. "Which I caught by being left uncovered on your walls day and night." His remark alluded to the

posters bearing his likeness, which were afterwards removed by agreement.

Tale LIII *How Ridolfo was wounded by an arrow*

Several men of Camerino were spending time practicing archery outside the walls of the town, when one of them let fly a careless arrow that slightly wounded Ridolfo, who was standing some distance away. The fellow was seized and a number of punishments were suggested, each more severe than the last, each man hoping by this to worm his way into the prince's favor. One finally proposed that the man's hands be cut off to prevent him from ever using a bow again. Ridolfo ordered the bowman's release, saying that this would have been very good advice had it been given before the accident. A wise and humane answer.

Tale LIV *The story of Mancini*

Mancini, a peasant of my village, frequently took corn to Castle Figlino on asses which he had hired for the trip. Once when he was returning from market he felt tired so he mounted the best ass and on the way counted all the others in sight. When he was almost home he came to the conclusion that one was missing—for he had forgotten to include his own

mount. Terribly upset about this, he left the rest of the animals with his wife, telling her to return them to their owner, then rode seven miles back to the market asking everyone he met if they had by chance seen a missing jackass. Since they all said "No," he went home that night melancholy and sad over the loss of the ass. Finally, when his wife called him, he climbed down and suddenly realized that there before him was the very ass whose quest had given him so much grief.

Tale LV *Of a man who carried his plow on his
shoulders*

Another illiterate, named Piero, had plowed the fields until noon. His oxen were tired out and he himself was thoroughly exhausted. Before returning to town, he tied the plow on his donkey's back, then mounting, he drove the oxen ahead. The poor beast was so overburdened he began to falter under the strain and Piero, realizing that it couldn't move, dismounted and put the plow on his own shoulders. He then climbed on again, saying, "Now you ought to be able to walk because I'm carrying the plow, not you."

Tale LVI *The elegant reply of Dante, the
Florentine poet*

Dante Alighieri, our Florentine poet, was once in Verona as the guest of the old Prince Cane della Scala, a very generous man. Present with Cane also was another Florentine, a vulgar, unlettered, imprudent man good for nothing but making crude gags, unworthy of being called jokes. Nevertheless, he had been enriched by Cane upon the urging of others. Dante, a most learned man, who was both wise and modest, regarded the idiot as no better than an animal. One day he said to Dante, "How come with all your brains and learning you're poor and destitute? Here I am an ignorant fool, but a rich one." To which Dante replied, "When I find a patron with tastes on a level with mine as you have found one with yours, than I, too, will become rich." A grave and wise remark! Superior people always take pleasure in the company of those with similar tastes.

Tale LVII *A facetious answer of the same poet*

At dinner once, Dante was sitting between Cane senior and Cane junior. To play a joke on the poet, the servants threw all the bones at his feet on the sly. When the table was taken away, everyone won-

dered why he was the only one surrounded by bones. But he was ready with an immediate comeback. "There's nothing to be surprised about," he said. The dogs have eaten their bones, but I am not a dog."

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In both Latin and Italian, the word, and in this instance, the name, *Cane*, means *dog*. In English the play on words loses its significance.]

Tale LVIII *Of an obstinate woman who called
her husband lousy*

We were talking once about the obstinacy of women, who are sometimes so unbending that they would rather die than give in once they have made their point. Then someone said, "A woman from my country was always fighting with her husband, contradicting everything he said, making fun of him, and insisting on the last word to show that she was superior. One day during a grave battle with her husband, she called him 'lousy.' In order to make her retract her words the man beat her furiously, but the more he punished her, the more she called him lousy. Finally, after getting tired of beating her, but still determined to overcome her stubbornness, he put a rope around her and lowered her into a cesspool, threatening to drown her if she did not change her tune. But she persisted in her verbal barrage, even when she was immersed up to the chin. Then, in order to shut her up once and for all,

the man plunged her completely beneath the excrementious muck, hoping that imminence of death would make her improve her language. She, however, suffocating and speechless, said with her fingers what she could not with her mouth. Raising her hands above her head, she pressed her thumbnails together, thus by gesture still calling her husband lousy. For women kill lice with just these fingernails."

Tale LIX *Of a man who searched in the river for his drowned wife*

Another man, whose wife had drowned in a river, was going upstream to look for her. A surprised onlooker told him that he ought to search downstream. "I would never find her that way," he explained. "While she was alive she was so overbearing, so difficult, so contrary, that even after death she would insist on going against the current."

Tale LX *Of a peasant who wanted to be a nobleman*

An illiterate peasant serving the Duke of Orleans asked his lord to make him a nobleman. In France, the only way of living a noble life in the country is by purchasing estates. Understanding the clod's nature, the duke said, "I can easily make you rich, but I can never make you noble."

Tale LXI *Of Guglielmo, who had a beautifully formed member*

There lived in our town of Terranuova a carpenter named Guglielmo, who was endowed with a prick of great dimensions. A neighbor learned about it from his wife. When she died, and the widower married an innocent young girl, named Antonia, this neighbor decided to enlighten the youthful bride concerning the husband's great spear. Now it happened that on the wedding night the timorous girl shunned her husband's advances and would not lie with him. When the man realized what was causing her terror, in order to console her, he told her that what she had heard was true, but that he secretly possessed two such tools—one small and one large. "In order not to hurt you tonight," he said, "I shall only use the small one. Afterwards, if you want to, we'll use the big one." She then submitted to her husband without a single whimper of pain. A month later, having become much more uninhibited, she caressed her husband one night and whispered, "My dearest, don't you think it's about time we began using the big one now?" The husband, who in this department was endowed nearly as well as a donkey, laughed at his wife's fine appetite. I have since heard him relate the matter himself.

Tale LXII *The retort of a woman from Pisa*

A woman of Pisa named Sambacharia was very quick with her comebacks. A would-be wit came up to her once and said, "The foreskin of the ass greets you." To which she snapped back, "Oh, is that so? Well, you do look like one of his envoys." And with that remark she left.

Tale LXIII *The remark of a matron on seeing a kept woman's clothing in a window*

A kept woman hung out the window an assortment of clothing that had been given to her by her lover. A matron passing the house looked at the array of clothing and said, "Just as the spider spins its web, this woman has made her clothes with her ass, and now she flaunts her handiwork."

Tale LXIV *Good advice*

Someone asked a countryman of mine, a witty fellow, for the loan of some wine casks at vintage time. To which he replied, "If I keep my wife all year round it's because I want to enjoy her myself

when Carnival time comes." By these words he advised not to ask others for that which they need themselves.

Tale LXV *What a Perugian said to his wife*

The Perugians are said to be sophisticated and even tempered. A woman named Petruccia, who wanted to attend a feast on the following day, asked her husband for a new pair of shoes. He consented to this, and at the same time asked her to cook him a chicken for lunch before she went out. When she had prepared the meal, she went to her front door and spotted a young man she greatly desired. Going back inside she signalled for him to follow, since her husband was away, and in her haste dashed up the stairs and lay down on the floor in a place where she could be clearly seen from the entrance to the house. Moreover, she pulled the youth down upon her, embracing his buttocks with her legs and feet, and devoting her entire energy to the work at hand. The husband, meanwhile, assuming that his wife had already left for the feast, and would not be home until later, had brought a friend home for lunch, explaining that his wife would not be with them. When they arrived at the house, the husband entered first, and seeing his wife near the stairs, waving her feet violently in the air above the young man, cried out, "Hey, Petruccial By the ass's ass (their favorite oath)! If that's the way you walk, you'll never break in those new shoes!"

Tale LXVI *The humorous quip of a young
man*

A peasant woman was complaining that her geese were languishing, explaining that a neighbor had cast a spell on them by praising them without saying afterwards, *God bless them*, as was the local practice. A young man overheard her and said, "I can see now why my prick has been looking debilitated lately. Someone took occasion to praise it without adding a benediction, so it must be under a spell, for it hasn't raised its head since then. Bless it, please, so that it may recover its former vigor."

Tale LXVII *Of a fool who took someone
imitating his voice for himself*

The father of a friend of mine was having an affair with a woman whose husband was a fool and a stutterer. One night he went to her house, assuming the stupid oaf to be away, and knocked loudly on the door, jokingly mimicking the husband's voice, and demanding to be admitted. The lamebrain, who happened to be home, on hearing what sounded like his own voice said to his wife, "Giovanna, let him in, for he seems to be me."

Tale LXVIII *Of a peasant who had a goose for
sale*

A young peasant who had a goose for sale went to Florence where he happened to meet a housewife who considered herself quite a wit. Deciding to have a laugh at his expense, she asked the peasant how much he wanted for the goose, to which the youth replied, "For you, a mere trifle." "What's that?" asked the woman. "Just one tumble in the hay," he said. "You're joking," she replied, "but never mind, let's go in the house and agree on a price." But when he remained firm about it, she finally agreed to consummate the deal on his terms. As soon as they had finished, the woman, who had been lying on top, demanded the goose. But he refused, reasoning that she had had him, rather than he her, because she had been on top. Therefore he owed her nothing. Upon this, they reversed positions and re-engaged, the young man performing his job admirably. When she claimed the goose a second time, the sly youth again refused, claiming that they were even then for he had only made up for the injury done him by her getting on top in the first place. In the midst of their wrangling, her husband walked in and attempted to find out the nature of the argument. To this the wife said, "I had hoped to prepare a delicious meal for you, but this miserable beast has spoiled everything. We had agreed on a price of 20 soldi for the goose, but now he's changed his mind and demands 22." "Bah!" said the husband. "Shall we let a little thing

like that ruin our dinner? Here, take your money!" And so, the peasant left having gotten both the wife and his money.

Tale LXIX *Of the stingy man who drank urine*

One of our fellow curia members who was known for his stinginess, always poked his nose around the servants' table at mealtime to taste their wine and make sure that it was watered down. Several of them decided to cure him of the habit, and at the time he was expected, placed a flask of fresh urine on the table instead of wine. As usual, he came and took a healthy swig. Becoming violently ill, he retched and raised a terrible uproar, making dire threats against the perpetrators of this affront. Nevertheless, they finished their meal amidst gales of laughter. The fellow who dreamed up this scheme in the first place told me about it later with great merriment.

Tale LXX *Of a shepherd who made an incomplete confession*

A shepherd from that part of the kingdom of Naples where highway robbery has always been a common practice, once went to a priest to confess his sins, and prostrating himself, said, with his eyes full of tears, "Forgive me, father, for I have sinned grievously." When the priest urged him to unburden

himself, he kept repeating the same thing over and over, as if he had committed some horrible crime. Finally, at the priest's exhortation, he confessed that while making cheese during Lent, he accidentally squeezed some whey into his mouth, which, instead of spitting out, he swallowed. Knowing the ways of the country, the priest smiled, and asked the penitent if he had committed any other sins more grave than breaking the Lenten fast. When the shepherd denied this, the priest asked if, according to local custom, he had, along with other shepherds, robbed or killed any strangers passing through the region. "Frequently," replied the penitent. "I've done both. But those are such commonplace things around here we never even think about them." When the confessor insisted that these things were grave sins, the shepherd would have none of it, for like his countrymen, he regarded highway robbery and murder as mere trifles. The only absolution he craved was for the milk he had accidentally swallowed. There is nothing worse than becoming accustomed to sin, for it renders light even the gravest misdeeds.

Tale LXXI *Of a gambler who was jailed for gambling*

In the town of Terranuova there are certain penalties for playing dice. Someone I know was caught at the game, sentenced, and thrown into jail. When he was asked why he happened to be there he explained, "This magistrate of ours had me locked up

because I played with my own money. What would he have done if I had played with his?"

Tale LXXII *A father's disapproval of a
drunken son*

A father, whose son was a confirmed drunk, had tried everything to discourage the youth's habit. One day he saw an old sot lying in the street with an erection while a gang of boys stood around laughing and scoffing at him. Calling his son over to look at this spectacle, the father hoped that it would serve as a deterrent against further drinking, but the moment he saw the drunk lying there, the son asked, "Tell me, father, where can I get some of the wine that he drank? It must be so good, I have to taste it!" The sight of such degradation did not frighten him, he was moved only by the desire for wine.

Tale LXXIII *A young man from Perugia*

Ispina, a young Perugian nobleman, was so dissolute that he brought nothing but disgrace to his family. One day a relative named Simone Cecolo took him aside and delivered a lengthy sermon, urging him to live a better life, delineating the detestability of vice and the goodness of virtue. When he had finished, the young man said, "Simone, you have made a flowery speech, which is very becoming

to an eloquent man, but I have heard discourses like yours a hundred times over, better ones even, yet I've never taken advantage of them." The one did not do any better by example than the other did by expounding fine words.

Tale LXXIV *When the Duke of Anjou showed
Ridolfo his treasure*

There was once a discussion among a group of learned men who blamed the inanity of those who devote great effort to the search and procurement of precious stones. Then someone said, "Ridolfo of Camerino demonstrated such foolishness on the part of the Duke of Anjou when visiting his camp on the eve of his departure for the Kingdom of Naples. At the time the duke showed him a collection of jewels including pearls, sapphires, garnets, and other stones having great value. After looking at them, Ridolfo asked what they were worth and how much income they produced. The duke replied that they were worth a great deal of money, but that they produced no income. To this Ridolfo said, 'I'll show you two stones that cost only ten florins, but which bring in two hundred every year.' When the duke marvelled at these words, Ridolfo took him to a mill that he had built and showed him the two millstones, explaining that these were more useful and profitable than all the gems they had seen."

Tale LXXV *Of the same Ridolfo*

A man of Camerino was anxious to travel and see the world. So Ridolfo suggested that he go as far as Macerata. When he returned, Ridolfo said, "You have seen the entire world. What else is there on earth besides hills, valleys, mountains, plains, both cultivated and uncultivated, woods, and forests? All these things you have encountered in the area between here and there."

Tale LXXVI *The witty remark of a Perugian*

There was a Perugian who had a cask of excellent wine, but a very small one. Someone sent a child with a large vessel with which to get some of his wine, so he took it in his hands, put it up to his nose, and said, "Ugh! this thing stinks! I would never pour my wine into it. Take it back to whoever sent you."

Tale LXXVII *An argument between two whores over a piece of linen*

Two Roman women I knew, differing from one another both in age and shape, came to the house of

one of our curia to profit by his pleasure. He made love to the prettier one twice and the other once, not so much because he wanted to, but in order to prevent her from feeling completely unwanted, besides, he was anxious for her to return again with her friend. When they left he gave them a piece of linen without telling them how to divide it. In the course of dividing it an argument arose between the two women. One wanted two thirds on the basis of the work she had performed, the other insisted on splitting fifty-fifty as they were supposed to be equal partners. Various arguments were offered by each. One said that she had done most of the work, while the other insisted that she had done an equivalent amount. From words they progressed to blows, scratching, and hair pulling. First the neighbors were attracted, and then the husbands rushed in, all of whom, of course, had no idea of what the actual quarrel was about. Each barked haughty words at the other. The husbands, naturally, took the sides of their wives and began fighting with each other. Sticks and stones began flying until the crowd intervened and broke up the fight. The men, still ignorant of the dissension's cause, stalked home with hatred in their hearts, as is customary among Romans. The cloth was placed in the custody of a neutral person while the women secretly negotiated a settlement. Tell me, wise men, how would you judge?

Tale LXXVIII *The cock and the fox*

A hungry fox was trying to catch some hens who

had taken refuge in a treetop with the assistance of a cock. Coming forward, the fox greeted the cock courteously, and asked, "What are you doing up there, haven't you heard the good news?" "Not a word," replied the cock. "Let me hear it by all means." "I came as fast as I could to tell you about it," declared the fox. "All the animals have held a grand conference at which they concluded a permanent treaty among all living creatures. No one has to be afraid anymore. No one can ambush or injure anyone again. We can all live together in peace and harmony, and we are all safe to come and go as we please, even by ourselves. So come on down, and we'll celebrate this wonderful day together." Of course the cock saw through the fox's scheme at once, and said, "I'm certainly grateful to you for bringing such good news." Then suddenly he raised himself, stretched out his neck, and gazed into the distance with an expression of alarm. "What are you staring at?" demanded the fox. "Two dogs," announced the cock. "They're coming this way as fast as they can with their fangs bared." At this the fox began to tremble, and turning to flee, bawled, "Oh, oh! I'd better get out of here. So long!" "Why leave?" asked the cock. "What's there to be afraid of? What with the peace in effect now, you don't have anything to worry about." "I doubt if those dogs have ever heard about the peace treaty," snarled the fox. Thus, fraud was overcome by fraud.

Tale LXXIX *A witty saying*

A man who was a bit too free with his tongue was making some rather audacious statements in the palace of the Pope, illustrating them with some humorous, but explicit gestures. "What on earth are you doing?" asked a friend. "People will say that you're an idiot." "That," answered the man, "would be the best thing that could happen to me. What better way is there for me to find favor in the eyes of the establishment? After all, this is the day of the fools, and all the power is concentrated in their hands."

Tale LXXX *An argument between a Florentine and a Venetian*

The Venetians had made a peace treaty with the Duke of Milan that was to last for ten years. During that time the first war between the Florentines and the duke broke out, and it looked as though the former would get the worst of things. Although the duke expected no hostility on the part of the Venetians, they broke their treaty and occupied Brescia in case the duke should decide to turn his forces against them. After a period of time, a Florentine and a Venetian were discussing the matter, when the Venetian said, "You owe your freedom to us. Without our efforts you wouldn't be free." "That isn't true at all,"

countered the Florentine, to top the impudent remark. "You did not free us, we made traitors of you."

Tale LXXXI *The Comparison of Antonio
Lusco*

Ciriaco d'Ancona, a man of great prolixity, once became extremely morose over the fall of the Roman Empire during a discussion we were having on the subject. Antonio Lusco, an extremely learned man, who was present at the time, laughed at the other's foolish sorrow, observing, "He reminds me of the man from Milan, who went to a feast, and after hearing a troubadour (one of the kind who sing about the deeds of heroes to the common people) recite the death of Roland, who was killed in battle seven hundred years ago, began weeping copiously. After he got home, his wife, on seeing how grief-stricken he was, asked what was wrong. 'Alas, my wife,' he cried. 'I am as good as dead.' 'My dear husband,' she insisted, 'What happened to you? Calm down, sit down and eat.' But he kept on moaning and refused to eat, until finally his wife convinced him to tell her what was bothering him. 'Do you know what I just found out today?' 'What?' she repeated. 'Roland is dead! The only hope of all Christendom!' Assuaging his stupid grief, the wife eventually succeeded with some difficulty in getting him to sit down and eat."

Tale LXXXII *Of a troubadour who declared
that he would narrate The Death of Hector*

Someone else topped this anecdote with a tale of similar stupidity. "A rather simple neighbor of mine," he said, "heard one of those troubadours announce at the end of his performance, to lure his audience back again, that the next day he would narrate *The Death of Hector*. Then, before the singer departed, this neighbor of mine paid cash in exchange for a promise not to kill off such a brave warrior as Hector. Consequently, *The Death of Hector* was put off till the next day. Not only that, for the next several days, the fool kept handing out money to prolong his hero's life. Finally, when he ran out of cash, he was forced to listen to the story of Hector's death with grief and flowing tears.

Tale LXXXIII *Of a woman who feigned death
to her husband*

Sarda is a town in our mountains. Here a simple man once caught his wife in the act of laying with another man, at which time she instantly feigned death and sank to the ground. Rushing to her, the fellow actually believed that she was dead, and began weeping and rubbing her arms. She then half opened her eyes as though she were gradually regain-

ing consciousness. When the man asked her what had happened she said that she had been seized by a sudden terror. Finally, when the fool consoled her and asked if there was anything he could do, she said, "I want you to swear that you saw nothing." And as soon as he had sworn, she made an instant recovery.

Tale LXXXIV *The witticism of a Florentine knight*

The Florentine knight, Rosso de Ricci, a wise and spirited man, had an ugly, elderly wife named Telda. He began casting eyes on a servant girl in the house, and chasing her about until she finally reported the matter to her mistress. She was advised to give in, arrange a rendezvous with Rosso in some dark place, at a specific time, when Telda would take her place. Rosso arrived and spent a great deal of time caressing the woman he thought to be the maid, but he could do nothing, for his prick remained dejected. "You horse turd!" shrieked his wife. "If the maid had been here you would have managed to have her!" "Oh!" exclaimed the old soldier, "Telda, by God! My prick is smarter than I am. Even though I mistook you for the maid, he knew bad meat right away and shrank back."

Tale LXXXV *Of a soldier who had a quarrelsome wife*

A Florentine knight of extreme nobility had a perverse and quarrelsome wife who went every day to her confessor, or *devoto*, as they say, and complained about her husband's vices. The confessor reproved and chided the knight, therefore. One day, at the wife's suggestion, and in hopes of making peace between them, he asked the husband to make his confession. He had no doubts that this would establish harmony in their household. The knight came around, but when asked to make his confession said, "This will never work. My wife has told you all about whatever sins I may have committed, and many more besides."

Tale LXXXVI *Of a charlatan who cured asses*

Not long ago, there lived in Florence an enterprising ne'er-do-well who was very self-confident despite having no profession. After reading in a medical book the name and formula of certain pills that were good for a multitude of illnesses, he conceived the bizarre idea of impersonating a doctor, by the grace of these pills only. After having a large quantity of them compounded, he left the city and wandered through villages and towns as a practicing physi-

cian. He offered the pills for all manner of sicknesses, and haphazardly achieved a few cures. After that the fool's name spread to other fools. One day someone who had lost his ass came and asked the fellow if he had a remedy for missing donkeys. The charlatan said "yes" and prescribed a dose of six pills. The next day, after following his instructions, the peasant set out to find his ass. But along the way the action of the pills forced him to seek immediate relief for his bowels, so dashing from the road into the bushes he accidentally came upon his missing ass grazing there. He praised the physician's art and pills to the heavens. After this peasants flocked to the latter day Aesculapius in droves, for they had heard that here was a doctor who even had a remedy for recovering lost property.

Tale LXXXVII *A comparison of Pietro de
Eghis*

During an uprising in Florence, the citizens were fighting among themselves in order to effect governmental changes. The leader of one of the factions had been killed by his opponents during a great tumult, and a man, watching from some distance, when he saw the angry mob and drawn swords, asked the neighbors what was going on. One of them, a man named Pietro de Eghis, explained, "They are dividing up the city and the posts of office." To which the other replied, "I am not interested in anything so expensive." And with that he retreated.

Tale LXXXVIII *Of a doctor*

I had dinner with a convivial group of friends, who, while eating, came up with a number of witticisms and hearty laughs. With a smile, one of them said, "A doctor of Arezzo named Cecchino was called in one day to take care of an attractive young woman who had dislocated her knee dancing. In order to straighten it out he had to handle the girl's hip and leg for some time, and they were so soft and smooth that his prick stiffened like a great stake, so that he was unable to contain it. Sighing, he arose, and when the girl asked him what his fee was, he told her that she owed him nothing. She asked him why, and he replied, 'We're even. I straightened one of your joints, and you, one of mine.' "

Tale LXXXIX *A joke on a Venetian who could not recognize his own horse*

Some learned men were having a discussion about the foolishness and stupidity of most people, when Antonio Lusco, a most witty man, told that once, while travelling from Rome to Vicenza, he was joined by a Venetian who appeared to have rarely ridden a horse. They spent the night at an inn in Sienna where a number of other travelers with horses had stopped. In the morning when everyone

else was getting ready to leave, the Venetian sat indifferently at the door wearing his boots and spurs. Wondering at his careless sluggishness when the others were already mounting, Lusco admonished the fellow, and told him that if he wanted to leave with the others he had better mount up. Then he enquired as to the cause of the delay. To which the Venetian said, "I really want to leave with you, but the truth of the matter is, I would never recognize my horse in such a crowd. So I'm waiting for the others to get going, then, when there is only one horse left in the stable, I shall know it is mine." Realizing the man's stupidity, Antonio waited until the numbskull had taken the last horse in the stable.

Tale XC *The saying of Razello of Bologna*

When wishing to slight someone, it is common to tell him, *I could pawn you a hundred times a day at a tavern*. Razello of Bologna, a quick man with the comeback, was thus spoken to by someone during an argument at a gathering. The speaker hoped to make himself look good at Razello's expense. But Razello retorted, "You're right. I willingly concede. Objects of great value always can be pawned for a good price. But you are so vile and worthless, I could peddle you in every tavern and dive—but vainly, because no one would give a penny for you." With this saying Razello had the last laugh, and topped a would-be caustic wit.

*Tale XCI Of an old usurer who gave up usury
for fear of losing what he already had*

A friend of mine was trying to convince an aged usurer to abandon usury and concentrate on saving his soul and resting his body. With many persuasive words he exhorted the man to liberate himself from his infamous life. "I'll do as you say," replied the old man. "I'll retire. My reputation is getting so bad, I would have to quit soon anyway, whether I liked the idea or not." So he retired from usury, not from a sense of shame, but because he was worried about losing his profits.

*Tale XCII Of an old whore who became a
beggar*

When the previous tale had been told in our group one of my colleagues said, "That reminds me of an old whore (and he mentioned her name), who took to begging after being stricken by age. 'Have pity,' she would say 'on one who has abandoned sin and whoredom.' A noted man reproved her for begging. 'What do you want me to do?' she protested. 'Nobody will have me now.' 'Ah,' he said. 'Then you've given up your life of sin out of necessity, not voluntarily.'"

Tale XCIII *Of a doctor and a know-nothing*

One day Pope Martin was talking with one of his secretaries, and the conversation turned to the subject of witty remarks. The pope told how a Bolognese jurist, while making an urgent demand of a legate, was called by him fatuous and crazy. "When did you discover that I was crazy?" he asked. To which the legate replied, "Just now." "You're wrong," said the other. "I was crazy when I made you, who know nothing about law, a doctor of civil law." The legate happened to have a doctorate, even though he was defective in doctrine, and this remark illustrated his ignorance.

Tale XCIV *A remark of the Bishop of Aleth*

Someone else, the Bishop of Aleth, I believe, told of a joke made by a Roman. He had just met the Cardinal of Naples, a stupid illiterate, emerging from the pontifical palace and laughing continuously, as was his habit. He asked a friend if he knew why the cardinal was always laughing, and on getting a negative reply, explained, "Because of the pope's stupidity for making a cardinal out of such an idiot."

Tale XCV *The witty saying of an abbot*

Next were told two witty remarks made by Benedictine fathers who had attended the Council of Constance. They had been sent by the Council to Pedro de Luna, who was recognized as pope by the Spaniards and the French. When he saw them he referred to them as two ravens coming to see him. "That's no surprise," said one of them. "Ravens are attracted to cadavers." In this way he emphasized that since de Luna had been condemned by the council, he was regarded as a corpse.

Tale XCVI *A witty saying*

During the controversy as to who was the legitimate pope, Pedro said, "Noah's Ark is here." By this he meant that he claimed the rights of the Apostolic See. "In Noah's Ark," retorted one of the fathers, "there were many wild beasts."

Tale XCVII *Miracles related by my secretary*

When he returned from the country known as Brittany, on the eighth day after the Ides of October, in the next to last year of Pope Martin's reign, my secretary, Giovanni, told me of miracles he had seen with his own eyes. Being an educated man, he was not a liar. First, it had rained blood between the Loire, Berry, and Poitou, so profusely that it stained the stones. Similar occurrences having been frequently recorded in history, it appears less incredible. But the following I would not have believed, had he not sworn to it. During the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, which is in the month of June, harvesters had left some hay in their fields the evening before. In contempt of the holy day, they went to rack it up, a task of an hour. But by the judgment of God, they were forced to remain for a long time, racking hay day and night, with neither food nor sleep. Thus they spent many days unable to leave their field, nor could the crowds who gathered about to look at them as fools get near enough to ask what it was all about. My secretary asserted that he had seen them reaping, but what happened to them afterwards, he said that he did not know.

Tale XCVIII *Miraculous punishment for
contempt of the saints*

Then another of my colleagues named Rollet, from Rouen, affirmed a similar miracle he had seen growing out of contempt for the saints. Near the castle of the city is a parish dedicated to the Blessed Gothardus, whose feast day all the parishioners solemnized, as always, with a procession of great pomp. A young girl from another parish derided them, their saint, and their ceremonies. She said that to show her contempt she would start spinning. So she took her distaff and spinning wheel, but they suddenly stuck to her hands and fingers, causing her tremendous pain, and with such force that they could not be removed. The girl was actually struck dumb (she could not use her voice) and she made signs to indicate the cause of her pain. Then a crowd took her to the altar of the saint she had affronted where she offered a vow to him. Then the distaff and spindle fell from her hands and she recovered her voice. He insisted that this occurred in his own parish, and despite my doubts, I do not consider it thoroughly impossible to believe.

Tale XCIX *Humorous tale of an old man who
carried his ass on his back*

During a conversation among the pontifical secretaries, it was said that to live according to the opinions of the common people was to submit to the most miserable servitude, for since everyone thinks differently, it would be impossible to try to please everyone. To illustrate this, one of the assistants told a fable he had seen in Germany both in words and pictures. "An old man," he said, "was on his way to market with his son to sell an ass, which led the way bearing nothing on its back. They were reproached by some farmers working in the fields for not riding the beast, the father because he was old, and the son because he was so young. He placed the son on the ass and continued on foot himself. Others seeing them upbraided the man for his foolishness in letting a strong young boy ride, while he, smitten with age, plodded behind. So he changed his mind, took the youth from the ass, and mounted himself. But he had not gone very far when he heard someone else admonishing him for dragging the lad behind him like a servant, with complete disregard for his youth. Moved by these words, he seated his son on the ass behind himself. Considering the matter settled, he continued on his way, but when he met others who asked him if the ass was his, and he answered affirmatively, they castigated him for taking no better care of the beast than he would that of a stranger. They said that it wasn't able to carry such a heavy

load, that the most it ought to carry was one. The man was perturbed by such a variety of suggestions. He got blamed if the ass was unloaded, if it had one rider or two. Finally he bound the animal's feet together, suspended it from a pole, placing one end on his son's shoulders and the other on his own. And in this manner he took the ass to market. Everyone laughed effusively at the spectacle of such stupidity, especially that of the old man. Infuriated at this, while standing on the bank of a river he flung the ass in with its legs still tied and went home without the creature. The good man, for trying to satisfy everyone pleased no one, and lost his ass as well.

Tale C *The great inexperience of a man*

One day a letter was being read before a gathering of leading Florentines on the subject of a man only mildly satisfactory to the republic. His name (let us call him Paolo) was repeated frequently, preceded occasionally by the term *aforesaid*. One of the assistants, who was barely literate, thought the word *aforesaid* was an honorary expression denoting high praise, for example meaning *most learned* or *most illustrious*. Indignantly he cried out that it was a pity to call *aforesaid* such a scoundrel, such an enemy of the country.

Tale CI *Another foolish man*

A townsman of mine, a peasant named Matteo, made himself the butt of laughter in a similar way. At an entertainment of some priests at a feast, he, as senior host, was given the job of thanking the guests, many of whom had come from far away. "My fathers," he said. "Forgive us if we have failed you in any way. We have treated you, not according to what you deserve, but according to our ability, as befits your ignorance." The idiot, in search of some exalted sounding phrase, believed he was paying them some high praise as if he had said, *Your wisdom*, or *Your knowledge*.

Tale CII *Of a bearded old man*

Antonio Lusco, the most cultured and likable of men, once, after a feast, told an extremely humorous story. It is common, when anyone breaks wind, for those nearby to say, *To the beard of him who owes nothing to anyone*. An old man of Vicenza, who had a very long beard, was summoned before the governor of the town (Ugolotto Biancardo, a stern but learned man). Clamoring with many words in a loud voice, the old man kept repeating that he was a debtor to no man, that he owed no one anything. To which Ugolotto replied, "Get out of here with that

stinking beard of yours, its stench is more than we can bear." Quite taken aback, the man asked what that meant. Then retorted the governor, "Because it contains all the farts that men ever blow, for they are sent to the beard of the man who owes nothing to anyone." The remark calmed the man down and set everyone to laughing.

Tale CIII *A comparison made by Carlo of Bologna to a certain notary*

While dining at the pope's palace with some of his secretaries, the conversation turned to the ignorance of those whose total knowledge and learning depends upon written formulas, and who, without delving into underlying reasons, say that whatever was written in the past, must remain as is. To this, Carlo of Bologna, a most jovial man, said, "These people are similar to a certain notary of my town (and he mentioned his name), who was once called upon to draw up a bill of sale for two men. As he took up his pen and began writing, he asked them their names. One said, 'Giovanni,' and the other said, 'Philip.' At this the notary announced that he could not execute the instrument (for that is what they call such documents). When they asked why, he explained, 'Unless the vendor is called Conrad, and the buyer, Titius (those being the only names he had learned in his formula) this contract cannot be drawn up or be considered legal.' When they refused to change their names, he insisted on wording the paper strictly according to formula. So they went to another

notary, leaving this idiot, who would have considered himself a forger had he altered a line of his formula by changing their names."

Tale CIV *Of a Florentine doctor who
propositioned a queen*

The conversation next turned lightheartedly to the stupidity of some who are sent as ambassadors to rulers. After several had been named, Antonio Lusco said, "Have you ever heard about the temerity of a certain Florentine (and he looked at me) who was sent by the people of Florence to Queen Joanna of Naples? His name was Francesco, and though he was a doctor of law, he was extremely idiotic. He told the queen the nature of his mission, and was instructed to return to her court on the following day. Meanwhile he heard that the queen was not averse to the presence of well built men. So when he met with her again, he talked about one thing or another, then said that he wished to talk to her in private. Assuming that he had to discuss some secret matter which could not be revealed to many others, she took him to a private place. Here, the imbecile, who had the highest opinion of himself, asked the queen to go to bed with him. 'Is that what the Florentines sent you here for?' she asked. Flushing, the envoy grew silent as she ordered him to go back for official confirmation of that particular mission, then she dismissed him with no sign of annoyance."

Tale CV *Of a man who had sexual intercourse
with the devil in the form of a woman*

A most learned man, Cincio, the Roman, has frequently told me a story, which cannot be readily dismissed, of a neighbor who was in no sense a fool, and which he insisted happened to himself. It was like this. One moonlight night, the man got up, thinking that dawn was approaching because it was so bright. He went to look over his vineyards, for it is the habit of the Romans to be very diligent about them. He had to arouse the keepers in order to get them to open the gates of Ostia, and when he got outside, he saw a woman walking ahead of him. He took her for some devout person going to make her devotions at the shrine of St. Paul. His lust became aroused, and he quickened his pace in order to overtake and seduce her. When he drew closer, she cut off the road, so the man walked even faster in order not to lose his chance. After a few steps he seized her, threw her down on the ground and had her. But when he was done, she disappeared, leaving nothing behind but the stench of sulfur. Feeling around on the grass, the man became alarmed and hurried home. Everyone was convinced that he had been the victim of a satanic illusion.

Tale CVI *Another tale told by Angelotto*

Angelotto, Bishop of Agagni, was present when Cincio told the last tale, and told us another which was quite similar. "A relative of mine," he began, mentioning the party by name, "was walking one night through the deserted town when he met a woman who appeared to be a great beauty, whereupon he lay with her. Afterwards, to terrify him, she transformed into an ugly man, and demanded, 'What do you think you've really done, you fool? I've really deceived you!' To which the man replied bravely, 'I've spotted your ass, that's what!'"

Tale CVII *Of a lawyer who received a peach and a fig from a client*

While casting aspersions on the ungratefulness of those who are always ready to ask others to work for them, yet who fall down when it comes to paying their debts, Antonio Lusco, that man of great wit and humanity, told the following: "A lawyer friend of mine named Vincenzo had a rich client who was terribly stingy for whom he had handled many litigations without ever collecting any fees. One day Vincenzo was scheduled to handle a very difficult case for this man, and in court he received from him a peach and a fig. During the hearing Vincenzo's

opponents argued fiercely, and challenged him repeatedly, but he kept silent, offering nothing in reply. Everyone was stunned, especially the client, who demanded a reason for the silence. "The fig and the peach you sent me," explained Vincenzo, "have so frozen my lips, that I haven't been able to utter a sound."

Tale CVIII *How a clever physician examined the sick*

A sly quack was in the habit of visiting his patients with a disciple. He would take their pulse (as was customary) and if he believed that anything was wrong, he would place all the blame on them for having eaten a fig, an apple, or something else he had forbidden them to partake. Since they virtually always admitted their guilt, he came to be regarded as a divine personage for having guessed his patients' disobedience. The pupil, generally amazed at the doctor's uncanny ability, finally asked him how he did it. Was it by touch, by the pulse, or by means of some more arcane methodology. "When I first enter the sickroom," explained the doctor, "I look around on the floor for fruit peels. If I see chestnut shells, fig skins, nutshells, apple cores, or what have you, I assume that my patient has eaten these things, and I accuse him with having aggravated his condition on account of them, and absolve myself of any responsibility if he should get worse."

A short while later, after the student had begun a medical practice of his own, he always dealt with

his patients in the same manner, accusing them of disregarding his dietary orders, and having eaten various things he guessed at by observing the scraps on the floor. One day he went to see a poor peasant who he promised to restore to perfect health in short order if he followed orders and followed a strict diet. He left and agreed to return the next day. When he came back, the man was more gravely ill. Unfortunately, this crude idiot had no idea of the real cause of his patient's illness, so he cast his eyes all around, but could see no scraps of food. He was terribly upset until he noticed the saddle of an ass under the bed. With a terrible uproar, he told the patient that now he knew what had aggravated his condition. He said he would not have been surprised to have found the man dead for committing such a great excess as eating the meat of an ass, for he regarded the ass's saddle in the same light as a bone. His stupidity exposed in this matter, he became the butt of ridicule and laughter.

Tale CIX *Of two men in a financial litigation*

There is a town in the vicinity of Bologna, called Medicina. A so-called magistrate, who was coarse and stupid, was sent there, and before him appeared two litigants with a financial dispute. The first, alleging to be the creditor, said that there was no doubt that the other owed him money. Turning to the creditor, the magistrate said, "You are in the wrong for not paying that man what you owe him." The defendant denied the charge, insisting that he had

already paid his debt. So the magistrate turned to the plaintiff and admonished him for suing without grounds. But when he restated his claim in detail, the magistrate turned back to the defendant and rebuked him more strongly than before. Again he presented proof that he had paid his debt. So after giving each an alternate tongue-lashing, the magistrate said, "You are even, having both won and lost. Now get out!" And he left without rendering any judgment. This was told at a gathering where a friend of ours had often changed his mind in the same way.

Tale CX *Of a stupid physician, who after
examining a woman's urine, prescribed coitus*

A woman I know named Giovanna became sick. A stupid and ignorant physician was called in to cure her, and according to custom, asked for a specimen of her urine (the collection of which was left to her young, unmarried daughter). Having forgotten all about this, the girl showed the doctor her own urine instead. Immediately he prescribed sexual intercourse for the woman. Hearing this, the husband, after filling his stomach with an ample meal, mounted his wife. Finding the business exceedingly bothersome because of her debilitated state (and being unaware of the doctor's prescription), the woman began shrieking, "What are you doing to me, husband? You're killing me!" "Shut up!" retorted he, "The doctor knows, it's the best thing for you. This is how you're going to be restored to perfect

health." Nor was he wrong, for after giving it to her four times he found her fever broke. By the next day it was gone. Thus, by the very means with which the quack had intended to deceive them, she recovered.

Tale CXI *Of a man who lay with his sick wife
and cured her*

A similar tale was told lightheartedly about the town of Valencia by one of the assistants. Shortly after having married a very young notary, a young bride became so gravely ill that everyone thought that she was at death's door. The doctors gave her up as lost, and after losing her power of speech completely, the young woman began to look like a corpse. Despairing over the loss of a wife with whom he had lain so seldom, and whom he loved so deeply, he decided to lay her once more before she expired. After sending everyone present from the room on some secret pretext or other, he climbed upon his wife. At once it was as if new life had been pumped into her body, she began to breathe, she opened her eyes, and after a little while, began to talk, softly calling her husband's name. Joyfully, he asked her what she wanted. She asked for something to drink, after which she ate some food, and finally she regained her health. The outcome of the matter proved the superiority of the marital act. It illustrates also that it is the best remedy for all female disorders.

Tale CXII *Of an illiterate who asked the
Archbishop of Milan for the honor of becoming a
monseigneur*

We complained sometimes about the nature of the times, not to say about that of men, who held the highest honors of the church, unlettered nobodies becoming enriched, while learned and prudent men were neglected. Antonio Lusco said of the matter, "The pontiffs aren't any more guilty of this fault than any other princes are. We see them all delight in patronizing fatuous and ridiculous men." He continued by saying, "Once there was a most jovial man named Nobili at the court of Cane, the former prince of Verona. He was crude and uneducated, but by means of his witty repartee, he had ingratiated himself with Cane. Since he happened to be a cleric, he had been granted many ecclesiastical fiefdoms. Once, when a number of excellent men were sent by the prince on an embassy to the old Archbishop of Milan, who then ruled the city, he forced himself into their ranks. When the ambassadors were leaving, upon the completion of their mission, Nobili, who had moved the archbishop to laughter, was given permission to ask for anything he wanted. He asked to be made archpresbyter of an extremely important parish. Laughing at the man's stupidity, the archbishop said, 'Look what you're asking for! That is too heavy a responsibility for a man like you to carry. After all, you are illiterate and uneducated.' 'True,' admitted Nobili firmly, but

with confidence. 'But I'm only going according to what is practiced in my country. In Verona benefices are never conferred on literate men, but upon the ignorant and uneducated.' " We laughed at the man's silly statement to the effect that if stupid things were done in Verona, they should be repeated everywhere else.

Tale CXIII *Of a whore who complained about a barber's malpractice*

There is a tribunal in Florence called *The Court of Morals*, which deals mostly with matters concerning whores, and which seeks to protect them from being molested in the city. A whore once appeared before this court, claiming injury by, and damages against a barber. She had engaged him to shave her lower parts, but his razor had cut her cunt so badly that for many days it was unable to admit any men therein. On these grounds she claimed damages equivalent to the fees which she had lost. I wonder, what should be the decision of the court?

Tale CXIV *Of a friar who confessed a widow*

A friar of the sort who was said to live strictly according to the rules was hearing the confession of a well built Florentine widow. While listening to the woman, he sat firmly, but as she told him her

secrets, she moved closer, kindling within him a youthful flame, finally causing that which had been lying quietly to raise its head and torture the man. Suffering because of his troubled flesh, he begged the woman to leave, but she pleaded with him to give her a penance. "Penancel" he exclaimed. "It is you who impose it upon me!"

Tale CXV *Of a man who pretended to his wife
that he was dead*

In Montevarchio, a town not far from us, a gardener I knew once decided after returning from work, while his young wife was out washing the linens, to hear what she would say, and see what she would do if he were dead. So he stretched out on the ground like a corpse. When the wife came home with her wash and discovered the supposed cadaver, she hesitated, uncertain as to whether she should begin grieving, or eat first (since it was lunch time). Driven by hunger, she made up her mind to eat, cooking some ham, and gobbling it down without drinking anything in order to save time. But the salty meat made her thirsty, so she went downstairs to the cellar to get some wine. As she came up, a neighbor entered to borrow some fire. Dropping the pitcher, the woman forgot about her thirst, and began wailing and screaming a torrent of words, as if the man had just breathed his last. Her shrieks and lamentations attracted the whole neighborhood, men and women, amazed at this sudden death. The man was indeed there, laid out with his eyes

closed and his breath held, so that he certainly seemed dead to everyone. Finally, when he thought that the joke had gone far enough, he opened his eyes in the midst of his wife's repeated cries of "My husband! How am I going to manage now?" To which he replied, "Badly, my wife, unless you get something to drink right away." At this everyone switched from tears to laughter when they learned the cause of the situation.

Tale CXVI *Of a simpleminded young
Bolognese*

A youthful Bolognese bride complained to a most honest matron, who was a neighbor of mine, that her husband always beat her unmercifully. When the lady asked the reason, the girl explained that her husband was displeased because when he performed the matrimonial act, she lay motionless as a log. "Well then," said the woman. "Why don't you behave in bed, and do what your husband asks?" "Because I don't know what to do, mistress!" exclaimed the bride. "If I had ever been taught I would not lie there and be beaten to death!" What an amazingly innocent girl, who knew nothing of that which nature teaches all women. I later told this to my wife for the humor of it.

Tale CXVII *The answer of a confessor to Prince
Bernabo in regard to a woman*

Bernabo, the Prince of Milan, was a great admirer of women. One day while he was alone in the garden, frolicking lasciviously with a woman he loved, a friar, who was his confessor unexpectedly appeared. Because of the man's wisdom and authority, the gates of the palace were open to him at all times. Blushing with embarrassment, Bernabo was at first angry at his confessor's inopportune arrival. But he quickly composed himself, and in order to alleviate the situation, asked, "What would you do if you had a woman like this in your bed?" To which the friar replied, "I know very well what I ought to do, but what I would do I cannot say." By this answer he demonstrated to the prince that as a human being, he was subject to human feelings.

Tale CXVIII *Of an absentminded servant with a
ponderous load*

Roberto of the Albizzi family, a learned and kindly man, had a stupid, slow, and absentminded servant, whom he kept not because of his worth to the household, but out of sheer humanity. He once sent the fellow on an errand to a friend named Degus, who lived near Trinity bridge, and when he got

there he was asked what word he had brought from his master. But he had forgotten, so he stood there like an idiot, trying to remember. The sight of him standing there mutely was nothing new to Degus, who said, "I know why you are here," and pointing to a huge cement block, added, "Take that and carry it to your master at once. He is expecting it."

When Roberto saw the servant carrying the block on his shoulders he understood that the fool was being punished for his bad memory, so when he drew near, called out, "A pox on you, imbecile! You didn't understand me. I don't want such a huge block. Go back and get me a smaller one!" So admitting his error, he trudged back to the friend, sweating beneath the heavy load, and made a third trip back. In this way he was made to suffer for his stupidity.

Tale CXIX Of a man who wished to spend a thousand florins to publicize himself, and the answer he received

A greatly ill-advised young Florentine, a countryman of ours, told a friend that he was anxious to spend a thousand florins, travelling around the world, in order to make himself known. The other, who knew him well, then said, "You would be better off spending two thousand to keep yourself from becoming known."

Tale CXX *A joke of the celebrated Dante*

During his exile in Sienna, our poet, Dante, sometimes meditated alone in the church of the Minorites. One day, while he was leaning on the altar deep in thought and examining his spirit, someone came up to him and pestered him with I know not what sort of bothersome questions. Finally Dante asked, "Tell me, which is the largest of all the beasts?" To which the fellow replied, "The elephant." "Very well, then, elephant," said Dante. "I have more important words than yours to think about. Leave me alone!"

Tale CXXI *A woman's humorous reply to a man's enquiry whether his wife could bear a twelve-month child*

A Florentine citizen, who had been abroad for a year, came home and found his wife in labor. He was considerably distressed by this, fearing that his wife had been unfaithful during his absence. However, not being certain about the matter, he sought the advice of a neighbor, a noble lady, whose opinions were highly regarded. He asked her if it were possible for his wife to have had a twelve month pregnancy. The lady, perceiving his stupidity, at once comforted him by saying, "Certainly, for if your wife saw a donkey on the day she conceived, she

would have had to be pregnant for a whole year, as is the case with asses." The husband accepted these words as absolute truth. Then thanking God for relieving him of ugly doubts, and freeing him from grievous scandal, the fool recognized the child as his.

Tale CXXII *A priest's improper question*

Outside the gates of Perugia is the church of San Marco. There, once, on the occasion of a solemn day when all the congregation was gathered, Cicero, the pastor, was giving his customary sermon. At the end of it he said, "My brothers, I wish to liberate myself from a great desire. During Lent, when I heard your wives' confessions, they all swore that they had kept unviolated the fidelity they owed their husbands. You, on the other hand, almost all admit to having slept with other men's wives. In order to allay my doubts, I want to know who and where are the women with whom you have sinned?"

Tale CXXIII *A barbed jibe upon a Perugian ambassador*

At the time when the Florentines were waging war against Pope Gregory, the Perugians, who had also abandoned the pope, sent a delegation to Florence to seek help. One delegate, a doctor, launched

into a windy discourse, of which the first gem-like words were, "Give us of your oil." A jovial fellow who loathed inflated grandiloquence, interrupted him and said, "Of what oil do you intend to speak? We came to ask for soldiers, and you ask for oil? Perhaps you have forgotten that we have come to seek arms instead of oil?" When the doctor answered that these were the words of the Holy Scriptures, the other replied, "A fine thing! We are enemies of the church, and you invoke the Holy Scriptures!" At this they all laughed at the man's wit, for with these words he not only poked fun at the doctor's prolixity, but won his argument as well.

Tale CXXIV *The Perugian ambassadors to Pope Urban*

The people of Perugia sent an embassy of three men to Pope Urban V at Avignon. It so happened that when they arrived, the pope was very ill, but in order not to keep them waiting, he granted them an audience after requesting that they keep it brief. On the way, one of them, a most learned man, had committed to memory a long speech which he planned to deliver to the pontiff. Completely disregarding the fact that the pope was sick in bed, the man commenced to deliver an oration of great prolixity, during which the pope occasionally showed definite signs of exhaustion. When the fool had completed his address, the pope, with his customary courtesy, asked the others if they had anything to add. One, who immediately recognized the stupidity

of the orator, not to mention the pontiff's boredom, said, "Most holy father, we have definite instructions not to leave here before my colleague repeats his whole speech, if you do not grant our petition at once." The pope laughed at this witty remark, and decreed that the Perugians' request be promptly granted.

Tale CXXV *The foolish remark of some
Florentine ambassadors*

When they arrived in Milan on their way to France, our Florentine ambassadors stopped to visit Duke Bernabo and pay their respects. When they were taken to him and asked who they were, they replied, "If you please, we are Florentine citizens and ambassadors," as was customary in those days. He received them and sent them on their way. When they arrived in Vercelli, they thought about what they had done, and recalled the words they had employed with Bernabo. The expression, *if you please*, was ill phrased, insisted one of them, because whether he was pleased or not, they were still ambassadors and citizens of Florence. With that they decided to go back to Milan and take back what they had said. So when they came back before the duke, the eldest and most learned of them said, "Your lordship, when we were in Vercelli, it occurred to us that we said *if you pleased*, we were Florentine citizens and ambassadors. In doing this, however, we spoke like fools and ignoramuses, for whether you are pleased or not, we remain citizens

and ambassadors of Florence." The duke, a most stern man, laughed at their exactness, and told them that he was pleased, for they were exactly what he took them for.

Tale CXXVI *The witty remark of Giovanni
Pietro of Sienna*

Giovanni Pietro, a citizen of Sienna, a jovial and witty man, was invited once in Rome to drink with Bartolomeo de Bardi while many of us were present. We were joking at the man, because, as it was our custom before drinking to take a mouthful of bread, only he kept holding his bread in his hand. We asked him why he was not eating, and he laughingly answered, "Your bread, Bartolomeo, is reverent and educated, for as many times as it has approached my mouth, it has never cared to enter before the wine." We all laughed at his remark, which indicated that food does not always have to go before drink, especially when a person is thirsty.

Tale CXXVII *About a man who had
purchased an expensive dress for his wife*

A man had bought his wife an expensive dress, and was complaining to her that they lay together so seldom, it cost him a ducat each time. "Well," she replied. "It's your own fault. If you lay with me

more often, it would only cost you a soldo* each time."

Tale CXXVIII *The humorous story of a
physician*

The Cardinal of Bordeaux told me of a man from his town, who began to cry bitterly on his way home one evening, because of a severe pain in his leg. His wife rubbed it down with oil of roses, covered it with wool and oakum, then wrapped it up with a linen bandage. The man kept complaining of the pain and insisted on a doctor. The doctor arrived, examined the leg gently and carefully, then said that there was nothing the matter with it. To which the peasant replied, "In that case, it must be this one that hurts." And he held out the other leg. What humorous stupidity, of a man who had to ask the doctor what hurt him!

Tale CXXIX *Of a man who found gold in his
sleep*

At a party one night, a friend of ours related a dream in which he found gold. "Be careful," said someone, "that you don't suffer the same misfortune that befell one of my neighbors, whose gold turned into feces." Being asked to tell the entire story, he said, "My neighbor dreamed one night that the Dev-

*A penny.

il had led him into a field to dig for gold. When he had found a large quantity the Demon barred his way, and declared, 'You are forbidden to carry it away now, but if you mark the place carefully you will recognize it when you return.' The man asked what sort of marker he should use, to which the Devil replied, 'Move your bowels here! It is the best way to prevent anyone from suspecting that there is gold below. No one but you will know anything about it.' The fellow thought that it was a good idea, but upon awakening suddenly he realized that he had emptied his bowels all over the bed. Rising amidst the excrement and stench, he reached for his hat and jammed it on his head, but the cat had already fouled it. Infuriated at the horrible stink, he had to go and scrub the filth from his head and hair. Thus had the golden dream turned into turd."

Tale CXXX *Of a certain secretary to the
Emperor Frederick*

Pietro delle Viti, a learned and wise man, was secretary to the emperor, Frederick, while he was warring against Pope Alexander III, and seizing the territories of the church. Frederick, listening to vicious attacks by envious barbarians against Pietro, an Italian, had his eyes put out. Afterwards, repenting his unjust punishment, the emperor returned Pietro to his most secret councils. When the conqueror was narrowly pressed for money, Pietro advised him to fight the church with its own property, to melt down the ecclesiastical gold and silver in the cause of war, and, among other things (as they were

in Pisa) the famous chain circling the cathedral. Frederick favored this advice, and used that which he had plundered from the church to support his army. Then Pietro said, "My emperor, I have now avenged myself for the injustice you inflicted upon me. I have invoked the hatred of all men upon you. For your sacrilege, the wrath of God will strike you! Whatever you undertake in the future will come to naught!" Nevertheless, he was victorious again. But Alexander eventually broke the emperor's pride. These words should warn you that sacred things must not be transferred to profane uses, and that whoever does so, is punished by God.

Tale CXXXI *Of a dead Jew, who was eaten for
dinner in ignorance by a Florentine*

Two Jews from Venice were travelling to Bologna, but on the way, one became sick and died. The survivor, desiring to bring his friend's body back to Venice, a thing prohibited by law, cut it up into small bits. He then mixed them with spices and honey and placed them into a small cask, from which there soon arose a delightful odor. He then gave the cask to another Jew who was travelling to Venice by barge, via the canal past Ferrara. There was a great crowd of passengers aboard, and a Florentine seated himself next to the cask. After nightfall, this Florentine, attracted by the savory fragrance, suspected that some rare delicacy was stowed away therein. So, glutton that he was, he stealthily broke open the cask and began to taste the contents. Finding that it was most luscious, he kept eating all night, and by

morning he had practically emptied the barrel, convinced that he had consumed some delicate morsel. When the Jew was about to leave the barge at Ferrara, he lifted the cask, and knew at once by its lightness that it was almost empty. He began screaming that he had been robbed of his countryman's corpse, and the Florentine learned that he had become a Jewish sepulchre.

Tale CXXXII *The vision of Francesco Filelfo**

Francesco Filelfo, jealous of his wife, lived in constant fear that she would betray him, so he kept careful watch over her day and night. One night while sleeping (for we are always occupied in our sleep with that which perturbs the spirit during wakefulness), he beheld a certain demon, who promised security from doubts about his wife if he would do exactly as he was told. In his sleep he assented, saying he would be grateful, and promised to return the favor. "Take this," said the demon, "and keep it diligently on your finger, for as long as you wear it, your wife may never lay with another man without your knowledge." With great delight he awoke to find that he had his finger in his wife's cunt. This is the best remedy against jealousy, for with it, wives cannot be unfaithful behind their husbands' backs.

**Although this story later became famous in many languages as "The Ring of Hans Carvel," this is the original version.*

Tale CXXXIII *Of a drinker*

An excellent wine drinker caught a fever which made his thirst increase. The doctors arrived and began discussing ways of eliminating the raging fever and the unslakable thirst. "Just pay attention to the fever!" exclaimed the sick man. "I'll take care of the thirst myself."

Tale CXXXIV *The joke of Everardo, an Apostolic Secretary, who farted at a cardinal*

The Cardinal di Conti, a stout and heavy man, was hunting with some others, and around lunchtime, upon feeling hungry, withdrew to eat. He sat down at the table sweating profusely (for it was summer), and asked that someone make wind for him with a fan. The servants had gone off on various errands, so he asked a certain Everardo Lupi, an Apostolic Secretary, to provide him with the wind. "I don't know how it should be done for you," he replied. To which the cardinal answered, "Do it your own way, however you wish to." "All right, by Hercules!" exclaimed the other, and lifting his right leg, he let forth a mighty fart, explaining that this was how he made wind. There was a great crowd present, and they were all compelled to burst out into laughter.

Tale CXXXV *A most amusing jest of another
cardinal*

A similar retort was made by the Cardinal of Tricarico to a piece of advice by Alto de Conti. The cardinal lived a very dissolute life, and while hunting, Alto admonished the prelate to improve his morals. Listening to this, the cardinal first stared at him, then bent over his horse's neck and let a mighty fart, exclaiming, "In your beard!" Then he rode off without saying anything else, thereby indicating what he thought of such counsel.

Tale CXXXVI *Of a woman, who, wishing to
hide her hair, showed her ass*

A woman had her hair shaved off because of a skin disease, and had to go out suddenly when called by a neighbor on some urgent business forgetting, however, to cover her head. Seeing her like that, the neighbor upbraided her for publicly displaying such a bald and unsightly pate. So to hide her head, she pulled her skirts up from behind, and in her anxiety to cover her top, she bared her bottom. Everyone laughed at the poor woman, who in her attempt to cover a minor embarrassment, created a great one. This applies to those who try to hide a small offense by committing one more serious.

Tale CXXXVII *The most humorous tale of a
man who sent letters both to his wife and to a
merchant*

Francesco di Ortano, a Neapolitan knight, who was appointed governor of Perugia by King Ladislas, received one day a letter from his wife, and one from a Genoese merchant to whom he owed some money. His wife asked him to return home, and reminded him to be faithful and of his conjugal responsibilities. The merchant asked for immediate payment of his debt. To the merchant, naturally, he was very level, asking for a short delay, and promising to pay as soon as possible. To his wife he sent a message of soothing words and blandishments, promising that he would come home soon and make up for lost time, and following his wife's example, he employed voluptuous terms and lascivious phrases promising that he would in his own phrase fuck her in a multitude of ways. However, in sealing the letters, he sent his wife's letter to the merchant and the merchant's letter to his wife. When she received her letter, she was amazed to learn that there was not a single reference to anything she had written. The Genoese scrutinized the letter which was preoccupied with bedroom jokes, the most prominent of which concerned a return home for the purpose of endless sex. Thinking himself the butt of some obscene joke, he took the letter to the king, and complained of having been offered a roll in the hay instead of the money which was owed him, com-

plaining that he had been sufficiently fucked on the day when he lent his money. Everyone laughed at this, even more so later when the mixup of the letters was discovered.

Tale CXXXVIII *The tale of a certain Dante,
who was always scolding his wife*

A townsman of mine named Dante was frequently warned by friends to protect his house from dishonor, for his wife had the reputation of being unchaste. As a result he bitterly reproved her. With a torrent of tears she swore to her honesty, and asserted that all the charges had been invented by malevolent neighbors who envied their peaceful existence. Convinced thus, by his wife's declaration, the man said to those who kept repeating their charges against her, "All right, enough! I won't listen to any more of this! Tell me, can you possibly know any more about her misconduct than she does herself?" When they admitted that they could not, he exclaimed, "Well, she says that you're a pack of liars, and I have more faith in her than I do in all of you together."

Tale CXXXIX *The will of an old man in his
wife's favor*

Pietro Masini, of our city, was very biting in his speech. During his last days, he made a will which left his wife nothing but her original dowry. Highly indignant at being neglected this way by her husband, and being left nothing, she pleaded with him loudly and tearfully to provide for her old age. "Send for a notary and witnesses," said the dying man, "so that I may leave something to my wife." They came immediately, and before his wife, Pietro turned to the witnesses and said, "This woman beats me with her pleas to leave her something. In order to comply with her request, I call you who have come to witness that I leave her the biggest stinking vulva of any female in town." Upon hearing those words, everyone departed laughing.

Tale CXL *A certain narrative of Zuccaro's
about a woman who asked a priest for a remedy*

Zuccaro, the most urbane of men, used to tell about a neighbor woman, whose looks were not to be scorned, and, who, being sterile, often asked the priest who was her confessor if he knew some remedy which might free her from that condition. He finally agreed to help, and ordered her to come to

his house on a Thursday, that being the best day for the thing at hand. When she entered the priest's chamber, she was filled with the desire to become pregnant. "I am going to use an incantation," he said, "which will induce a number of varied illusions of things which seem to be, but which are not. Firmness and constancy are essential for success. It will seem to you that I touch you, kiss you, embrace you, even do more intimate things, which are actually in the domain of your husband. They will be unrealities, however, appearing only as a result of the words I utter, the efficacy of which is so great as to cause the imaginary to seem real." Putting full trust in his words, the woman agreed to disregard his illusions. After making strange signs, and whispering many mysterious words in her ears, the priest began kissing the woman, and threw her onto the bed. Tremblingly, she asked him what he was doing. "Didn't I warn you earlier," he reminded her, "that nothing is what it seems to be?" Thus he had the credulous creature twice, continually assuring her that nothing was happening. The matter concluded, she went home convinced that she had been deluded by false images.

Tale CXLI *Of a hermit who had sexual
intercourse with a great many women*

There lived in Padua, during the reign of Duke Francesco VII, a hermit named Ansimirio. By passing for a holy man, and pretending to be their confessor, he succeeded in seducing a great number of

women, among whom some were nobility. Eventually his sins caught up with him (for hypocrisy cannot remain hidden forever), he was arrested by the chief officer, and brought before Francesco after making a lengthy confession. Sending for his secretary, the duke decided to amuse himself, and asked the hermit to recount the details of his affairs and the names of the women he had had. He mentioned many, including the names of wives in the duke's own household as the secretary wrote them down for the purpose of furnishing future merriment. When the end of the list appeared to be in sight, the duke asked if any names had been left out. The hermit was firm in his denials, but the secretary made dire threats of punishment for any failure to disclose them all. So the hermit sighed and said, "Very well, write down the name of your own wife, and add her to the others." These words gave the secretary such a calamitous pain that he dropped his pen. Turning, the duke burst out laughing, declaring that it was a good thing for a man who took such pleasure in shame of others, to be united with them.

Tale CXLII *Of a certain young Florentine
who lay with his stepmother*

A certain Florentine youth was frolicking upon his stepmother, when his father burst in and caught the youth in the act of defiling his wife. Horrified at this unexpected indignity, he began to roar and hurl the most violent invectives at his son, who tried vainly to excuse himself. The battle grew louder and more

furious. A neighbor, who was ignorant of what had happened, was attracted by the uproar, and hurried over in hopes of making peace. When he asked the cause of the quarrel everyone remained silent for fear of bringing disgrace on the family. But when the neighbor vehemently insisted on an answer, the father said that it was his son's fault. To this the son retorted, "It's my father who started it. He fucked my mother a thousand times and I never said a word, now that I have done the same thing to his wife—which I admit was foolish and indiscreet—he shrieks to high heaven like a madman!" The neighbor laughed at the son's witty reply, and led the father away until he could subdue him with consolation.

Tale CXLIII *A dispute among some Minorite brothers about having a picture of St. Francis made*

Certain brothers of the Minorite order sent for an artist to paint them a picture of Saint Francis. They could not agree among themselves, however, as to how he should be depicted, some wanting him with stigmata, some preaching to the populace, and some still in other ways. After they wasted a whole day discussing it without coming to any conclusion, the artist had no idea of what they wanted, and went to sleep. Seeing what fools the brothers were, and thinking that they were trying to deceive him, the artist painted the figure playing on a flute, or as some say, hanging from a noose. Then he left. When

the brothers saw the painting, they wanted to punish the artist, but he had used his feet well. They felt that he had insulted their founder deeply, and they wanted to make the fellow pay the penalty.

Tale CXLIV *Of a Florentine priest who went to Hungary*

In the kingdom of Hungary, it is customary after mass for all those who are bleary-eyed to approach the altar and have water poured into their eyes by the priest. At that time he says a few words from the Holy Scriptures to bless them with good health. A certain Florentine priest went to Hungary with Philip the Spaniard. After saying mass one day for the Emperor Sigismund, a number of bleary eyed parishioners came forward to have their eyes sprinkled with water. He, thinking that the cause of their condition was drunkenness, raised the chalice (as he had seen it done) sprinkled them, and said in Italian, *Andatemene, che siate morti a gliadi!* Which means, "Get out and get killed with a sword!" The emperor understood this and could not prevent himself from laughing. Next day, he repeated the meaning of the priest's words at a banquet, irritating the bleary eyed, but moving everyone else to laughter.

Tale CXLV *A peasant's reply to his patron
about his establishment*

A certain peasant of our district was asked by his patron one day what time of the year he was busiest. "In May," he answered. The patron asked why this was, saying that there seemed to be no work in the country at that time, to which the peasant replied, "Because that is the time we have to plow both our own wives and yours."

Tale CXLVI *A man's ridiculous statement*

A certain Roman we knew climbed once to the top of a wall surrounded with reeds, and began speaking to them as though making a speech to the people, in which he discussed at length the affairs of the city. As he spoke, a slight breeze bent the reeds as if they were listening. The ridiculous man, pretending that the reeds were men, thanked them, saying, "Pay me no homage, masters of Rome, for I am the most insignificant of you all." A statement, which thereafter became a proverb.

Tale CXLVII *The derision of a man who was
going to kill a pig*

It was customary in a certain village in Piceno that when one slaughtered a pig during the winter, he invited all his neighbors to dinner. A man who wanted to avoid this expense asked a friend for advice. "The thing for you to do," said he, "is to say tomorrow that your pig was stolen during the night." And that very night he really stole the pig. The next morning, when the owner saw that his pig was missing, he ran to his friend exclaiming loudly that his pig was stolen. To this the other said, "Correct, my friend, you know exactly what I told you to say." But when the first man swore by all the gods that what he said was true, his friend answered, "Excellent, you followed my advice perfectly." The owner repeated all his oaths, to which the thief replied, "That's exactly how I told you to talk, I gave you really good advice." Thus deceived, the fellow left.

Tale CXLVIII *A remark of Facino Cane*

Facino Cane, leader of the troops in the cause of the Ghibelline faction, entered Ticino, and according to his word, plundered only Guelph property. When he was finished, however, he began sack-

ing Ghibelline houses, with the excuse that they contained Guelph goods. The Ghibellines came before the general and indignantly complained of having been thus despoiled, reminding him that they were Ghibellines. "What you say is very true, my sons," replied Facino. "You are all Ghibellines, but the goods are Guelph." In this way, by discriminating against neither faction, he pillaged the goods of all.

Tale CXLIX *Of an ignorant youth who did not consummate his marriage with his wife on the first night*

A simple, stupid, and tasteless young Bolognese married a beautiful young maiden. On the wedding night, knowing nothing of such things, having never had a woman, he failed to consummate the marriage. The next day a friend asked him how matters had proceeded during the night. "Badly," replied the bridegroom. "For though I tried for a long time to make love to my wife, I realized that she did not possess the necessary hole about which I had heard." Recognizing his friends ignorance, he said, "Whatever you do, keep this thing secret, don't say a word about it. It would be dangerous to your name for such a great shame to be openly revealed." The poor fool then pleaded with his friend for advice and help. "I will devote my efforts," said the other, "to boring an opening there for you, if you will agree to provide me with a sumptuous banquet in return. But it will take me eight days to accomplish my

task, for it will be extremely difficult to pierce through." The imbecile agreed to this, hid his wife away together with his friend, then withdrew himself to another bed. After the time had passed, the road was so well opened by the amicable labors of his friend, the husband no longer had anything to fear. When he returned, his companion told him that he had sweated and toiled on his behalf for many days, succeeding at last in confecting the hole. The enlightened young wife congratulated her husband and praised the friend's efforts. The fool, on learning of his wife's perforation, rejoiced, thanked his chum, and repayed him with the promised banquet.

Tale CL *Of a shepherd's wife who had a child
by a priest*

The wife of a shepherd from Rivo, a cold mountain village, had an affair with a priest, by whom she had a son, who was raised in the shepherd's house. When the boy was seven, the priest came to the shepherd, confessed that the child was his, and asked to take him away from them. "Certainly not!" exclaimed the shepherd. "I shall keep the boy who is born in my house. It would be a bad deal for my patron and me if after all the sheep were tupped by strange rams, I gave the lambs to the rams' owners."

Tale CLI *Of a peasant who brought asses
loaded with grain*

A peasant who was seeking a favor of the Perugian council, was opposed by one of the members on grounds of dishonesty. The next day, on good advice, the peasant brought three asses loaded with grain to the house of his opponent. After four days the man changed his mind and spoke profusely on behalf of the peasant. Then, while he spoke, one of his associates asked the other councilmen, "Do you hear how those asses are braying?" He was making a jocular reference to the acceptance of the grain.

Tale CLII *The witty remark of a pauper to a
cold rich man*

A rich man bundled up in warm clothing was on his way to Bologna one winter. While crossing the mountains, he met a peasant wearing nothing but an old, threadbare coat. The wealthy traveller wondered at the endurance of the poor man, for the snow was piled high, and the icy wind blew fiercely. "Aren't you cold?" asked the rich man. "Not at all," came the cheerful reply. The former was amazed at this answer and retorted, "How can you stand it? Here I am freezing under my furs, while you, half naked, don't seem to feel the cold." "Ah," said the

peasant. "If you wore your whole wardrobe on your back the way I do, you wouldn't feel cold either."

Tale CLIII *Of a mountaineer who wished to
betroth a girl*

A mountaineer from the town of Pergola was desirous of marrying the young daughter of a neighbor. But upon looking her over, he decided that she was too young and tender for marriage, and withdrew his offer. Upon this her stupid father said, "She is much more mature than you think. She's already had three children by the priest's clerk."

Tale CLIV *Of the priest who ordered a young
woman to pay him his tithe*

In Bruges, a noble western city, a foolish young woman was confessing to her parish priest. He asked if, among other things, she was prompt in rendering her tithes to the clerics, asserting that she had to include a coital portion as well. This she offered immediately, being desirous of owing nothing to anyone. When she got home late, her husband asked the reason, and fearing nothing, she told him. The man concealed his fury, and after four days, invited the priest to dinner along with several others in order to expose him. When they were all seated at the table, the man told the story, turned to the

priest, and said, "Since you must have your share of all my wife's things, take this!" And at that moment he raised a pot of his wife's excrement and urine to the priest's mouth, and forced him to drink it.

Tale CLV *Of a physician who ravished a
tailor's sick wife*

A Florentine tailor once summoned a doctor he knew to visit his sick wife. The physician came while the husband was away from the house, and despite the sick woman's weak protests, ravished her on the spot. As he was leaving, he met the returning tailor, and assured him that the woman had been well taken care of. But when the tailor entered the house, he found his wife upset and weeping. Upon learning of the doctor's treacherous act, he remained silent. Eight days later, he called on the physician's wife, taking along an expensive piece of cloth. He explained that he had been called by her husband to make an undergarment called a *cotta*.^{*} In order to measure her correctly and ensure a perfect fit, the tailor told the lady, a most delectable creature, to strip completely. As soon as she was naked, he took her by force in a secluded corner, thus avenging himself on the doctor, whom he informed of the matter afterwards.

^{*}*Something like a shift, or thin chemise.*

Tale CLVI *Of a Florentine who was engaged
to a widow's daughter*

A Florentine, who considered himself to be a very sly fellow, was betrothed to a widow's daughter. He visited her home frequently, and one day in the widow's absence, he went to bed with the young girl. The daughter's expression betrayed her to her mother, who reproved her bitterly for having disgraced the family name, and swore that she would do everything she could to break the engagement off. The man had been watching, and returned as soon as his mother-in-law-to-be left again. Finding the girl thoroughly distracted, he asked the reason, whereupon she told what her mother had said. "What about you?" he asked. "I want to obey mother," she replied. "It will be very easy," he told her, as she wondered how it could be. "Last time," he said, "you were on the bottom. This time get on top. Your contrary action will dissolve our engagement." She agreed and the engagement was in this manner broken. Shortly afterwards, she took herself a different husband, and he a different wife. At the former lover's wedding the two of them smiled warmly at each other in recollection of their past relationship. The bride saw this and grew suspicious, asking her husband that night to explain what this had signified. He tried to avoid answering, but upon being pressed, he related the story of the other girl's folly. To which his wife said, "What an idiot she was to tell her mother about your affair. What was the point

of her revealing it? Our servant went to bed with me more than a hundred times without my saying a word about it to mother." The man remained silent, realizing that he was getting no more than he deserved.

Tale CLVII *Of a usurer from Vicenza*

A friar who was a man of great authority, and who often preached to the people, was being continually pestered by a usurer to harangue against usurers, to say how detestable they were, and how prevalent especially in that city. The man was so insistent that he was a source of pain to the friar. Perplexed at the man's desire to have his own activity castigated thus, someone asked him the reason for his frequent solicitations on the matter. To which he said, "There are so many usurers here that very few come to me for loans and I don't make any money. Now if the others could be convinced to retire, all their profits would be mine."

Tale CLVIII *The most amusing tale of Giannino the cook*

Giannino, chef to Baronto of Pistoja, who was once a cook in Venice, told a very funny tale at the Secretaries' banquet. A dull witted Venetian was beaten up, and was extremely anxious to have a son

who might avenge his injury. His wife, however, was sterile, so he approached a friend who claimed to be unusually skillful in the procreation of children. The friend promised to perform the husband's job as best he could. While this was going on, the Venetian left to wander about the city that he might not impede the sowing of his fields, when he met his enemy who threatened to inflict further punishment. Shaking his head, he exclaimed, "Ho! Ho! You fool, be quiet! You don't know what's being prepared for you at my place. If you did, instead of making threats, you'd be terrified. On my word, my avenger is being made for me this very minute!"

Tale CLIX *Of a fatuous Venetian, who carried
his spurs in his pocket while riding*

He told also of a Venetian, who was similarly stupid, who mounted his horse for a ride in the country, and carried his spurs in his pocket. The horse walked slowly, and the fool kept digging his heels into creature's sides, saying, "Aren't you going to move? You'd speed up if you knew what was in my pocket!"

Tale CLX *Of a crazy Venetian who was made
a fool of by a quack*

We laughed deeply at another tale he narrated. A wandering quack came to Venice whose poster showed a phallus, whose image was divided by a number of lines. A certain Venetian approached and asked the significance of the divisions. For the fun of it, the quack said that his own member possessed a like nature. That if he used it on a woman up to the first part he produced merchants, up to the second, soldiers, up to the third, dukes, up to the fourth, popes, his fee for its use being according to the rank of the individual desired. The fool believed this, discussed the matter with his wife, summoned the quack to his house, and paid the price for the procreation of a soldier. When the mountebank commenced coition with the wife of the dolt, he pretended to leave, but instead, hid under the bed. When he saw them strenuously producing a soldier, he seized the quack's ass and gave a mighty push, securing thus the benefit of the fourth dividing line. "By the Holy Scriptures of God!" he bellowed, "This will be a pope!"

Tale CLXI *Of a Venetian who, while
travelling to Treviso, was struck in the kidney by
a stone thrown by his servant*

A Venetian, going to Treviso, rode on a hired horse while his servant followed on foot. As they were traveling, the horse kicked the servant in the leg. It hurt so much, that to avenge himself, he picked up a stone and threw it at the horse, missing, and hitting his master above the kidney. The dolt thought that the horse had done it, and as the servant was walking slowly on account of being hurt, he was reproved by his master. "Your horse kicked me so hard," the man explained, "I can't go any faster." "Don't worry," replied the master. "He's such a kicker, he managed to give me a big one in the kidney."

Tale CLXII *Of a fox, fleeing from dogs, who
was hidden in the straw by a peasant*

Once a fox was being chased by a pack of dogs. He ran to a peasant who was threshing wheat and begged for shelter, promising at the same time never to make off with his chickens. The peasant agreed to the terms, took up a pitchfork full of straw, and hid the fox. Soon a hunter came along, followed by another, searching for the fox, and asking the peasant

if he had seen the fox fleeing, and if so, in what direction. By means of words he said that the fox had gone down a certain path, but with signs and winks, he pointed under the straw. But the hunters paid attention to the words instead of the nods, and left. Then, uncovering the fox, the peasant said, "Remember to keep your promise now, for you owe your escape to what I told them and my saying you had gone." The fox, however, anxious for his life, had watched the peasant's every motion from under the straw, and replied, "Your words were good, but your actions were exceedingly bad." A saying for those who say one thing and do another.

Tale CLXIII *Of a Florentine who bought a
horse*

A Florentine I knew had to buy a horse in Rome and haggled with a dealer who wanted too high a price, 25 golden ducats. The Florentine offered to pay fifteen in cash, and owe the balance. The dealer agreed. The next day when he asked for it, the other refused, saying, "We must keep our bargain. We agreed that I would be your debtor. If I paid you, I would no longer be in your debt."

Tale CLXIV *A jest of Gonella the actor*

Gonella, who was a most amusing actor, once promised a man from Ferrara that for a few coins he would fulfill his desire to become a soothsayer. He took the man into his bed with him and silently broke wind, then ordered him to stick his head under the covers. The fellow obeyed, but hurriedly withdrew because of the stink. "I believe you have farted," he declared. To which Gonella replied, "Then give me the coins, for you are indeed a soothsayer."

Tale CLXV *Another joke on someone who wanted to become a soothsayer*

He said to another, who wished to become a soothsayer, "I can make you a soothsayer by means of a single pill." With that he concocted a pill from a turd, and thrust it into the fellow's mouth. Spitting it out violently because of the stench, he cried out, "Shit!" At which Gonella assured him that he was in truth a soothsayer, and demanded his price.

Tale CLXVI *Of omens reported to Pope
Eugene*

This year in October, when the pope was in Florence for the second time, a number of omens were reported on such good authority, that it would appear unwise to disregard them. They were described in a letter from Como which was written by men of great honesty, who said that they had gotten their information from eyewitnesses. From a certain spot about five miles out of Como one evening at nine P.M., a horde of red-looking dogs, headed towards Germany, were spotted from four miles away. The first rank was followed by a huge number of cattle and sheep, next came infantry and cavalry, split into companies and squadrons, a number of them wearing armor. There were so many of them that they made up an entire army. Some appeared to have almost no heads, and some appeared to be headless. The rear rank was followed by an enormous man as big as a giant, who rode a huge horse and drove a number of pack animals. The passage went on for nearly three hours and was seen in a number of places so that many men and women saw it and even came closer in order to get a better view. After sunset the cavalcade passed, but it was not seen anywhere else.

Tale CLXVII *Marvellous to behold*

After a few days, from the city of Rome, certain facts were reported which are beyond doubt, since they have left behind traces which may still be seen. On September 20th, a tornado knocked down the walls of a deserted castle, called Borgeto, six miles from the city, and also those of a very old church in the same vicinity. The stones were broken into such small pieces that it seemed as though they had been scattered by human hands. A small inn at the foot of the walls, where travellers usually stay, was used as a shelter by many people. Its roof was swept away by the wind and carried a short distance up the road without anyone being hurt. The tower of St. Rufina's church, ten miles from Rome, on the opposite bank of the Tiber, at a place called Casale, which is near the sea, was levelled to the ground by the force of the hurricane. People were amazed at such destruction and wondered what could have caused it. Then two oxdrivers, who lived and worked in Casale, came to Rome, impelled by the strange events they had seen. They told that they had frequently seen the cardinal known as the patriarch, who had recently died of a wound in Adrian's mausoleum, wandering around in the neighboring woods. As was customary with cardinals, he was wearing a linen vestment and a biretta on his head, just as he had appeared in life. He looked melancholy, and he moaned and groaned. At the moment the storm erupted, it was still daytime, they saw him

in the sky in the midst of the howling winds. He clasped the tower in his arms, raised it some distance above the ground, and then hurled it to earth with all his might. Many trees of exceptional thickness were likewise uprooted and carried away. All this was hardly believed at first, but the truth of it was subsequently confirmed by several other people who came from the place.

Tale CLXVIII *Of a deceitful Florentine notary*

A certain Florentine notary who made a little money at his profession, in hopes of turning a clever trick for profit, called on a youth, and asked him if he had been repaid 500 florins which his father had once lent to a person now dead. The young man knew nothing about it, and said that there was no record of the debt on his father's books. The notary, however, insisted that the debt was incurred through a contract he had drawn up himself, and convinced the other to pay cash for a copy which he might use to lay a claim before a magistrate. Replying to the summons, the son of the alleged debtor denied that his father had ever incurred such a debt because there was no record of it on the books (as was customary among businessmen). He went immediately to the notary and accused him of having forged an agreement which was never made. "My son," said the notary, "you know nothing of what was done then because you had not yet been born. Your father did borrow the money, but he paid it back after a few months. I drew up the

contract myself and gave him the receipt." The young man, by paying cash on the line, was given the contract, and freed from the trouble of a lawsuit. Thus by wily trickery the notary defrauded both parties.

Tale CLXIX *Of a friar who stuck his member
through a hole in a shingle*

In Piceno there is a town called Jesi. A friar living there named Lupo was in love with a young virgin whom he begged passionately to gratify his lust. She finally yielded to his pleas, but hesitated for fear of too much pain. The monk said that he would thrust his spear through a hole in a wooden board and place it between them. He then obtained a fir shingle and drilled a special hole in the middle. Soon afterwards, he slipped into the girl's chamber, his still dormant prick stuck through the hole in the wood. As he drew near to this delectable morsel, and began covering her with sweet, warm kisses, something commenced to rise beneath his robe. The maiden's sweet lips, her gentle caresses on his lower parts, so aroused his twig that it began to swell beyond the diameter of the hole until it nearly strangled. It was constricted so tightly that it could go neither in nor out without inflicting upon him the most dreadful suffering. The anticipated pleasure was transformed into excruciating pain, and the friar, writhing beneath his affliction, began to scream and groan. The maiden, thoroughly frightened, sought to comfort him with her kisses in order to accomplish the

original purpose of the tryst, but her attempts at alleviation only increased his anguish, for the greater the swelling, the more painful the squeezing. The miserable friar was on the rack. He begged for cold water to bathe and shrink the swollen weapon which tormented him, but the girl, afraid of arousing anyone else in the house dared not leave the room. Finally, no longer able to bear the poor wretch's screams and suffering, she went for water. She profusely bathed the part that was stuck in the shingle until the swelling abated. The friar, on hearing others in the house stir, was suddenly anxious to make a hasty exit. When he finally pulled his member from the board, it was badly lacerated. Afterwards he had to seek medical treatment for his injury, and the tale of his exploit became public knowledge. If everyone paid such a high price for his peccadilloes, more men would remain continent.

Tale CLXX *The horrible story of a boy who
ate children*

Among these stories, I shall tell a dreadful and abominable thing, unheard of in olden times, and which I considered unbelievable until convinced of its veracity by a letter from one of the king's secretaries, which went something like this, "A monstrous thing has been perpetrated in the mountains ten miles from Naples, near the local castle of Somma. A thirteen-year-old Lombard boy was captured and taken before the magistrate, after having eaten two three-year-old children. He lured them with caresses

into a cave, cut them into pieces and hung them up. Part he ate raw and freshly killed, and the rest he cooked on a fire. He confessed to having eaten several others because their flesh was tastier than other meat, and he said that if he was able, he would do it again. He was taken for insane at first, but his answers were rational on other subjects, indicating that he had acted out of savagery rather than madness."

Tale CLXXI *Of a Florentine knight, who,
pretending to go out, hid in his wife's chamber
without her knowledge*

A Florentine knight with the gout, whose name I do not mention out of respect, had a wife who cast lustful eyes on the steward of the household. Becoming aware of the matter, the husband pretended on a feast day to go out, but instead, hid himself in his wife's chamber. Believing her spouse to be out of the way, she immediately summoned the steward. After greeting him, she said, "I want us to play a certain game together." When he agreed she went on, saying, "First we shall pretend to be at war, afterwards, we will make peace." When the steward asked what to do she replied, "Let us wrestle a little, and when you have thrown me to the ground, thrust your spear into my wound, then we shall conclude peace by kissing each other." He agreed to this, for he had always heard peace praised by all people, and he regarded his future peace as a sweet thing. Then, as they lay on the floor prepared to make their peace, the husband burst out of his hiding place, saying, "A

hundred times in my life I have brought about peace, and though it goes against my grain, I must prevent this one." So the pair had to part without concluding their peace.

*Tale CLXXII Of a certain party who wished
to appear exceedingly chaste, but who was
caught in adultery*

A certain townsman of ours who wanted to be considered a chaste and religious man, was caught by a friend one day in an act of lechery. He was bitterly reproached, he who was always spouting about chastity, for wallowing in such reprehensible sin. To which he replied, "Oh! Oh! It was not for pleasure, as you may think, but to conquer and punish this miserable flesh, and to purge my loins that I did this." This is the way with those miserable hypocrites, denying themselves nothing, while cloaking their ambition and criminality beneath the pretense of virtue.

Tale CLXXIII About the same thing

A religious hermit living in Pisa during the lifetime of Pietro Gambacortas, once brought a whore to his cell, and copulated with her twenty times in one night. In order to purge himself of the sin of lust, each time he moved his buttocks he cried out in

Italian, "*Domati, carne cativella!*" which means, "Control thyself, wicked flesh!" When the whore returned to her quarters, the story leaked out, and the hermit was thrown out of town.

Tale CLXXIV *Of a pauper who earned his
bread as a ferryman*

A pauper who earned his living by ferrying people across a river in a boat was about to go home in a state of gloom because he had no passengers that day. Then, from the distance someone desirous of being taken across the river called out. The ferryman, in hopes of making a small profit went back, and cheerfully took the man across. But when he asked for his money, the other insisted that he had no money, offering instead to impart a piece of good advice. "What?" demanded the boatman. "How do you expect me to feed my hungry family with advice instead of bread?" "Well," said the man, "it is the only thing I have with which to pay you." At that the poor wretch asked what the advice was. "Never," said the man, "take anyone in your boat unless they pay in advance, and never tell your wife that anyone else has a larger genital member than yours." Hearing this, he went sadly home. When he got there his wife asked him how much money he had earned to buy bread. So he told her that instead of money he had received some good advice, and he told her everything, omitting no detail. When the woman heard about the genitals she asked, "My dear husband, you mean to tell me that they're not all the

same size?" "Bah!" he exclaimed. "Of course not. There are tremendous differences between us. Our priest exceeds us all by one half again," and with that he extended his arms to illustrate. The wife immediately burned with desire for the priest, and would not rest until she had verified her husband's statement. Thus the fool negated good advice, and learned that we must all conceal that which is harmful to ourselves.

Tale CLXXV *Of a certain foolish Milanese who set forth his sins in writing for his priest*

A certain man of Milan, who was either a fool, a hypocrite, or highly forgetful, wrote an entire book of his sins which he took to a very learned man, Antonio Rodi, of the Minorite Order, to confess his sins. Handing over the book containing the narrative, the fellow asked him to read it. Being too prudent and clever a man to take up all his time reading this, and knowing what an idiot he was dealing with, Rodi asked some questions and said, "I absolve you of everything mentioned in this notebook." When the other asked what penance was to be imposed, he was told, "For the next month, you will read what is in this book seven times a day." Upon complaining that it would be impossible for him to do it, the confessor remained firm. Thus the fool's verbosity was appropriately overcome.

Tale CLXXVI *Of a certain man who had asked
a friend to praise him while on a visit to his
in-laws*

A man who was neither healthy nor wealthy was going to get married. One midsummer day while dining at the house of his future in-laws, he brought a friend who had been asked to amplify with flowery speech anything that was said about him. When the mother-in-law complimented the tunic he was wearing, he remarked that he had another far more beautiful. At that the friend asserted that he had another costing twice as much. When the father-in-law asked him about his property, he replied that he owned a farm which produced sufficient income to satisfy him. "You forgot," said the friend, "about the other estate which is larger, more elegant, and which produces even more money." Thus, whatever he boasted of, his friend multiplied. The host observed that his future son-in-law was not eating very much and urged him to have more. He explained by saying, "I just don't feel too well in the summer." To which the friend, with his usual braggadocio, added, "There is more to it than that. He's bad enough in the summer, but he's even worse in the winter."

Tale CLXXVII *Of a certain Pasquino from
Sienna, who made a remark about a fart from the
state*

Pasquino of Sienna, a witty and sharp-tongued man, had retired to Ferrara after being exiled from his country following a revolution. He was being visited by a certain Siennese who was returning home from Venice. The visitor was a man of no great worth. Pasquino received him well, and after some conversation, the man boastfully offered to do what he could on his friend's behalf. Stretching out his arms, he said, "I am part of the body of the state." To which Pasquino retorted, "Would that the body would fart and get rid of you and your ilk forthwith!" Thus he facetiously castigated the vain fellow.

Tale CLXXVIII *Of a stupid doctor who
discoursed in Latin while bird hunting*

An ignorant, stupid doctor from Milan saw a man going out to hunt birds with an owl. Anxious to see how this was done, he asked to go along. The birdcatcher assented, and placed him near the owl, under cover of the thicket, on condition that he say nothing, lest he frighten the birds. When a large flock of them gathered, the doctor cried out to draw

the nets. The birds all took wing at the sound of the doctor's voice. Bitterly, the birdcatcher upbraided the doctor who promised to be silent. But when the birds returned to the spot, the bonehead cried out in Latin, *Aves permultae sunt!*, convinced that if he spoke in Latin, the birds would not understand him. Once again the birds flew away, and again the frustrated birdcatcher bitterly rebuked the doctor for having spoken. "Do the birds understand Latin?" exclaimed the doctor, who believed the birds had flown, not because of the sound of his voice, but because of the meaning of the words, as if birds could understand them.

Tale CLXXIX *Of a woman who believed that
she was being praised when told her vulva was
wide*

A woman in Sienna was committing adultery. Immediately after disconnecting himself from her, the lover said that he had never seen anyone with so wide a vulva. Believing this to be praise, she said, "Oh, I don't deserve a compliment like that, you're just being gracious. I wish it were true, that it was as big as that! I would be very proud, and would think much more of myself."

Tale CLXXX *The humorous remark of a
young woman in labor*

A rather simple-minded young woman of Florence was in labor, and experiencing great pain. After her suffering had continued for a long time, the midwife took a candle and inspected the woman's secret parts to see if the baby was coming out. At this the mother-to-be told the midwife to look also up the other end, as her husband had occasionally used it, too.

Tale CLXXXI *Of someone who lavished on a
young Roman the highest of praise*

One of our group lavished the most extravagant praise upon a most handsome young Roman, who was honest, dedicated to the study of literature, and a person of high morals. When several others concurred in their compliments, someone said, "I believe that when he was at the same age, our Lord, Jesus Christ was exactly like him and no other." What mighty praise of physical beauty. Neither Cicero nor Demosthenes could have said anything more exquisite.

Tale CLXXXII *Of several who expressed
various wishes*

A group of Florentines were having a conversation in which each expressed a different wish. One said he would like to be the pope, another wished to be a king, and still another mentioned something else. A talkative child who happened to be present then said, "I wish I were a melon." When asked the reason for this, he replied, "Because then everyone would smell my ass." It is common for those who buy melons to sniff the posterior part.

Tale CLXXXIII *Of a merchant, who, in praising
his wife, asserted that she never farted*

A certain merchant was praising his wife to a patron upon whom he was dependent, and among other things, said that she had never farted. The patron marvelled at this, but insisted that it was impossible, and then bet the merchant a lavish dinner that within the next three months his wife would fart a number of times. On the following day he asked the merchant to loan him 500 gold ducats for one week. He did not like to lend that much money, but he agreed to do so. After waiting eight anxious days, he went to the patron and asked for the money back. The nobleman, acting as though he were

gravely pressed, asked the merchant for another 500, promising to pay the entire amount back by the end of the month. For quite a while the good man tried to resist on grounds of poverty, but for fear of losing his first 500, loaned out the second. He went home with a troubled spirit, melancholy and concerned. He became so upset by doubts that his nights were soon sleepless. While lying awake every night, he heard his sleeping wife fart. After a month, the patron summoned the merchant and asked him if, since they had met, he had heard his wife break wind. At that the man confessed his error. "So many times," he said, "that instead of a dinner, it would cost me my whole fortune." When he said that he got his money back and paid for the dinner.

Tale CLXXXIV *A most sensible reply to a detractor*

Loisio Marsilio, of the Augustinian order, who used to live in Florence, was a man of superb ingenuity and learning. When he was an old man he brought up and educated in the study of humanities, a poor young man named Giovanni (whom we knew), and who, as a result, later became a very learned man. A fellow student of his, a Florentine (indeed, a number of pupils attended the old man's discourses), moved by jealousy, began secretly detracting the young man to his master, asserting that he was ungrateful, thinking and speaking ill of him. Since the fellow was always talking about this, the

old man, who was most wise, asked, "How long have you known Giovanni?" When the detractor replied that it was less than a year, the friar said, "I am amazed that you regard yourself so clever, and me so stupid, that in less than a year you think you know more about Giovanni's nature and morals than I, with whom he has lived for ten years." A most intelligent reply, which revealed the detractor's malevolence, and bolstered the youth's loyalty. If more were treated thus, fewer would practice envy and slander.

Tale CLXXXV *A facetious remark that applies
to many bishops*

The same man was asked by a friend what was meant by the two tassels on bishops' mitres, to which he replied that the front one represented the New Testament, and the back one, the Old Testament, which all bishops should have memorized. The questioner then asked the significance of the two bands which hang from the mitre to the loins. "That bishops know neither," he explained. A facetious response, which applies to many bishops.

Tale CLXXXVI *A humorous remark about
Francesco Filelfo*

At a gathering of the secretaries in the papal palace, attended (as always) by many learned men, the conversation turned to the impure and iniquitous life of that most infamous of men, Francesco Filelfo. While being accused by everyone of his crimes, someone asked if Filelfo had been born of nobility. Then one of his countrymen, a fine and witty man, assumed a grave expression and said, "He certainly was. His nobility was of the highest degree, for his father always wore silk in the morning." This would denote that he was the son of a priest, for priests usually wear silk while administering the sacraments.

Tale CLXXXVII *A joke against the same man*

Then another funny fellow remarked, "No wonder that since he is descended from Jupiter and he is imitating his forebears, he should have kidnapped another Europa and another Ganymede." This referred to a Greek virgin he had ravished and brought to Italy, the daughter of John Chrysoloras, and also to a certain young man from Padua, whom he took to Greece because of his handsome looks.

Tale CLXXXVIII *Of a procurer who had been a
notary*

There was a French notary in Avignon, well known to the Roman curia, who fell in love with a public whore, gave up his notary's profession, and lived off the profits of her prostitution. When January the first, New Year's Day fell, he put on new clothes, and wrote French words in silver letters on his sleeve that said, *From good to better*. Thus he regarded the business of a procurer more honorable than his previous profession.

Tale CLXXXIX *The joke of a certain Petrillo,
who freed a hospital of a filthy crowd*

The Cardinal of Bari, who was born in Naples, owned a hospital at Vercelli, in Cisalpine Gaul. He derived a scanty income from it, however, because of the high costs incurred by the poor. So he sent one of his men, named Petrillo, to straighten out the finances. On his arrival, Petrillo found the hospital filled with all sorts of lazy, malingering indigents, who were exhausting the resources of the place. Entering the wards in the gown of a physician, he examined the patients' assorted ulcers, then summoned all the inmates together. "There is only one thing," he said, "that can cure all your ulcers. It is a

salve made of human fat. Therefore, I shall draw lots among you today, to decide who will be popped alive into the water, and boiled down for the others." On hearing this, the patients ran away in terror, each one fearing that the deadly lot might fall to him. Thus the hospital was liberated of a sordid lot of men.

Tale CXC *The humorous tale of a young man
who laid everyone in the house*

A certain Florentine had in his house a young man who tutored his sons in literature. He became so familiar, that eventually he lay with the maid, then the nurse, next the mistress of the house, and finally with his two pupils. When the father, who was incredibly witty, heard about this, he summoned the youth to a private chamber, and said, "Since you have horizontalized everyone of mine (and may it do you a lot of good), there will be no exceptions. You're going to have to take me too!"

Tale CXCI *Of sound*

Once during the reign of Boniface IX, several people were discussing which sounds were sweetest and most pleasant. They had a variety of opinions. Lito of Imola, secretary to the Cardinal of Florence, the one who really was a cardinal, said that there

was nothing more pleasant than the sound of a bell to a hungry man. It is, indeed, customary for cardinals to summon their households to dinner and supper with the sound of a bell, and when it rings late, those who have the most hearty appetites regard the sound as the very summit of luxury. After that everyone agreed, especially those who had often learned of this through personal experience.

Tale CXCII *Concerning the son of a prince
who had been commanded to be mute because
of his malevolent tongue*

A Spanish prince had a grown son, whose vicious and abusive tongue had brought the hatred of many upon himself. For this reason the father ordered his son to be permanently silent, and the young man obeyed. Now it happened that both of them went to a grand celebration for the king at which the queen was present. The youth attended his father scrupulously without speaking. The queen (an unchaste woman), believing him to be truly deaf and dumb, and thinking to take advantage of the fact, asked the father to take his son into her service. When she had obtained his consent, she employed the young man for her most secret affairs, and always allowed him to witness her debaucheries. Two years later, the father was again present at a celebration similar to the previous one. The king, during that interval, had frequently seen the young man taken by everyone as dumb. While attending the queen, the father was asked by the king whether the youth had been

dumb from birth, or through an accident. "Neither," explained the father. "I forbade him to speak because of his evil tongue." The king then asked the father to permit his son to speak, and for some time he resisted, insisting that if he complied with the request some scandal would result. Finally he acceded to the royal demand and permitted his son to speak if he so desired. Then turning to the king and pressing up to him, the youth said, "You have a wife who is more debauched then the most feculent whore!" Confounded by this, the king forbade him to speak another word. It is the way of some people, that though they may speak infrequently, they always speak evil.

Tale CXCIH *The deed of a certain guardian*

Dacono degli Ardingelli, a Florentine citizen, had been appointed guardian over a certain orphan, and over a long period of time he squandered the entire estate on his own eating and drinking. Finally he was summoned before a magistrate who ordered him to produce books of income and expenditure. He pointed to his mouth and to his buttocks, saying, "I have nothing but these. This is my income, and that is my outgo."

Tale CXCIV *How a friar seduced a woman by
means of a malicious trick*

A mendicant friar who was casting eyes on a beautiful young female was tortured to the limits of endurance by his love for her. As he was ashamed to make any dishonest proposals, he conceived of a scheme by which he might deceive her. For several days he went around with his index finger bandaged, pretending to be suffering from great pain. After he had complained for some time, the young woman asked if he had attempted to remedy the condition. "I have tried many," he replied, "but to no avail." There was one, he explained, which the doctor had recommended, but the nature of it was such, that he would blush even to mention it. Urging him not to be ashamed to describe that which would cure such a severe ailment, she was insistent. Then he, with great timidity, told her that the finger would have to be cut off unless he could place in that part of a woman from which she derives her feminine nature, where the warmth would weaken the sore. But as a matter of honor, he would not ask anyone for such a favor. The woman, moved by pity, offered her services. Whereupon he declared that modesty forbade the performance of such a task in any but some dark place, that he could never take advantage of such charity in the light. Suspecting nothing, the woman consented. As soon as they were in the dark he made her lie down. First he put his finger into her, then his prick. When done he cried that the infection had

broken and discharged its contents. Thus was his finger cured.

Tale CXCIV *A witty remark of Angelotto about
a bearded Greek cardinal*

Angelotto, the Roman cardinal, is an extremely witty man. When a Greek cardinal came to the curia wearing a long beard, as was customary in his land, everyone wondered that he did not conform to them by shaving it off. "It is good for him to have it," said Angelotto. "For among so many goats, there is nothing wrong with one buck."

Tale CXCVI *Of a certain fat horseman*

An extremely fat horseman rode into Perugia, where the inhabitants enjoy a jest. When some bystanders jokingly asked him why he contradicted custom by carrying his bag on the horse's neck, he made the witty reply, "I must do so in a city so full of thieves and bandits."

Tale CXCVII *The humorous remark of a
judge to a lawyer who quoted the Clementina
and the Novella*

The litigation of a will came before a secular court in Venice. The lawyers for each side were there to argue for their clients. One, who was a priest, referred in his argument to the *Clementina* and the *Novella*, and quoted certain passages from them. Then, one of the judges, an extremely old man who was totally ignorant of these names, and who bore no resemblance to Solomon, turned ferociously to the lawyer and exclaimed, "Damn you! Do you not blush to mention the names of these lewd and meretricious females? Do you think that we are going to accept their words on your behalf?" The ignoramus thought that *Clementina* and *Novella* were not the names of laws, but those of women being kept by the attorney.

Tale CXCVIII *A remedy to avoid cold*

Once I asked how to avoid coldness in bed at night, to which someone standing nearby said, "Do what a friend of mine did when he was a student. Although he usually purged his belly after dinner, he sometimes abstained, declaring that the retention of hot turd kept his body warm during the night. A remedy against cold which is no longer used."

Tale CXCIX *About a certain preacher*

A preacher, once during the feast of St. Christopher, was praising the saint to the people, for having carried Christ on his shoulders. He kept asking, "Who on earth ever had such an opportunity as that of carrying the Saviour?" As he repeated his tiresome question, "Who ever received such grace?" A wit standing nearby who was tired by continuous questioning retorted, "The ass who carried the son and mother."

Tale CC *About a young woman who had been separated from her husband*

A youth of Verona married a beautiful young girl. As he overindulged in his matrimonial rights, his face grew pale and emaciated, and his body thin and debilitated. His mother, fearing that he would soon collapse into a state of illness, sent him off to the country, far away from his wife. The girl, while lamenting her husband's absence, saw a pair of sparrows mating. "Fly away," she warned. "If your mother-in-law sees you, she'll never let you stay together."

Tale CCI *Of two men who argued because
they had the same coat of arms*

A Genoese sea captain who was fighting the English for the king of France had a coat of arms which depicted a bull's head. A French nobleman, seeing the crest, claimed it as his own. An argument arose, and the Frenchman challenged the Genoese to a duel. The Italian accepted the challenge and came to the appointed place unarmed, while the Frenchman arrived with an elaborate display of grandiose ceremony. "Well," asked the Genoese, "what exactly are we going to fight about today?" To which the Frenchman said, "I assert that your coat of arms is mine and that it was mine long before you had it." At this the Genoese asked what that crest was. "The head of a bull," came the reply. "Well, in that case," said the Genoese, "we have nothing to fight about, my crest isn't a bull's head. It's a cow's head." So by this witty remark, the Frenchman's pretentiousness was derided.

Tale CCII *The joke about a doctor who
prescribed medications by lottery*

It is customary in Rome for the sick to obtain a diagnosis by sending the doctor some urine with one or two silver coins. A certain physician I knew used

to write down at night remedies for illnesses on slips of paper (which are called prescriptions). Next he would throw them all together in a bag. When all the urine was brought to him and he was asked to postulate his remedies, he would thrust his hand into the bag, take out the first slip he found, and say in Italian, *Prega Dio te la mandi buona*, which means, "Pray God that he sent you a good one." A miserable situation for those who had to depend upon chance instead of reason for their recoveries.

Tale CCIII *Consolation to a sad man in debt*

A Perugian was walking down the street absorbed in melancholy thoughts, when he was stopped by someone who asked to know what was troubling him. When he explained that he owed money he could not pay back, the other said, "Bah! Leave such thoughts to your creditors, you fool."

Tale CCIV *Of the penalty inflicted upon Greek and Genoese murderers*

Some Genoese of Pera (which is a possession of Genoa near Constantinople) went into that city on business, fell into a skirmish with some Greeks, after which some of the party were dead and others wounded. When they petitioned the emperor to levy justice on the slayers, he promised that it would be

done immediately, and he decreed that as the penalty for their crimes, the Greeks would have their beards shaved off, a thing they considered most ignominious. The Genoese governor of Pera, thinking that he had been affronted, promised the families of the dead and injured that he would avenge them. Sometime later, they entered Constantinople and killed or wounded a number of Greeks. The Emperor sent an angry complaint to the Governor of Pera immediately, and demanded punishment for the malefactors. The governor promised that the guilty would be liberally punished, and on the day of the sentence's execution the slayers and their accessories were conducted to the public square apparently to have their heads cut off. The news of this thing attracted a crowd of Greeks and the entire populace of Pera, all of whom expected the extreme penalty. Priests came with crosses prepared to carry off the dead bodies. Then the governor, after having a herald proclaim silence, ordered the malefactors to have their behinds shaved, explaining that Genoese wore their beards around their buttocks, not their faces, and by thus shaving bottoms instead of the faces, equal punishment was meted out for the same crimes.

Tale CCV *A laugh at the Romans, who eat
 "virtues"*

On Mayday the Romans cook and eat a variety of vegetables, which they refer to as "virtues." Once while this custom was being discussed by some friends, the Milanese, Francesco Lavegni laughingly

remarked, "No wonder the Romans have degenerated from their former superiority. Every year they diminish their *virtues* by consuming them."

Tale CCVI *Of someone who vowed a candle
to the Virgin Mary*

While I was in England, I heard an amusing remark from an Irishman who was the captain of a merchant ship. Once the ship was struck by a wild storm at sea, and was so furiously tossed about by the waves, that everyone gave himself up as lost. The captain vowed that if the ship were saved from the storm, he would go to a certain church of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and offer up a candle as big as the ship's mast. When a friend reproached him for such a vow as being difficult to fulfill, since there was not that much wax in all of England, the captain said, "Oh be quiet! Let me promise the Mother of God what I please, as long as we get out of danger. Once we are saved she'll be satisfied with a penny candle."

Tale CCVII *A similar joke about another who
made a vow to St. Ciriac*

The same sentiment was felt by a merchant of Ancona towards St. Ciriac (the patron of that city, who is always depicted with a long beard). His ship

was once being tossed severely by a storm, and for fear of his life, he promised St. Ciriac a certain house within a specific time limit. When the time had elapsed, he went to church and confessed what had happened. The priest (hoping to take personal advantage of the matter in the future) exhorted the merchant to fulfill his vow. He promised to free himself from the burden of such a weight, but continuous pestering and admonishments on the part of the priest cause him to act. Finally, annoyed by the priest's tiresome reminders, he said, "Oh, stop bothering me about this thing! I've fooled plenty of people with beards longer than St. Ciriac's."

Tale CCVIII *Of a widow who wanted to marry
an old man*

A widow once said to a neighbor that, though she no longer cared for worldly things, she would like to marry a quiet old man for the sake of company and mutual comfort rather than for anything else, because she felt that it was time to think about the salvation of her soul instead of the gratification of flesh. The neighbor then promised to find just such a man, and on the next day returned to the widow and announced that she had found one with all the necessary virtues, especially the primary one which had been sought. He was utterly lacking in virility. Hearing that the widow exclaimed, "I wouldn't have him under any condition! For without a peacemaker (thus she described the procreator of humanity, and she believed in living peacefully with her husband)

what mediator could restore peace between us should a serious altercation or dispute ever arise?"

Tale CCIX *Of a certain friar who got an abbess pregnant*

An abbess I knew in a certain convent in the city was pursued by a Minorite friar who was constantly seeking to bed her down. The woman refused, however, for fear of conceiving and bringing punishment upon herself. The friar then promised to give her a *brevet*, as they called it, which, if suspended about her neck with a silken thread, would prevent children, permitting her to copulate with whomever she chose. She believed what she wanted to, and the friar pushed her against the mattress many times. Three months later she became pregnant. The friar learned of it and fled. The abbess, seeing that she had been deceived, untied the *brevet*, opened it up, and looked to see what was written there. In ungrammatical Latin were the following words, "Do not encourage admittance to the cave, and it will never fill up." A most practical incantation for the prevention of fertility.

Tale CCX *The amazing answer of a boy to
Cardinal Angelotto*

Angelotto, the Roman cardinal, was a biting and argumentative man, who was occasionally long on words and short on tact. Once when Pope Eugene was in Florence, Angelotto was visited by a precocious ten-year-old boy who offered a maximal compliment with minimal words. Admiring the boy's gravity and smoothness of tongue, Angelotto asked him several questions which were answered quickly and cleverly. Turning to his assistants, he remarked, "The intelligence of those who display such natural qualities and learning from childhood decreases with age, and they grow into old fools." To which the boy retorted, "In that case you must have been the most brilliant and learned one of all in your tender years." The cardinal was astounded at this fast and witty comeback, finding himself rebuffed for stupidity by a mere child.

Tale CCXI *Of a shoemaker's apprentice who
had his master's wife*

The apprentice of a shoemaker in Arezzo often retired to his master's house with the excuse that it was easier to sew shoes there. Noticing these frequent comings and goings, the shoemaker grew sus-

picious, and coming home unexpectedly one day, caught the apprentice upon his wife. "You can't expect me to pay you for that kind of sewing!" he exclaimed. "For *this*, you pay me!"

Tale CCXII *The amusing tale of a young woman who farted*

A young woman who was visiting her parents in the country went for a walk through the woods with her husband. As they passed a flock of sheep she noticed that the rams were tugging certain ewes and leaving others alone. So she asked her husband why they chose to couple up with some and not with others. "Because," said the husband jokingly, "when a ewe farts, the ram immediately mounts her." When she inquired if this were also the case with men, the husband, in order to carry the jest further, answered affirmatively. She immediately farted, and thus caught up in his own joke, the husband laid her on the spot. They had not gone much further when she farted again, making it necessary for the husband to have her again. By the time they had nearly reached the edge of the woods, the female, thoroughly delighted with the game, gave a third fart. But the husband, exhausted between hiking and fornication, exclaimed, "Even if you were to shit out your very heart, I wouldn't take you again!"

Tale CCXIII *Who is more acceptable to God,
he who says, or does?**

A wit I know once asked a monk who was more acceptable to God, a sayer or a doer? To which the monk told him, a doer. "In that case," retorted the other, "He who makes a *Pater Noster* is more deserving than he who says one."

Tale CCXIV *About an Egyptian who was urged
to convert*

A Christian urged an Egyptian infidel who had come to Italy, and whom he had known for a long time, to come to church during the celebration of a solemn mass. The Egyptian agreed and attended a mass along with the Christians. Afterwards, at a gathering, he was asked what he had thought of the ceremony and solemnity of the service he had seen. "It was all well and good," he observed, "with one exception." Asked what that was, he explained that he could find no charity present during the mass, for there was only one man who ate and drank, leaving neither bread nor wine for the others.

**This tale can be taken two ways. It can refer to a rosary or to one who is excessively liberal in begetting offspring.*

Tale CCXV *Of a Spanish bishop who ate
partridges as fish*

A Spanish bishop who was travelling on a Friday stopped at an inn and sent his servant out to purchase some fish. The servant returned explaining that he hadn't been able to find any fish for sale, but told his master that he had seen two partridges. He was then ordered to go out, buy them, have them cooked, and brought to the table. The servant was amazed at this for he had assumed that the purchase was intended for Sunday, and he asked the bishop if he really meant to eat them on a day when meat was forbidden. To which the bishop replied, "I shall use them as fish." The fellow was even more startled at this answer, when the bishop explained, "You are aware that I am a priest, no? Well then, which is more difficult, making bread into the body of Christ, or partridges into fish?" Whereupon he made the sign of the cross, told them to change into fish, and he ate them as fish.

Tale CCXVI *Of a fool, who on sleeping with
the archbishop of Cologne, accused him of being
a quadruped*

The late archbishop of Cologne had a fool in whom he delighted, and whom he allowed to lie in his own bed. One night a nun happened to be in that very bed, and the fool, who lay at the foot, noticed that there were more feet in bed than usual. He seized one of them and asked who it belonged to. The archbishop said that it was his. Upon grabbing the second, third, and fourth, and having the archbishop claim them as his own, the fool leaped immediately out of bed, ran to the window, and began shouting in a loud voice, "Come everyone, and see this strange and monstrous thing. Our archbishop has become a quadruped!" Thus did he expose his master's turpitude. More mindless than fools are those who delight in fools' company.

Tale CCXVII *Of one who condemned the life of
Cardinal Angelotto*

A certain man was vituperating the life and morals of the late Cardinal Angelotto. He had, indeed, been a rapacious and violent man with no conscience whatsoever. Then said one of the bystanders, "I believe that the devil has already eaten and

excreted him again and again for his crimes." To which another most witty man replied, "I think his flesh was so foul, that no demon, no matter how strong his stomach, would dare to eat him for fear of vomiting."

Tale CCXVIII *Of a fool who mocked a
Florentine knight*

There once lived in Florence a knight of our acquaintance who was short in stature, but who had an extremely long beard. A certain fool began to make fun of him whenever they met, joking about his stature and his beard so persistently, that he became a nuisance. This so bothered the knight's wife that she summoned the fool, stuffed a good meal into him, and gave him a coat, asking him not to mock her husband any more. He gave his word, and the next time he met the knight, he remained silent. Marveling at this some bystanders asked him why he had said nothing instead of babbling as he formerly did. At this he put a finger to his lips and said, "My mouth has been so stuffed I cannot speak." The optimum method of benevolent conciliation, therefore, is a meal.

Tale CCXIX *A daughter's excuse to her father
for sterility*

The wife of a certain nobleman was rejected and repudiated by her husband after a few years because she was barren. When she returned to her father's house, her father took her aside and reproached her for not becoming pregnant, if necessary even by someone other than her husband. "But father," she cried. "It really wasn't my fault! I tried all the manservants, even the stableboys, but I couldn't conceive, and it did me no good at all." The father then consoled his unfortunate daughter, realizing that she was utterly blameless for being childless.

Tale CCXX *Giovanni Andrea, caught in the
act of adultery*

Giovanni Andrea, the famous Bolognese doctor, was caught by his wife as he lay with a servant girl. Stupefied at this unexpected thing, the woman turned to her husband and demanded, "Where is all that wisdom of yours now, Giovanni?" To which he instantly replied, "Here in this vagina where it fits very nicely."

Tale CCXXI *Of a Minorite friar who made a
boy's nose*

An extremely witty Roman, with whom I was talking at a gathering, told me a very funny story about what happened to a neighbor of his. "A Minorite friar named Lorenzo," he said, "was making eyes at a lovely young girl, recently married to a neighbor." (And he mentioned the name.) For ulterior motives he asked the husband if he could be godfather to their first child. The ever-present friar, from continuous observation, had assumed that the young woman was pregnant, and coming to see her in her husband's presence, he assumed the stance of one who could see the future, and told her that she was going to have a child, which, after being born, would bring her great unhappiness. She thought that he was predicting a girl, and said, "Even if it is a girl, it will be most welcome." With a grave expression, the friar, being pursued on the point, said that he doubted if the child would be a girl, but the more he was urged to speak, the less he would say. Finally, deeply anxious to know what the impending disaster might be, she secretly called the friar to her and begged him to reveal what this monstrous thing would be. Softly, he told her that she would have a male child, but that it would be born without a nose, the most foul thing that could befall a human face. Terrified at this, she begged to know if there was any way to prevent such a calamity. He said that there was, but that it would be necessary to set

aside a day for the task on which he would go to bed with her to make up for her husband's deficiency, and add a nose to the baby. Although it was a hard thing for her, she agreed, so that her infant would not be deformed, and on the prescribed day she submitted to the friar. He, under the pretense of perfecting the nose, came back and lay with her many times. Being bashful, she lay motionless, and the friar ordered her to move, explaining that only from a great deal of friction would the nose be anchored properly. Finally she chanced to deliver a boy with a very long nose. When she marvelled at this the friar explained the nasal masterpiece as a direct result of his excessive labors. She told her husband about the matter herself, firmly believing that it would have been unspeakable for their child to have been born deformed and noseless. He praised her for this, and in no way cast aspersions on her efforts.

Tale CCXXII *Of a mendacious Florentine*

There was a certain Florentine who was so mendacious that never did the truth issue from his mouth. One day he met someone to whom he always told falsehoods, and as he was about to speak, the other said, "It's a lie!" "How could I?" he protested. "I haven't said anything yet!" To which the man retorted, "I mean that you will lie as soon as you open your mouth!"

Tale CCXXIII *Of a jealous man who castrated
himself to prevent his wife's infidelity*

A citizen of Gubbio named Giovanni was extremely jealous, and he could not ascertain any positive means of learning whether or not his wife was going to bed with other men. At last he conceived of a scheme worthy of such extreme jealousy. He castrated himself, taking consolation in the thought that, if his wife became pregnant, he would be sure that she had committed adultery.

Tale CCXXIV *What was said to a priest at the
offertory*

Once on a feast day when a Florentine priest was receiving his customary stipends from the people at the offertory, he kept saying the usual words, "It shall be returned to you a hundredfold, and you shall enjoy everlasting life." While giving a coin an old nobleman heard these words, and said, "I will be satisfied if I only get back the capital (as they say)."

Tale CCXXV *A priest who made a mistake
while preaching and said "hundred" instead of
"thousand"*

In the same vein, a certain priest was expounding to his congregation on the passage from the gospels where it says that our Saviour fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread. But by mistake, he said "five hundred" instead of "five thousand." His clerk murmured softly that he had made an error in numbers, telling him that the gospels say five thousand. To which the priest snapped, "Be quiet, you fool! They'll hardly believe the number I've told them."

Tale CCXXVI *Wise saying of the cardinal of
Avignon to the king of France*

It occurs to me to relate among these tales of mine a salty saying made by the Cardinal of Avignon, a most prudent man. When the popes made their residence in Avignon, it was customary for them to have magnificent processions of retainers with many gorgeously decorated horses to heighten the grandeur of their train. The king of France once angrily enquired if the apostles ever resorted to such pomp. The cardinal replied, saying, "Not at all.

The apostles lived in a time when kings, too, lived differently, being only shepherds and cowherds."

Tale CCXXVII *A terrible happening in St. John
of Lateran*

Not for the sake of entertainment, but as a deterrent against like things, I must report a monstrous thing. While preaching to his congregation in my presence, during Lent, a certain Augustinian monk, of Rome, in order to induce them to confess their sins, told of a miracle he had witnessed six years before. One night after midnight, he had arisen with his confreres to sing matins in the Lateran basilica, when he heard a voice calling out from a tomb where a certain Roman citizen had been buried eighteen days earlier. The voice repeatedly begged them to come closer. At first, the voice terrified them. Gathering their courage, the monks went to the place from where the voice issued. Thereupon the dead man told them not to fear, but to move the stone and bring the chalice. When this was done he rose up and spat into it the consecrated host which had been administered before death, saying that he was damned and suffering the most cruel punishment, for he had had carnal knowledge of both his mother and daughter, but had never confessed the sin. And having said that, the cadaver lay down again.

Tale CCXXVIII *How a screaming preacher was
 confounded*

A monk who preached frequently fell into the habit of screaming like a fool in a mighty voice. A woman who listened to him wept at the sound of his roaring. Having noticed her often, the monk believed that she was swayed to tears by his words, and his zealous appeals to God and conscience. He called her to him and asked her the cause of her groans, enquiring if his words agitated her spirit, and reduced her to pious tears. She said that in truth she was bitterly saddened and disturbed by his incitements and screams, explaining that she was a widow, who had been left an ass by her deceased husband, to help her earn a living. Just like the monk, it was in the habit of braying day and night, but now it was dead, and she was miserable and destitute. Thus, whenever she heard the raucous preaching of his shrieking voice, it reminded her of her ass braying, and she was forced to cry whether she wanted to or not. Thus the fool, who would have been more aptly termed a barker than a preacher, was thoroughly confounded.

Tale CCXXIX *Of a young woman fooled by an
old husband*

An old Florentine married a young girl, who had been advised by matrons to resist her husband's first leap on the bridal night. Thus she drew her portals shut, and denied the initial congress. The husband, prepared to navigate the channel, and flying full sails, was surprised, and asked why she would not comply with his wishes. When she said that she had a headache his twig lay down, he turned over, and they slept until daybreak. When the girl saw that he pressed her no further, she grieved at having taken the advice to repel his advances. So she woke her husband up and told him that she no longer had a headache, to which he replied, "But now I have an ache in the tail." So the wife was left a virgin. It is wise, therefore, to accept a good thing when it is offered.

Tale CCXXX *How a Minorite's breeches
became relics*

A thing very worthy of laughter, and deserving of inclusion in this collection of tales, took place not long ago at Amalia. A married woman, moved, I suppose, by good intentions, confessed her sins to a Minorite friar. While talking to the woman, he was

aroused into a state of carnal concupiscence, and little by little, he persuaded her to give in, after which they sought a time and place for their tryst. They agreed that she should feign illness, and that the friar would then be called to confess her. As was customary, everyone would leave them alone so that they might labor in privacy at conversation intended to liberate the spirit. So she feigned illness, withdrew to her bed, and pretending extreme pain, sent for her confessor. As soon as he came, everyone departed. The moment they were alone, the friar partook of her favors repeatedly. They were alone together for so long that someone finally interrupted them, and the friar took his leave, saying that he would return the next day to complete the confession. He did exactly that, and, after laying his breeches on the lady's bed, probed her sins in exactly the same fashion he had on the previous day. The husband, however, suspicious of so lengthy a confession, burst into the room. The friar, startled at this precipitous intrusion, fled, leaving his breeches behind. The husband, seeing the breeches, cried out that the wretch was no friar, but an adulterer, and everyone in the household examined the breeches and clamored for vengeance. The cuckold rushed immediately to the monastery where he complained bitterly to the prior, threatening at the same time to slaughter his betrayer. Being an old man, the prior succeeded in calming the husband down, assuring him that by making an issue of the matter, he would only bring disgrace to his family and himself. The only way to cover the affair up, he insisted, was to employ silence and discretion. The husband pointed out that the discovery of the breeches had already brought things out into the open. But the old man

offered to remedy that by asserting the breeches to be those of St. Francis, which the friar had brought to heal the ailing woman. They would be retrieved and taken back to the monastery in a procession of great pomp and ceremony. So the husband agreed, the prior assembled all his monks, and bearing the cross before them, they marched to the house clad in sacred vestments. Reverently they took the breeches, like holy relics on a silken cushion, and with uplifted hands, raised them to the lips of the husband, the wife, and everyone along the way. Then with full ceremony and the chanting of hymns they returned to the monastery and lay them in the sanctuary with the other relics. Afterwards this fraud was discovered, and authorities from the town came to investigate it.

Tale CCXXXI *About a "brevet" against the
plague to be suspended about the neck*

When I went to Tivoli not long ago, where I had sent my children from the city on account of the plague, I heard an amusing tale which is worthy of this collection of ours. A few days earlier, one of those mendicant friars, who wander around the villages preaching to the peasants, promised them a thing called a "brevet" which would offer protection against the anticipated plague to all those who would hang it around their necks. The stupid clods, believing in the alleged properties of the "brevets" bought them for whatever they could afford to pay, and hung them around their necks with virgin

thread. The friar, however, told them that they must not open these amulets for at least fifteen days, lest their virtues be lost. After collecting a goodly quantity of money, he departed. The brevets, however, were read shortly afterwards because of the great human desire for fresh knowledge, and on them was inscribed in the vulgar tongue,

*Donna, se fili, e cadeti lo fuso,
Quando to fletti, tien lo culo chiuso.*

Which means,

Lady if you spin and drop your staff,
When you bend, shut up your ass.

That surpasses all medical prescriptions and cures.

*Tale CCXXXII Cardinal Angelotto's mouth was
opened when it should have been kept closed*

The Roman, Angelotto, was a long-winded, slanderous man who spared no one. When due to the nature of the times, not to say, the stupidity of men, he was made a cardinal, he remained silent, as was customary, during the secret consistory, for it is the rule that new cardinals keep their mouths shut until the pope gives them permission to speak. Cardinal Santo Marcello, when asked one day what had been taking place in the consistory, replied,

"We have opened Angelotto's mouth." To which I replied, "It would have been far better to padlock it shut."

Tale CCXXXIII *Ridolfo's way of presenting an exquisite horse, when asked for one*

Ridolfo of Camerino, whom we have mentioned before, was asked for a horse by a nobleman of Piceno, on condition that it be so perfect, and so beautiful, that it was impossible to find among his animals. So Ridolfo, in order to comply with this tactless request, selected a mare and a stallion which he sent with a note suggesting that the man have a horse made from them according to his own specifications, since he himself had not been able to find such a one. These words warned not to make requests which can neither be fulfilled nor honorably refused.

Tale CCXXXIV *An argument between women which prompted a laughable and appropriate comeback*

A certain woman we knew from the city earned her living by her body. She had a most attractive grown daughter, whom she had dedicated to Venus. She once had an argument with a neighbor, who followed the same profession. The argument

soon degenerated into abusive words. The neighbor, on grounds of influential connections, threatened both mother and daughter. The mother merely placed her hand on the upper part of her daughter's thigh, and said, "As long as God saves and protects this for me, I have nothing but contempt for your words and threats!" An excellent comeback, indicating her faith in a most prominent patronage, in which many take delight.

Tale CCXXXV *A priest fooled a layman who wanted to catch him*

A certain priest was lying with the wife of a peasant one midday, in a bed under which the husband was hiding in hopes of catching the priest. When the priest, unaware of the man's presence, and, due, perhaps to his excessive efforts, fell into a giddy state, he cried out, "Ho! the whole world seems to be spread out before me!" The peasant, who had lost his ass the day before, promptly forgot the injury which had been inflicted on him and exclaimed, "Hey! Take a look and tell me if you see my donkey anywhere!"

Tale CCXXXVI *A marvellous thing that happened to an English fuller and his wife*

While I was in England, a most laughable thing

befell a fuller, which should not be left out of our tales. He had a wife and a household full of young men and maid servants. He was always making eyes at the prettiest of the girls, and perpetually urging her to bed down with him. Upon relaying this information to her mistress, she was told to consent to her master. At the appointed day and hour, the woman hid herself in the secret place instead of the maid. The husband came and had her unaware of the fact that she was his wife. He finished her off, left the room and told one of his young retainers about it, urging him to go and partake of the supposed maid's favors, which the fellow then did. When he got to her, the woman took him for her husband and said nothing. After that, he sent still another youth, and the wife, taking this third visitor for her husband, submitted. All three had taken her for the maid, while she mistook each of them for the same man. Afterwards she secretly left the place, and during the night remonstrated against her husband for being so remiss with her, yet so attentive towards a servant girl, that he made love to his wife three times under the impression that she was indeed that maid. The man kept his error to himself, as well as that of his wife, since he knew himself to have been the cause.

Tale CCXXXVII *A Tuscan confession which at
last came to the point*

Someone who had ravished his sister without paying the penalty came to Rome in search of a Tuscan

confessor to whom he might reveal his crime. After being told of such a man, he went to him, and first asked if he could speak Tuscan. Upon being assured that was so, he spoke of various delinquencies, and said that among other things, one day while alone in a room with his sister, he had drawn his bow and shot an arrow at her. "Oh, what a crime!" exclaimed his confessor. "Did you kill her?" "Not in the least," answered the man. "Don't you understand the Tuscan dialect?" "Well enough," said the priest, "I'm a native. Didn't you tell me that you bent your bow and struck your sister with an arrow?" "That is not what I was trying to tell you," said the man. "I said that my bow was bent, I stuck an arrow in and sent it into my sister . . ." "Did you injure her in the face or any other place?" asked the confessor. "Oh!" exclaimed the man. "I can see that you don't speak Tuscan!" "I understand you clearly," the priest assured him. "Beware of the fact that *you* don't know Tuscan." "I didn't say that I wounded my sister," declared the fellow. "I said that after bending my bow I shot an arrow into her." As the confessor kept pretending not to know what he meant, the man kept insisting that the priest did not know Tuscan, and kept repeating the business about his bow and arrow. "If you don't use other words," warned the priest, "I'll never understand what you mean." The penitent, after ashamedly sputtering for a long time to find words, finally said openly and in plain language that he had fornicated with his sister. "Now," exclaimed the confessor, "you are speaking Tuscan to a Tuscan. I understand you clearly." And he left after prescribing a suitable penance. Such shame about speech is not commensurate with lewd behavior and criminal acts.

Tale CCXXXVIII *Of a battle between magpies
and jays*

In this year of 1451, during the month of April, a monstrous thing took place in that part of France known as Brittany. Magpies and jays, after forming aerial battle lines, made an immense noise, and fought bitterly all day. The jays were victorious, two thousand of them and four thousand magpies were found dead on the ground. Time will reveal the significance of this prodigy.

Tale CCXXXIX *Francesco's witty remark about
the children of Genoese*

Francesco Quartente, a merchant of Florence, lived in Genoa with his wife and family. His children were thin and lean of body, while those of the Genoese were generally hale and hardy. Someone asked Francesco one day why his children were so slight, and weakly constituted, whereas this was not so with the Genoese. To which he said, "The reason is this. I work alone at making my children, but you have a number of assistants in the procreation of yours." For surely, shortly after they marry, the Genoese go to sea, leaving their wives in the care, as they say, of other men.

Tale CCXL *Of a crude, but justified gesture
by a Florentine*

The following was told to me by a friend one day at a gathering. A certain Florentine he knew had a beautiful wife who was always being followed by a crowd of admirers. Some of them *serenaded* her (as they call it) nightly, in the street across from her house, carrying the customary lighted torches. One night, the husband, an exceedingly merry fellow, on being awakened from his sleep by the sound of trumpets, leaped out of bed, rushed over to the window with his wife, and seeing the raucous and bawdy mob below, called out to them in a loud voice to look towards him. When all eyes were directed toward his voice, he took hold of his prick, which was of most copious size, and thrust it erect out the window. He then told them that their labors were in vain, that they could plainly see he was better provided than they with the equipment to satisfy his wife, and he therefore advised them to stop pestering him. As a result of this humorous display, they desisted from that time on.

Tale CCXLI *The humorous request of an old man who was unable to perform the task of copulation*

Someone else told us a similar tale about a Florentine neighbor of his, who, at a mature age, had taken a young woman to wife. Soon afterwards, Ricardo de Alberti, a handsome young nobleman, fell in love with her, and, as in the previous case, awoke the man at night many times with the sound of singing and music in the street. He finally went to the young man's father, Benedetto, spoke to him of their long standing friendship, of their mutual good will, and after a long prologue, gravely insisted that he had done nothing to invite death at the hands of his friend's son. Astonished and horrified at this, the father promised to prevent such a crime, and asked for the entire story the better to facilitate further restraint of his son. At this the other explained, "Your son is perishing over my wife, and he is forever arousing us from our sleep with his flutes and other sounds. Once we are awake, I am forced to service my wife in excess of my strength in order to prevent her from lusting after others. Since I am not up to such exertion, if this continues, I am doomed!" Ricardo was then commanded by his father to give up his game, and the old man was bothered no more.

Tale CCXLII *The witty remark of a whore
about Venetians*

When I was at the baths at Petriolo, I was told by a man of erudition, of a whore's witty remark which is not unworthy of being included in the society of our other tales. There lived in Venice, he said, a public prostitute, who was patronized by men of many nations. Someone asked her one day the nationality of those men provided with the largest virile member. Unhesitatingly, the woman replied that it was the Venetians. "Their pricks are so long," she said, "that though they are often away in distant lands beyond the seas, they are still able to connect with their wives and produce children." Thus she jibed at the Venetian wives, who are left under the protection of others, while the husbands travel.

Tale CCXLIII *The witty saying of an
uneducated man who confounded the doctors*

Several clerics were discussing the age and works of Our Saviour, and that he began preaching when he was over thirty. An illiterate among them asked what the first thing was that Jesus had done at the end of his thirtieth year. They all hesitated, all gave different opinions. "With all that learning," said the man, "you mean to say you don't know such an easy

thing?" "Well, what was the first thing he did?" they asked. "He began by embarking upon his thirty-first year," he replied. Everyone laughed and complimented the man on his wittiness.

Tale CCXLIV *The salty remark of a man
against a merchant who accused others of being
crazy*

Carlo Geria, a merchant of Florence, was one of those money changers who follow the Roman curia, as is customary for those who trade in various provinces. After returning to Rome from Avignon, he was asked at a convivial gathering, among other things, about the way of life and the doings of Florentines there. He replied that they were all cheerful and happy. He added, however, that a year in the place was enough to drive them crazy. Then one of the guests, Aldighiero, a most humorous man, asked Carlo how long he had been there. When he replied, "Six months," Aldighiero retorted, "Wonderful, Carlo! You managed in six months what it took all the others a whole year to achieve." We all laughed at the man's witty saying.

Tale CCXLV *The pretty response of a woman
to a youth who was ardently in love with her*

A certain Florentine youth burned with love for a noble and virtuous woman, whom he would follow into the various churches and other places she frequented. He told his friends that he was hoping for favorable conditions under which he might whisper to her a few words he had memorized. She went to the church of Santa Lucia one feast day, and as she was going alone towards the holy water font, one of his friends told him that it was time to speak. Instigated and impelled by his cohort, he became flustered and lost his nerve, forgetting the sweet words he had planned. Going up to the woman he muttered, "Mistress, I am your servant." Smiling at these words, the lady smiled and said, "I have a sufficient number of servants at home, more than enough to serve and clean up. I need no more." His friends laughed at his stupidity, and at the woman's clever retort.

Tale CCXLVI *Of a nobleman in the time of
Emperor Frederick who showed arms, but no
fight*

When the Emperor Frederick died in the Siennese town of Buonconvento, he had come as an enemy, and had made his camp at the second mile stone before Florence. At the time, many noblemen took up arms for their land, and attacked the hostile encampment. A certain swaggerer of a noble family put on his armor, mounted his horse, and charged precipitously out of the gates, jeering at the slowness of the others, inferring that they were afraid, and loudly proclaiming that he would clash with the enemy. After galloping the first mile at full speed, blustering all the while, he encountered some of the wounded returning, and he slowed his pace, then cut it to a minimum. But when he heard the sound of battle, and saw from a distance the clamor and tumult of the fighting itself, he became immobilized. Those who had heard his boasts asked him why he did not rush into combat, and after a brief silence, he replied, "I don't feel as brave and vigorous in armor as I had expected." One should consider the strength of his body and spirit, and never promise more than he can do.

Tale CCXLVII *Of a man, who, for two years,
neither ate nor drank*

In truth, what I am about to insert in these tales of ours will seem more fabulous than the others, for it is repugnant to nature, and may appear more incredible, yet the truth of it has been so definitely indicated, that it cannot be tactfully denied. A man named Jacob, who was a copyist in the curia during the time of Pope Eugene, returned to his native place, Noyon, France, and suffered for a long time from a grave illness. It would require too long a narrative for me to tell all that happened to him during that illness. After many years, during the sixth year of the pontificate of Nicholas V, he returned to the curia to visit the sepulchre of Our Saviour, and he came back naked and destitute, for he had met robbers along the way. He called on curia members, neighbors of mine, most honest men, who had known him in the past. He told them that for the two years following his illness he had neither eaten nor drunk, although he had tried many times. He is an emaciated man, a priest, and in his right mind, for he always says Mass, and has heard it in my presence. Many theologians and physicians have spoken with him seriously, saying that his condition is contrary to nature, but so valid that it would be perverse not to believe it. Many people come daily to question him, and there are a number of opinions about the matter. Some believe that his body is inhabited by the Devil, but there are no signs of his

being anything but a prudent, honest, and religious man, who today makes a living by his pen. Others say that the melancholy nature of his humors sustains him. I have conversed with him many times, paying no attention to what has been said of him. He says that he is as baffled over his condition as the others, explaining that he did not give up sustenance all at once, but gradually. My amazement would be even greater had I not, while examining some chronicles which I copied in France, read of the same thing happening during the reign of the Emperor Lothair, and Pope Pascal, in the year of Our Lord 822. A girl of twelve, at Commercy in the province of Toul, after taking holy communion at Easter, went first for ten months, then for three years without meat or drink, then afterwards, resumed her former way of life. This man hopes that his future will be the same.

Tale CCXLVIII *Witty saying of a man who
promised to teach an ass*

A tyrant, wishing to expropriate the property of a man who boasted of many talents, ordered him under threat of grave punishment, to teach an ass literature. The man said that this would be impossible unless he were given a long time to instruct the donkey. When he was asked how much time he needed, he replied, ten years. He was derided by everyone for having undertaken such an impossible task, but he consoled his friends, saying, "I fear nothing, for in the interim either I will die, or the

ass, or the lord." These words illustrate the salutary effect of protracting and deferring a difficult thing.

Tale CCXLIX Of a priest who did not know whether the Epiphany was a man or a woman

On the feast of the Epiphany, a friend of mine told me of the ridiculous stupidity of a priest who was a countryman of his. "The priest," he told me, "was announcing to the people the coming of the celebration of the Epiphany. 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you must devote your utmost veneration to the Epiphany, for it is a great and special feast. I do not know whether it was a man or a woman, but it makes no difference, for it is a day which we must observe with the greatest of piety.'"

Tale CCL A usurer who pretended repentance and became worse than before

Someone once came to a certain old usurer, who had pretended to give up his profession, and asked for some money at excessive interest, offering as a pledge a silver crucifix containing a splinter of the cross of Our Saviour. When the old man was asked for the loan, he said, "I have long since abandoned the sin of usury, but go to my son (and he mentioned the name) who is involved in the destruction and loss of his soul, and he will take care of you."

And he sent a servant with the man to point out the son's house. When they had gotten some distance away, he called back his servant and said, "Hey, talk to my son and remind him to deduct the price of the wood's weight." Instead of being repentant, he was worried that his son might pay out for silver, the wood of the cross, which he valued less. It is an easy thing to backslide into one's old habits.

Tale CCLI *A fable of birds who spoke under
a false illusion*

A man was once taking birds out of a cage and killing them by crushing their heads with his hands. While doing this he happened to shed some tears. One of the remaining birds said to the others, "Be of good spirit, I see him weeping, he is taking pity on us." But the oldest one said, "Oh, my son, look not at his eyes, but at his hands." Illustrating that we should consider not words, but deeds.

Tale CCLII *A man with various chains around
his neck who was regarded as most stupid*

A braggart of a Milanese knight was sent as an ambassador to Florence. Daily, he ostentatiously displayed a variety of different chains, which he wore about his neck. His inane boastfulness was observed by Niccolo Niccoli, a most learned man

who was prompt with a humorous quip, and who remarked, "Other fools are girded by a single chain, but this one is so stupid he is not content with one."

Tale CCLIII *The witty barb of Ridolfo, lord of
Camerino, at an ambassador who had denounced
all lords*

During the war between Pope Gregory XI and the Florentines, Picino and nearly all the other territories of the Roman church had revolted against the pontiff. An ambassador to Florence from Recanti told the authorities of the gratitude felt by his fellow citizens towards the Florentines for their help in liberating them. He then launched into a lengthy invective against the pope and his ministers, particularly against all lords and tyrants. He vituperated their evil deeds and poor government without respecting in the slightest, Ridolfo, lord of Camerino, who, as general of the Florentine forces, always attended ambassadorial audiences. After listening for a long time to his detractor, Ridolfo asked the ambassador what art or faculty he had acquired, to which he replied that he was a doctor of civil law. Ridolfo then asked him how much time he had devoted to the study of law. When the man answered that it was over ten years, Ridolfo retorted, "What a shame you did not spend at least a year studying discretion!" The fool was plainly shown the error of defaming all noblemen in the presence of one.

Tale CCLIV *Of an arbitrator in whose house a
pig spilled some oil*

A man who had been appointed to arbitrate between two litigants received from one of them a jar of oil, by means of which he hoped to receive a favorable judgment. When the other disputant heard about it, he sent the judge a fat pig, asking for a decision favoring him. The judge decided in favor of the pig, so the man who had given him the oil came and reminded him of it and of the promise he had given, to which the judge replied, "A certain pig came into my house, and when he found the jug, he broke it, spilling the oil, so I forgot about you." The most venal of replies!

Tale CCLV *A bald man's facetious quip at a
jibe of two young women*

Two girls were leaning out of a window overlooking a garden, when the gardener, a baldheaded old man, went out to eat his meal. When they saw his bald head, they asked him if he would like a remedy to make his hair grow again. When he said that he would, they jokingly told him that all he had to do was to wash it in his wife's urine. Then turning to face them, he laughingly said, "This proves that your remedy is no good," he said as he exposed his

prick with his hand. "For the last thirty years my wife has been bathing this friend of mine, and no hair has grown on it yet."

Tale CCLVI *Of Messer Perde il Piatto*

Enrico de Monteleone, a lawyer of the Roman Curia, was very old, and so incompetent in his profession that he was nicknamed *Messer Perde il Piatto*, or *Master of lost causes*. When someone asked him why he lost every lawsuit in which he was involved, he explained, "Because only those with unjust causes ask for my services, I must always be defeated, since my causes are bad." The humorous reply of an ignoramus.

Tale CCLVII *Of a song which gratifies innkeepers*

A hungry traveller went into an inn and stuffed his belly with food and drink. When he was presented with the bill, he said that he had no money, but he would pay his debt by singing. The innkeeper replied that he wanted money, not songs. So the other said, "If I sing one that satisfies you, will you accept it instead of money?" The innkeeper assented and the traveller began to sing, then he asked if his song was satisfactory. When the innkeeper said that it was not, the fellow kept on sing-

ing, one after another. When none of them met with the landlord's approval, the traveller said, "In that case I will now give you one which is bound to please." Then taking his purse in hand as if about to open it, he began the usual travellers' lines, *Metti mano alla borse e paga l'oste*, which means, "Put your hand in your purse and pay the host." When he asked the innkeeper if that pleased him, he answered, "That pleases me." To which the traveller replied, "According to our agreement, then, you are satisfied, since that song pleased you." So he left free and clear.

Tale CCLVIII *The witty remark about a
thin man*

A fellow citizen and very dear friend of mine is extremely thin and lean of body. When someone wondered at the cause of this, a certain wit remarked, "What are you surprised about? It is the most apparent thing! He sits a half an hour taking his food, but two hours getting rid of it." This was indeed his habit, for my friend takes a very long time to purge his belly.

Tale CCLIX *The witty reply of a woman who
had an empty inkwell*

A most honorable woman we know was asked by a courier if she did not have a letter to give him for her husband, who had been away for a long time as an ambassador of the republic. "How can I possibly write," she asked, "when my husband has taken the pen with him and left the inkwell empty?" A witty and honest answer.

Tale CCLX *A humorous response on the
scarcity of God's friends*

A friar came to the sickroom of a certain witty fellow citizen of ours, in order to console him while he suffered from a long and grave illness. Among other words of consolation, the friar said that God especially castigates those He loves, and inflicts inconveniences upon them. "Then it is no wonder," said the sick man, "that He has so few friends for if that's the way He treats them, He deserves even fewer."

Tale CCLXI *About a friar of St. Anthony, a
layman, and a wolf*

A friar, one of those beggars who seek alms in the name of St. Anthony, persuaded a farmer to give him some wheat, by promising that all of his property, particularly his sheep, would be safe and sound all year. The peasant, having faith in this promise, let his sheep graze more freely, and many were eaten by a wolf. He was highly indignant about this when, the following year, the collector returned for more wheat. He refused to give it, and berated the friar for the inanity of his promise. When asked what this was all about, the peasant told about the wolf that ravaged his flock. "The wolf!" exclaimed the friar. "Ho! Ho! He's an evil beast, he can't be trusted. You must beware of him! He would not only cheat St. Anthony, but Christ himself if he were able!" It is foolish to trust those who practice the profession of fraud.

Tale CCLXII *Of an amazing reciprocal
balance between penitent and confessor*

A certain fellow once, whether he was serious or not, went to a priest and said that he wanted to confess his sins. When he was asked to recite them from memory, he recalled that he had stolen some-

thing from one person, but had been robbed to a greater extent by someone else. Said the priest, "You compensated each other, so now you are even." The man went on to tell how he had beaten someone, but had been trounced in return. Here as well, the priest pointed out that the guilt and the punishment had been equal. Several similar admissions were similarly treated, the priest always saying that one thing compensated for the other. Then the man said, "There is one more sin remaining which is so great, that I blush to mention it, especially as it concerns you." The priest convinced him to abandon all his shame and confess his sin. For a long time he refused, but at last giving in to the priest's exhortations, he said, "I laid your sister." "And I," declared the priest, "screwed your mother so many times, that here, too, one sin washes away the other." Thus equality in crime absolves the guilty.

Tale CCLXIII *The witty repartee of two
Florentine youths*

A Florentine youth went down to the Arno River with a net used to wash wool. He met there a merry lad, who for the fun of it, asked, "What are you planning to catch with that net?" "I'm going to the outlet of the whorehouse," he said, "where I'm going to spread my net and catch your mother." "Be sure you search the place carefully," snapped the other.

"You're bound to find yours there, too." Two remarks deserving of each other.

Tale CCLXIV *The confusion of a youth, who
urinated on the table during a banquet*

A young Hungarian noble was invited to dinner by another nobleman of higher rank to whom he was distantly related. So he came a long distance on horseback with his servants. As soon as he dismounted, all the men and women present greeted him and (since the hour was late) led him at once to the dinner table so that they could commence the banquet. After he had washed his hands, he was seated at the table between the two beautiful daughters of his host. Although he had to urinate desperately, he had been ashamed to mention it, and being unable to do anything about his need, and therefore suffering greatly, he forgot all about the meal. Everyone noticed his distraction, and pressed him to eat, so, impelled by his discomfort, he put his right hand under the table, secretly took out his prick and stuck it into one of his high boots that he might ease his bladder. At that instant, the girl on his right said, "Now you must eat something!" grabbing his arm at the same time, and bringing it up to the table along with the spouting member in its grasp, which besprinkled the whole vicinity. Every-

one burst into laughter at this unusual spectacle, and the young man was overcome with embarrassment.

Tale CCLXV *The clever scheme of a
Florentine woman who was caught in the act*

A woman who was the wife of an innkeeper near Florence was exceptionally liberal with her favors, and was in bed one day with a lover. Meanwhile, another man came intending to take the first one's place. Hearing him come up the stairs, the woman went out and got into a bitter altercation with him, insisting that she could not satisfy him. But the wrangling went on for so long, that the husband came along and demanded to know what was going on. "This man," she said, "is in a fury, and he wants to come in here and assault another man who is hiding, and I am holding him back to prevent such a crime from being perpetrated in our house." Hearing these words, the hiding man's spirits rose, and he began to threaten the other fellow. He similarly pretended to raise threats, and to force his way inside. The foolish husband, trying to determine the cause of the disagreement, took it upon himself to settle matters. So he entered into a negotiation with the two belligerents, made peace between them, and settled the matter over his own wine, thus com-

pounding his wife's adultery at the expense of his drink. Women caught in this crime are never lacking in some nefarious scheme.

Tale CCLXVI *About a living corpse who
spoke on the way to his grave and moved people
to laughter*

There was a Florentine fool named Nigniacca, who was not exactly insane and quite amusing. For the sake of a joke, several youths decided to persuade him that he was gravely ill, and they worked in concert toward that end. As he was leaving his house soon after, one of them asked him if there was anything wrong with him since he looked so changed and pale. "There's nothing wrong at all," replied the blockhead. But a few steps beyond that another of the conspirators asked him if he had the fever, for he looked so thin and sickly. The idiot began having his doubts, for he believed what he was told. He became worried and started walking more slowly when a third schemer approached, looked at him, and said, "Your appearance says that you are suffering from a mighty fever, and that you are gravely ill." Now he became more frightened than ever, his legs refused to function, and he stood in suspended animation, wondering whether he had the fever or not. Now a fourth joker came to him asserting that he was violently ill, wondering why he was not in bed yet, and offering to take him home and nurse him like his own brother. The nincompoop retraced his steps as though suffering from a

disease, and crept into his bed looking like one about to expire. The rest came to visit him and told him that he had not gone to bed any too soon. Then, shortly afterwards, another entered pretending to be a physician, took his pulse, then announced that the illness was so grave that he would soon perish. Then all the others gathered around the bed and said to one another, "He's dying. His feet are cold already. His tongue is swelling up and his eyes grow dim!" Then, "He has died! Let us close his eyes, therefore, and arrange his hands. Let us entomb him." And "Oh! What a great loss is his departure! He was such a good fellow, such a dear friend!" And then they consoled each other.

The idiot, like one defunct, said nothing, actually believing himself to be dead. He was then put in a coffin and carried through the city by the youths, who, when asked, said that they were taking Nigniacca to the cemetery. Along the way many people joined in the game and kept repeating that Nigniacca was dead and being taken to be buried. Then a tavern keeper cried out, "Oh what a miserable beast he was! What a lowdown thief! He deserved to be hanged by the neck!" When the imbecile heard this, he raised his head and said, "If I were alive instead of dead, you villain, I'd tell you that you were lying in your throat!" The pallbearers burst into gales of laughter and left the fellow there in the coffin.

Tale CCLXVII *Of a dubious argument*

Two friends, while strolling together, were arguing as to which produced the greatest pleasure, sexual intercourse, or moving the bowels. They noticed a woman who never spurned any connections with men, and one of them suggested, "Let's ask her, she is an expert in both things." "Not at all," said the other. "She can't make a judgment, because she fucks much more often than she shits."

Tale CCLXVIII *Of a miller, deceived by his wife who gave him five eggs*

The following tale is well known by everyone in Mantua. Near the bridge of the town is a mill belonging to a man named Cornicolo. One summer's evening after dinner, he was sitting on the bridge, he saw a ripe young peasant girl crossing, who appeared to be lost. Since it was late and the sun was going down he convinced her to go to his wife. She agreed, and he called a servant and told him to take the girl to his wife, give her dinner, and then show her to a certain room where she might sleep. The wife dismissed the servant, and discerning that her husband wanted to sleep with the girl, put her in her own bed, and went to sleep herself in the room which had been prepared. The miller stayed out

very late on purpose, and thinking that his wife was fast asleep, returned to his house, and secretly entered the aforementioned room, unaware of the fraud that had been perpetrated on him, and silently lay upon his wife, who likewise remained silent. He then left the room, told his servant what he had done, and urged him to do the same thing. So he went in and lay with the wife of his master. Cornicolo, in the meantime, went to his own room, and slipped quietly into bed so that he might not awaken his wife. He arose early the next morning and went out silently, fully convinced that he had enjoyed the girl. When it was time for breakfast, he came home, and the first thing that happened was he was given five fresh eggs by his wife. Amazed at this novelty he asked her what this meant, and she smilingly explained that she was giving him one egg for each mile he ran during the night. He understood at once that he had fallen into his own trap, and he pretended that it was he alone who had lain with his wife, and he ate the eggs. It frequently happens that scoundrels are punished by their own deceits.

Tale CCLXIX *A pretty way of lying about
beauty*

Two friends, one of whom was tall, fat, and dark, were talking as they walked through the streets of Florence. Noticing a young girl go by with her mother, the tall one said for the sake of a joke, "There is a girl who is both shapely and beautiful."

At his words she snapped insolently, "The same, however, cannot be said of you!" "It certainly could," he replied. "If one were to lie as I did."

Tale CCLXX *A woman's amusing, but
improper response*

A Spanish friend of mine told me of a woman's salty remark, which, it appears to me, should be in this collection of ours. An elderly man married a widow, and on the first night, while performing his matrimonial obligations, discovered that his wife had a more ample storehouse than he had expected. "My wife," he said, "your barn is too ample for my flock." To which the woman replied, "That is your own fault. For my departed husband (may God have mercy on his soul) filled it so admirably, that often, the kids had to leap from the fold for lack of room." A thoroughly salty and clever response.

Tale CCLXXI *A bawdy similitude about the
threat of loose teeth*

An old bishop I knew had lost some of his teeth, and complaining that some of the others were loose, he said that he feared he would lose them too. "Have no fear that you will lose your teeth," said one of his retainers. When the bishop asked for a

reason, the man said, "Because for the last forty years, my testicles have been hanging loose as though they were going to fall off, but they are still there."

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