

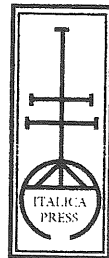
# FRANCESCO PETRARCH

LETTERS ON FAMILIAR MATTERS  
(RERUM FAMILIARIUM LIBRI)

VOL. 1: BOOKS I-VIII



Translated by  
Aldo S. Bernardo



ITALICA PRESS  
NEW YORK  
2005

*Fam.* III, 18.

*To Giovanni dell' Incisa,<sup>1</sup> to whom he has entrusted the search for books.*

What formerly forgetfulness or laziness often kept me from doing, I want now to deal with, dear brother. And if I may be allowed to brag I shall do so in the name of Him in Whom alone it is safe to brag. Divine mercy has now almost freed me from the throes of human cupidity, if not perhaps altogether, for the most part at least. It was from heaven, therefore, that this was granted to me either through the goodness of nature or through age. Having indeed seen so many things and considered so much, I have finally begun to understand how many are these desires with which the human species burns. Lest you consider me immune to all the sins of men, there is one implacable passion that holds me which so far I have been neither able nor willing to check, for I flatter myself that the desire for noble things is not dishonorable. Do you wish to hear the nature of this disease? I am unable to satisfy my thirst for books. And I perhaps own more of them than I ought; but just as in certain other things, so does it happen with books: success in searching for them is a stimulus to greed. There is indeed something peculiar about books. Gold, silver, precious stones, beautiful clothing, marbled homes, cultivated fields, painted canvases, decorated horses, and other similar things, possess silent pleasure. Books please inwardly; they speak with us, advise us and join us together with a certain living and penetrating intimacy, nor does this instill only itself into its readers, but it conveys the names and desire for others. To cite some examples, Cicero's *Academicus* made Marcus Varro dear and attractive to me; and the name of Ennius I heard in his books on *Offices*; from a reading of the *Tusculan Disputations* I first felt my love for Terence; from the book *On Old Age* I became acquainted with the *Origins* of Cato and the *Economics* of Xenophon and I learned that the same book was translated by Cicero in his same *Offices*. In the same way

1. Theologian and Prior of the monastery of St. Marco in Florence. A relative as well as a close and trusted friend of Petrarch.

the *Timaeus* of Plato made me aware of the talent of Solon; the death of Cato made me know the *Phaedo* of Plato, while the interdict of Ptolemy made me know Hegesia of Cyrenaicus; and I believed Seneca even before I ever saw the letters of Cicero. Augustine prompted me to start looking for Seneca's book, *Against Superstitions*. Servius revealed the *Argonautica* of Apollonius; Lactantius as well as others made me long for the books on the *Republic*; Tranquillus the Roman history of Pliny; Agellius the eloquence of Favorinus, and likewise the budding brevity of Annaeus Florus prompted me to seek the remains of Titus Livy. To pass over the most famous and widespread works which do not need witnesses, the fact remains that when a more famous witness testifies, such works sink more deeply into the mind. For example, it is in the *Declamations* of Seneca that the eloquence of Cicero is praised and that an unusual announcement of his genius is made; while Virgil's prolific eloquence was shown by Eusebius in the *Saturnalia*. It was the respectful and humble testimonial by the poet Statius Pampinius to the *Aeneid* of Virgil, whose footsteps deserved so much to be followed and worshipped, that informed his *Thebaid* as it was about to be published; while the judgment, universally unquestioned, proclaiming Homer the prince of poets, was given by Horace Flaccus. I am citing more writers than is necessary, for it would indeed be much too long to recall everything I learned in my youth in reading Priscian, the grammarian, as, for example, how many foreign names of books he compiled, and how many later ones by Pliny the Younger, or how many contemporary ones I found in Nonius Marcellus, and how often they truly excited me. Therefore, to return where I left off, no one will be astonished that minds were inflamed and deeply shaken by those books, each of which openly displays its sparks and its stings and also bears hidden within it other qualities which reinforce themselves in turn. Therefore—while it shames me, I must openly confess it and yield to a truth—the passion of the Athenian tyrant (Pisistratus) and of the king of Egypt (Ptolemy) always seemed to me more excusable, not to say noble, than that of our leaders, because the zeal of

Pisistratus and that of Ptolemy Philadelphus seemed more noble than Crassus' lust for gold although he had more imitators. But in order not to have Alexandria or Athens downgrade Rome, and Greece or Egypt downgrade Italy, outstanding thinkers are part of our heritage as well, and they are so numerous that it is too difficult even to name them. And they were so dedicated to these things that there may be found among them those who held the name of philosopher more dear than that of empire, and I might add that they were eager not so much for the books themselves as for the contents. There are those who accumulate books like other things with no intention of using them, but with the sole pleasure of possession, and not so much to aid their thought as to ornament their rooms. To mention but a few examples, the Roman library was the care of the divine Emperors Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus. In choosing an overseer for such an enterprise the former appointed a man who was not inferior to, and perhaps (without intending any slight) superior to Demetrius Phalerius who had been famous in Greece for this activity, that is to say, Marcus Varro; while the latter emperor appointed Pompeius Macer, a most learned man. Asinius Pollio, the very famous orator, also displayed the greatest enthusiasm for the Greek-Latin public library and is said to have been the first of Rome to make it public. Of private concern, on the other hand, was Cato's insatiable desire for books, to which Cicero testifies, and Cicero's own passion for acquiring books about which ample testimony may be found in his letters to Atticus of whom he makes the same request with great urgings and prayers as I do now to you. If it is permitted to a very great talent to beg for the services of books, what do you think should be permitted to a poor one? I have not achieved what I had considered most important in this portion of the letter and what seems scarcely credible without citing the zeal of a very learned man and the friendship of princes which calls one back to reality. Amonicus Serenus is remembered as having a library containing 62,000 books all of which he left to Gordian the Younger who was then emperor and a disciple of his, a matter that made him no less

famous than the empire. I say all these things as an excuse for my vice and as a comfort to such renowned colleagues. As for you, if you care for me, make this request of some trustworthy and lettered men: let them search throughout Tuscany, let them roll out the closets and chests of their church people and other men of letters in case something might emerge that might be suitable to soothe or irritate my thirst. On the other hand, although you know in what lakes I am accustomed to fish or in what thickets I am accustomed to go bird hunting, to avoid having you be deceived I insert as a separate enclosure those things which I especially desire. And so that you might be more vigilant, know that I sent the same requests to other friends in Great Britain, France and Spain. Make an effort not to let anyone surpass you in faith and industry. Farewell.

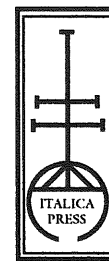
FRANCESCO  
PETRARCH

LETTERS ON FAMILIAR MATTERS  
(RERUM FAMILIARIUM LIBRI)

VOL. 3: BOOKS XVII-XXIV



Translated by  
Aldo S. Bernardo



ITALICA PRESS  
NEW YORK  
2005

FIRST PUBLISHED 1985  
COPYRIGHT © THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS

FIRST PAPERBACK EDITION  
COPYRIGHT © 2005 BY ALDO S. BERNARDO

ITALICA PRESS, INC.  
595 MAIN STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10044

*To Marian and John*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Italica Press.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Petrarca, Francesco, 1304-1374.  
Rerum familiarium libri.

Vol. 2-3 have title: Letters on familiar matters.

Bibliography: v. 1, p.

Contents: [1] I-VIII – [2] IX-XVI – [3] XVII-XXIV.

1. Petrarca, Francesco, 1304-1374—Correspondence.

2. Authors, Italian—To 1500—Correspondence.

I. Title. II. Title: Letters on familiar matters.

PQ4496.E29E23 1975 851'.1 75-2418

ISBN 1-59910-002-9 (pbk.: alk. paper)

Printed in the United States of America

5 4 3 2 1

Cover Art: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Good Government in the City.  
Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. Detail. Scala/Art Resource, New York.

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE TEXTS  
VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT: [HTTP://WWW.ITALICAPRESS.COM](http://www.italicapress.com)

To the same correspondent, the time to think is before acting.

Far be it for me to dissuade anyone from complying with a reasonable request; but I remind you to observe foresight just as I thus far have observed hindsight. There is nothing more pleasant or more sweet than to be a partaker in helping someone who is deserving and needy. On the other hand, there is nothing sadder than unexpected ingratitude. It is indeed a sign not only of great knowledge but of great fortune to discern among so many hiding places of the heart the pure minds from the false ones, and to recognize before becoming acquainted whose prayers are sincere and whose tears are wretched, whose need is fictitious and whose flattery is feigned. It is common for most men to be mindful of those things that they wish to come to pass, and forgetful and slow when it is time to express gratitude. Men's minds are subject to so great and so sudden change that someone you may see entreating you in the morning you would not recognize in the evening after his request has been granted. About these *Ecclesiasticus* says: "As long as they may receive, they kiss the hand of the giver and they owe their voice in promises; and at the time of restitution they will request time and will speak words of weariness and complaint." You know the rest. But since we live among ingrates, we should not stop for that reason, otherwise virtue will seem to have been overcome by vice. I believe we should go a little more cautiously.

Farewell, and for whatever you are to do, think carefully while there is time for changing your mind; for subsequent deliberation is too late.

To Giovanni dell' Incisa,<sup>1</sup> to whom he has entrusted the search for books.

What formerly forgetfulness or laziness often kept me from doing, I want now to deal with, dear brother. And if I may be allowed to brag I shall do so in the name of Him in Whom alone it is safe to brag. Divine mercy has now almost freed me from the throes of human cupidity, if not perhaps altogether, for the most part at least. It was from heaven, therefore, that this was granted to me either through the goodness of nature or through age. Having indeed seen so many things and considered so much, I have finally begun to understand how many are these desires with which the human species burns. Lest you consider me immune to all the sins of men, there is one implacable passion that holds me which so far I have been neither able nor willing to check, for I flatter myself that the desire for noble things is not dishonorable. Do you wish to hear the nature of this disease? I am unable to satisfy my thirst for books. And I perhaps own more of them than I ought; but just as in certain other things, so does it happen with books: success in searching for them is a stimulus to greed. There is indeed something peculiar about books. Gold, silver, precious stones, beautiful clothing, marbled homes, cultivated fields, painted canvases, decorated horses, and other similar things, possess silent pleasure. Books please inwardly; they speak with us, advise us and join us together with a certain living and penetrating intimacy, nor does this instill only itself into its readers, but it conveys the names and desire for others. To cite some examples, Cicero's *Academicus* made Marcus Varro dear and attractive to me; and the name of Ennius I heard in his books on *Offices*; from a reading of the *Tusculan Disputations* I first felt my love for Terence; from the book *On Old Age* I became acquainted with the *Origins* of Cato and the *Economics* of Xenophon and I learned that the same book was translated by Cicero in his same *Offices*. In the same way

1. Theologian and Prior of the monastery of St. Marco in Florence. A relative as well as a close and trusted friend of Petrarch.

the *Timaeus* of Plato made me aware of the talent of Solon; the death of Cato made me know the *Phaedo* of Plato, while the interdict of Ptolemy made me know Hegesias of Cyrenaicus; and I believed Seneca even before I ever saw the letters of Cicero. Augustine prompted me to start looking for Seneca's book, *Against Superstitions*. Servius revealed the *Argonautica* of Apollonius; Lactantius as well as others made me long for the books on the *Republic*; Tranquillus the Roman history of Pliny; Agellius the eloquence of Favorinus, and likewise the budding brevity of Annaeus Florus prompted me to seek the remains of Titus Livy. To pass over the most famous and widespread works which do not need witnesses, the fact remains that when a more famous witness testifies, such works sink more deeply into the mind. For example, it is in the *Declamations* of Seneca that the eloquence of Cicero is praised and that an unusual announcement of his genius is made; while Virgil's prolific eloquence was shown by Eusebius in the *Saturnalia*. It was the respectful and humble testimonial by the poet Statius Pampinius to the *Aeneid* of Virgil, whose footsteps deserved so much to be followed and worshipped, that informed I his *Thebaid* as it was about to be published; while the judgment, universally unquestioned, proclaiming Homer the prince of poets, was given by Horace Flaccus. I am citing more writers than is necessary, for it would indeed be much too long to recall everything I learned in my youth in reading Priscian, the grammarian, as, for example, how many foreign names of books he compiled, and how many later ones by Pliny the Younger, or how many contemporary ones I found in Nonius Marcellus, and how often they truly excited me. Therefore, to return where I left off, no one will be astonished that minds were inflamed and deeply shaken by those books, each of which openly displays its sparks and its stings and also bears hidden within it other qualities which reinforce themselves in turn. Therefore—while it shames me, I must openly confess it and yield to a truth—the passion of the Athenian tyrant (Pisistratus) and of the king of Egypt (Ptolemy) always seemed to me more excusable, not to say noble, than that of our leaders, because the zeal of

Pisistratus and that of Ptolemy Philadelphus seemed more noble than Crassus' lust for gold although he had more imitators. But in order not to have Alexandria or Athens downgrade Rome, and Greece or Egypt downgrade Italy, outstanding thinkers are part of our heritage as well, and they are so numerous that it is too difficult even to name them. And they were so dedicated to these things that there may be found among them those who held the name of philosopher more dear than that of empire, and I might add that they were eager not so much for the books themselves as for the contents. There are those who accumulate books like other things with no intention of using them, but with the sole pleasure of possession, and not so much to aid their thought as to ornament their rooms. To mention but a few examples, the Roman library was the care of the divine Emperors Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus. In choosing an overseer for such an enterprise the former appointed a man who was not inferior to, and perhaps (without intending any slight) superior to Demetrius Phalerius who had been famous in Greece for this activity, that is to say, Marcus Varro; while the latter emperor appointed Pompeius Macer, a most learned man. Asinius Pollio, the very famous orator, also displayed the greatest enthusiasm for the Greek-Latin public library and is said to have been the first of Rome to make it public. Of private concern, on the other hand, was Cato's insatiable desire for books, to which Cicero testifies, and Cicero's own passion for acquiring books about which ample testimony may be found in his letters to Atticus of whom he makes the same request with great urgings and prayers as I do now to you. If it is permitted to a very great talent to beg for the services of books, what do you think should be permitted to a poor one? I have not achieved what I had considered most important in this portion of the letter and what seems scarcely credible without citing the zeal of a very learned man and the friendship of princes which calls one back to reality. Amonicus Serenus is remembered as having a library containing 62,000 books all of which he left to Gordian the Younger who was then emperor and a disciple of his, a matter that made him no less

famous than the empire. I say all these things as an excuse for my vice and as a comfort to such renowned colleagues. As for you, if you care for me, make this request of some trustworthy and lettered men: let them search throughout Tuscany, let them roll out the closers and chests of their church people and other men of letters in case something might emerge that might be suitable to soothe or irritate my thirst. On the other hand, although you know in what lakes I am accustomed to fish or in what thickets I am accustomed to go bird hunting, to avoid having you be deceived I insert as a separate enclosure those things which I especially desire. And so that you might be more vigilant, know that I sent the same requests to other friends in Great Britain, France and Spain. Make an effort not to let anyone surpass you in faith and industry. Farewell.

*Fam. III, 19.*

*To his Lelius,<sup>1</sup> concerning the stubbornness of human expectation.*

Hope in men is so obstinate and determined even against proven misfortunes that none is deterred from his undertaking: not the farmer facing bad crops, not the sailor facing the storm, not the architect facing the destruction of buildings, not the father facing the tragic destruction of his children. Because all these have the same things in common we see the famished sowing, the shipwrecked sailors sailing, those barely saved from ruins undertaking to rebuild upon the same foundations, and childless adults undertaking further procreation among the very graves of their children. I have before my eyes here some fishermen exhausted from cold and hunger. It is extraordinary and utterly unbelievable that though hungry and naked all day, they yet spend their nights awake until dawn with the same lack of success whether they use hooks or nets. They accomplish nothing, they suffer uselessly and in vain, and they lose time which could perhaps more usefully be spent differently. Nor, obstinate from the beginning, are they minded to turn away from the dangerous eddies. Thus a long-lasting habit of undertaking bitter activities becomes pleasant. Sweeping the unproductive sands in the deepest stream beds, they discover the poverty which they flee amidst the waves and the reefs, never finding perhaps what they so obstinately seek. Indeed I'm not sure whether still other examples which may be simpler to relate are not more worthy of admiration. I speak of the striving of beasts, which, though they leave their lairs very often, are never still. The tiger never ceases to produce new offspring and, if they are lost, to feed older offspring; doves deprived of the comfort of their young lose none of their drive in their remaining activities; Philomena, after the theft by the shepherd, follows her lost young

1. Lello di Pietro Stefano dei Tosetti was a very strong Roman supporter of the Colonnas. Petrarch first met him during his journey to Rome with Giacomo Colonna in 1330, and he became, with Socrates, one of Petrarch's most intimate friends. Petrarch classicized his name in memory of Scipio's closest friend, Laelius.



*To Nicholas Sygeros, Greek praetor,\* an expression of gratitude for his sending a book by Homer.*

Yours was a noble gift from a noble spirit, as was fitting; for the acts of man are images of his spirit, and a man's character is revealed by the nature of his actions. Something unusual behooved your character, for truly you are an extraordinary man, far from the common crowd in your every effort. If you were part of the multitude, you would have done as the others; now instead you have magnificently revealed your true character, and in a single act demonstrated your friendship and nature. From Europe's furthest corner you have sent me a gift, one that could not be more worthy of you or more pleasing to me or more noble in itself. Antiochus, the great Syrian king, as some believe, or Attalus, the Trojan king, as Cicero prefers, "sent Publius Scipio some splendid gifts from Asia all the way to Numantia," gifts that the illustrious man did not conceal but "accepted in the presence of his army," as the same author states. His grandfather, the elder Africanus, gave magnificent gifts to King Masinissa for his meritorious service because he had given extraordinary aid in wartime to the Roman army. Others often did the same; but my purpose is not to enumerate either public or private generosity but to list a few so that you will understand my forthcoming words. Some people bestow gold or silver, dregs of the earth that are perhaps very desirable but also very dangerous; or they give booty from the Red Sea and the spoils of its rich algae, precious stones and gems, which, like comets, often reflect a mournful and bloody color; some give necklaces and belts, the glory of sooty artisans; others give strongholds and fortresses, the labor of filthy builders. But you, O best of men, have given none of these things that might display the wealth of the giver and the greed of the receiver. What is it then? A rare and pleasing gift that I wish were worthy of me but certainly is worthy of you, as I have said. And what would an intelligent and eloquent man give except the very source of wisdom and eloquence? You gave me Homer, whom Ambrosius Macrobius deservedly calls the source and origin of all divine invention, and even were everyone to remain silent, the book would speak for itself;

\*A high-ranking official in the court of Byzantium, Sygeros was sent in 1348 by the Emperor, John Cantacuzenus, to Avignon on a mission to Pope Clement VI regarding the possible unification of the Greek and Roman churches. He met Petrarch during his stay and promised to send him whatever manuscripts of classical writers he could find in Constantinople. The resulting gift of a Greek Homer was one of the earliest and best manuscripts of its kind in Italy.

but everyone admits it. From among all of them, however, I have mentioned the one witness whom I thought would be the best known of all Latin writers to you, for we readily believe those we love. But to return to Homer. This you gave me as a gift, O kindest of men, mindful of your promise and my wishes, and to mention something that adds even more to the gift, you gave it to me not in another language as though wrested from a violent riverbed, but pure and unspoiled from the very springs of Greek eloquence and as it originally flowed from that divine mind. Moreover, I have received a supreme and, if its true value were asked, an inestimable gift, one that nothing could approach unless along with your Homer you would honor me with your presence. Under your guidance I would penetrate the difficulties of this foreign language, happily taking delight in your gift, and in astonishment I would perceive that light and those splendid wonders about which Flaccus speaks in the *Ars poetica*, "Antiphates and Scylla and Charybdis with the Cyclops." But alas, what am I now to do? You are too distant from me, blessed in your singular knowledge of both languages; death snatched away our Barlaam and, to tell the truth, it was I who first banished him from my presence. While seeking honors for him, I was inflicting harm upon myself that went unnoticed; thus in helping his climb to the bishopric, I lost a teacher under whom I had begun to serve with great expectation. I admit a tremendous difference between you and him; for you have been of great assistance to me, and I do not know how to reciprocate. He, on the other hand, while teaching me a great deal in daily lessons, admitted that he too had acquired much from our meetings, including considerable earnings. I know not whether this was out of courtesy or the truth; but he was as learned in Greek as he was poor in his knowledge of Latin, and though possessing a nimble mind, he would nonetheless have to work hard to express his feelings. And so, in turn, with trepidation I would approach his field under his guidance, and often he would wander after me within my field, though with firmer steps. For this too there was a different reason: his knowledge of Latin was greater than my knowledge of Greek. At that time, I was laying foundations while he was somewhat more advanced since he had been born in Magna Grecia. Being older than myself, and having once availed himself of the knowledge and skill of the Latins, he returned more readily to his usual ways. Death snatched him from me, as I lamented a short while ago, while distance, not that dissimilar to death, deprived me of you; for although I delight in having such a friend wherever you may be, I still cannot hear your voice in person, and thus my thirst for learning with which I admittedly burn can neither be enkindled nor soothed by you. Without it, your Homer is si-

lent for me, rather I am deaf to him. Still I take pleasure in his mere presence and with many sighs I embrace him, saying: "O great man, how willingly would I listen to you! But death has blocked my one ear and detestable distance the other." Nonetheless I thank you for your magnificent gift. As you know, recently from the west—surprising as that may seem—the prince of philosophers, Plato, arrived at my home. I do not fear that you, with your stature, would protest this appellation, as the scholastics are surely wont to do, when neither Cicero himself nor Seneca, neither Apuleius nor Plotinus the great Platonist, and finally neither Ambrose nor our Augustine would object. Now at length, through your gift, to the prince of philosophers has been added the Greek prince of poets. Who would not rejoice and glory in such great guests? I do possess whatever of each of them had been translated into Latin; but to behold Greeks in their own dress, which perhaps may not be useful, is truly a pleasure, nor indeed have I lost any hope at this age of making some progress in your language in which we know Cato made such strides in his old age. If perhaps you wish something from me, show in turn a similar confidence in me and make use of my services as is your right, just as you know I make use of yours. And since the success of one request leads to boldness in requesting others, send me at your convenience a Hesiod, send me a Euripides, I beg you. Farewell, O distinguished man, and if you will, attempt to make my name, which without any merit and with the mysterious favor of men or of fortune is now well known in the West, known to the oriental court as well, and to its illustrious members, so that what the Roman Caesar finds appealing may also please the Emperor of Constantinople.

Milan, 10 January.

*Fam. XXIV, 3.*

*To Marcus Tullius Cicero.*

Francesco sends his greetings to his Cicero. After a lengthy and extensive search for your letters, I found them where I least expected, and I then read them with great eagerness. I listened to you speak on many subjects, complain about many things, waver in your opinions, O Marcus Tullius, and I who had known the kind of preceptor that you were for others now recognize the kind of guide that you were for yourself. Now it is your turn, wherever you may be, to hearken not to advice but to a lament inspired by true love from one of your descendants who dearly cherishes your name, a lament addressed to you not without tears. O wretched and distressed spirit, or to use your own words, O rash and ill-fated elder, why did you choose to become involved in so many quarrels and utterly useless feuds? Why did you forsake that peaceful ease so befitting a man of your years, your profession, and your fate? What false luster of glory led you, an old man, into wars with the young, and into a series of misfortunes that then brought you to a death unworthy of a philosopher? Alas, forgetful of your brother's advice and of your many wholesome precepts, like a wayfarer at night carrying a lantern before him, you revealed to your followers the path where you yourself stumbled most wretchedly. I make no mention of Dionysius, of your brother or of your nephew, and, if you like, even of Dolabella, all men whom you praise at one moment to the high heavens and at the next rail at with sudden wrath. Perhaps these may be excused. I bypass even Julius Caesar, whose oft-tested clemency proved a haven of refuge for those very men who had assailed him; I likewise refrain from mentioning Pompey the Great, with whom you seemed able to accomplish whatever you liked by right of friendship. But what madness provoked you against Mark Anthony? Love for the Republic, I suppose you would say, but you yourself confessed that it had already collapsed. But if it were pure loyalty, if it were love of liberty that impelled you, why such intimacy with Augustus? What would your answer be to your Brutus who says, "If you are so fond of Octavius, you seem not to have fled a tyrant, but rather to have sought a kindlier one." There still remained your last, lamentable error, O unhappy Cicero: that you should speak ill of the very man whom you had previously praised, not because he was doing you any harm, but merely because he failed to check your enemies. I grieve at your destiny, my dear friend, I am filled with shame and distress at your shortcomings; and so even as did Brutus, "I place no trust in those arts in which you were so profi-

cient." For in truth, what good is there in teaching others, what benefit is there in speaking constantly with the most magnificent words about the virtues, if at the same time you do not give heed to your own words? Oh, how much better it would have been, especially for a philosopher, to have grown old peacefully in the country, meditating, as you write somewhere, on that everlasting life and not on this transitory existence; how much better for you never to have held such offices, never to have yearned for triumphs, never to have had any Catilines to inflate your ego. But these words indeed are all in vain. Farewell forever, my Cicero.

From the land of the living, on the right bank of the Adige, in the city of Verona in transpadane Italy, on 16 June in the year 1345 from the birth of that Lord whom you never knew.

*Fam. XXIV, 4.*

*To the same correspondent.*

Francesco sends his greetings to his Cicero. I hope that my previous letter did not offend you; for as you are wont to say, there is truth in what your contemporary says in the *Andria*: "Indulgence begets friends, truth only hatred." Accept then what may somewhat soothe your wounded feelings so that the truth may not always seem hateful; if we are irritated by true criticism, we rejoice in true praise. Allow me to say, O Cicero, that you lived as a man, you spoke as an orator, you wrote as a philosopher; and it was your life that I censured, not your intellect and your tongue since I admire the former and am astounded by the latter. Moreover, nothing was lacking but constancy in your personal life, a desire for the tranquillity necessary for the practice of philosophy, and withdrawal from civil strife, once liberty was spent and the Republic buried and mourned. Note how different is my treatment of you than yours of Epicurus throughout your works, but especially in the *De finibus*, where you approve of his life and ridicule his intellect. I do not ridicule you at all; I pity only your life, as I said, and applaud your talent and your eloquence. O great father of Roman eloquence, not I alone but all who bedeck themselves with the flowers of Latin speech are grateful to you; for it is with the waters from your wellsprings that we irrigate our fields, frankly admitting that we are sustained by your leadership, aided by your judgments, and enlightened by your radiance. In a word, under your auspices, so to speak, we have achieved whatever writing skills and principles we possess. In the realm of poetry we followed another master since necessarily we had to follow one supreme guide in the unencumbered ways of prose and another in the more restricted paths of poetry; we were moved to admire one who spoke and one who sang since, and I beg the indulgence of you both, neither of you could serve both purposes; in your waters he was unequal to you, and you to him in his measured flow. Possibly I would not have ventured to say this first, however much I felt it, but before me the great Anneus Seneca from Cordova said it, or borrowed it from someone else. He laments that the obstacle to his knowing you was not your ages but the fury of civil strife; he could have met you but never did, yet he was always an admirer of your works and those of that other writer. According to him, then, each of you is confined to his own realm of eloquence and is bidden to yield to his colleague in all else. But I am keeping you too long in suspense: you would like to know who the other master is. You know him; you must remember his name: it is Publius Virgilius

Maro, a citizen of Mantua, about whom you prophesied great things. For we read that, struck by one of his youthful works, you sought the author's name; you, already advanced in years, saw him while he was still young, and expressed your delight with him, rendering a judgment from the inexhaustible fount of eloquence, which, though mingled with self-praise, was truly honorable and splendid for him: for you called him "the second hope of great Rome." At your words, he was so pleased and committed them so deeply to memory that twenty years later, after your earthly journey had long since ended, he inserted your very words into his divine poem. Had it been given to you to see the work, you would have rejoiced at discerning from the first blossom the promise of the real fruit to come; what is more, you would have congratulated the Latin Muses either for having left a doubtful superiority to the insolent Greek Muses or for having won a decisive victory. There are defenders of both these opinions; and if I have come to know your mind from your works, which I do seem to know as though I had lived with you, your choice will be the latter, and as you gave primacy in oratory to Latium, so would you give it the poetic palm. Doubtless you would have ordered the *Iliad* to yield to the *Aeneid*, something that Propertius did not fear to affirm from the very beginning of Virgil's labors. For in his work on the fundamentals of poetry, he openly declared his feelings and hope for those works in these verses: "Yield, O Roman authors, yield, O Greeks; something greater than the *Iliad* is born." So much for the other master of Latin literature, the other hope of great Rome; now I return to you.

You have heard my opinions about your life and your talent. Do you also wish to hear about your books, how fortune has treated them and how the public and scholars view them? Some splendid volumes still exist that I can hardly list, much less peruse with care; moreover, your works enjoy an immense reputation and your name is on everyone's lips, but rare are those who study you, whether because the times are unfavorable or men's minds dull and sluggish, or, as I think more likely, because greed has bent their minds to other pursuits. Thus, some of your books, I suspect, are lost for us who still live, and I know not whether they will ever be recovered: how great is my grief, how great a shame for our times, how great a wrong to posterity! It was not degrading enough to neglect our own intellects to the detriment of the following age, but we had to destroy the fruit even of your labor with our cruel and unpardonable negligence. What I am deploring with respect to your works has also happened to many works of other illustrious authors. But since at present I am dealing only with yours, here are the titles of those whose loss is most to be deplored: *De republica*, *De re familiari*,

*De re militari*, *De laude philosophiae*, *De consolatione*, and *De gloria*, although my feeling is one of faint hope for the last ones rather than total despair. And furthermore, even of the surviving books, large portions are missing; it is as though after winning a great battle against oblivion and sloth, we now had to mourn our leaders, and not only those who had been killed but those who had been maimed or lost. This we deplore in many of your works, but particularly in *De oratore*, the *Academica*, and *De legibus*, all of which have reached us in such fragmentary and mutilated condition that it would perhaps have been better for them to have perished.

In conclusion, you will wish to know about the condition of Rome and of the Roman state, as well as the appearance of your homeland, the degree of harmony among its citizenry, to whom power has been entrusted, and by whose hands and with what wisdom the reins of government are held; also whether the Danube, the Ganges, the Ebro, the Nile, the Don are still our boundaries, or whether in the words of your Mantuan poet, someone has arisen "whose empire shall reach to the ocean's limits, whose fame shall end in the stars," or "whose empire shall expand beyond the Garamants and Indians." I surmise that you are most eager to hear these and similar tidings, owing to your patriotism and your love of country, which led to your death. But it is truly better to pass over such subjects in silence, for believe me, O Cicero, were you to learn your country's condition, you would weep bitter tears, wherever in heaven or in Erebus your lodging may be. Farewell forever.

From the land of the living, on the left bank of the Rhone, in transalpine Gaul, in the same year, on 19 December.

To Quintilian.

Francesco sends his greetings to Quintilian. A long time ago I had heard of your name and read something of yours, and I wondered where you had acquired your reputation of possessing keen insight; later I became acquainted with your intellect when your work *De institutione oratoria* came into my hands, but, alas, mangled and mutilated. Knowing how time destroys all things, I said to myself: "You do as usual; nothing do you faithfully preserve except what is better lost. O insolent and slothful age, in such condition you hand down to me men of genius while paying your respects to the unworthy! O sterile and detestable times dedicated to learning and writing much that would have been better left unsaid, you failed to keep this work intact." But your book allowed me to form a correct opinion of you, for I had long erred in judging your work and am now pleased to have put an end to my error. Seeing the dismembered limbs of a beautiful body, my mind was overcome by admiration and grief; perhaps someone now possesses you in your entirety who is doubtlessly unaware of his guest's renown. May whoever had the good fortune to discover you know that in his possession is this object of great value, which, if he is at all wise, he will consider among his greatest treasures. In these books—I know not the number but they doubtless were many—you dared to probe once again a subject already treated with the highest skill by Cicero in his old age, something that seemed impossible to me; following in his footsteps you acquired a new renown not from imitation but from your own learning, which gave birth to your remarkable work. The orator so carefully formed by him is so molded and fashioned by you that Cicero seems either to have neglected or not to have noticed a great deal. One by one you so diligently gather the many things overlooked by your master that you can be said to have surpassed him in diligence to the same degree that he surpassed you in eloquence. While he leads his orator through the difficulties of legal actions to the highest summits of eloquence, training him for victory in judicial battles, you go further back, leading your orator through all the twists and pitfalls of the lengthy journey from the very cradle to the impregnable stronghold of eloquence; this is pleasing and delightful, compelling our admiration, because nothing proves more useful to aspirants. Ciceronian splendor enlightens those already advanced and reveals to the strong the way to eminence, whereas your diligence assists the weak as well, and like an experienced nurse of intellects nourishes the tender child with the milk

of humility. Lest flattering truth seem suspect to you, I must change my style; Cicero's words in his *Rhetorica* apply in your case: "For the orator it is of very little importance to speak about his skill, and of the highest importance to speak with skill"; I do not endow you with one of these qualities and deny you the other one, as Cicero does with Hermagoras, about whom he was speaking. I concede both of them to you, but the latter to a lesser degree and the former to such a remarkable degree that it now seems hardly possible for a human mind to add anything to what you say. When this magnificent work of yours is compared to your other book entitled *De causis*—by not having perished it shows all the more clearly that our age is especially neglectful of the best things but not of mediocre ones—it becomes sufficiently clear to discerning minds that you have performed the office of the whetstone rather than that of the sword, and have been more successful in polishing the orator than in shaping him! I wish that you would not take this in bad part, but understand that it is true of yourself as of others that an intellect is never so competent in all things that it may not be surpassed in some way. I admit that you were a great man, but you were supreme in teaching and molding great men. And if you had come across a suitable candidate, you would have produced someone greater than yourself, being as you were a learned cultivator of noble intellects.

There was, however, a considerable rivalry between you and another great man, Anneus Seneca. Your age, profession, and birthplace joined the two of you, but envy, that plague among equals, separated you. I know not whether in this matter you might appear the more moderate inasmuch as, while you refrain from praising him fully, he speaks of you with great contempt. If I may be considered any kind of judge between such illustrious parties, although I have a greater fear of being judged by an inferior than of being worthy to judge those who are superior, I shall still express my opinion. He was more versatile, you keener; he used a loftier style, you a more cautious one. What is more, you praise his genius, his dedication, and his breadth of learning, but not his taste and judgment. You say in fact that his style is corrupt and vitiated by every fault. On the other hand, he numbers you among those whose fame is buried with them although your fame has not yet disappeared and you neither died nor were buried while he was still writing. He died under Nero, whereas you, following his death and Nero's, came to Rome from Spain during Galba's reign, and there after many years, accepting from the Emperor Domitian the task of educating his sister's grandchildren, you were made sponsor of their youthful customs and studies. Having enjoyed great success in both fields, you performed your duty, I believe, in the best way you could. Nevertheless, as Plutarch

wrote to Trajan shortly thereafter, the indiscretions of your youthful charges reflected upon you. I have nothing more to write. I hope to see you in your entirety, and if you are anywhere in such condition, I beg you not to hide from me any longer. Farewell.

From the land of the living, between the right slope of the Apennines and the right bank of the Arno, within the walls of my own city, where I first became acquainted with you, and on the very same day, 7 December, in the year 1350 from the birth of Him whom your master preferred to persecute rather than know.

To Titus Livy, historian.

Francesco sends his greetings to Titus Livy. I should wish, if it were permitted from on high, either to have lived in your age or you in ours so that either the age itself or I as a person would become better through you, and, as one of your admirers, I would be disposed for the sake of seeing you to travel not only to Rome but indeed to India from either France or Spain. But now I am allowed to behold you in your books, not indeed in your entirety but as much as has not yet perished through the sloth of our age. We know that you wrote 142 books on Roman affairs. Alas, with what enthusiasm and labor! Scarcely thirty of them survive. What a wretched custom it is to deceive ourselves willfully! I said thirty because it is common for everyone to say so, but I find that one of these is missing. They are twenty-nine, that is, three decades: the first, the third, and the fourth, which does have the full number of books. I busy myself with these few remains of yours whenever I desire to forget these places or times, as well as our present customs, being filled with bitter indignation against the activities of our contemporaries, who find no value in anything but gold and silver and pleasures. If these are to be considered among good things, then not only the dumb beasts but even inert matter enjoy a fuller and more perfect good than does rational man. But this is a lengthy and well-known subject. Now it is rather the time for me to express my gratitude to you for a number of things, but especially for the fact that you often make me forget present evils by transferring me to happier centuries. As I read I seem to find myself with the Cornelii, the African Scipios, the Laelii, the Fabii Maximi, the Metulli, the Bruti, the Decii, the Catos, the Reguli, the Cursores, the Torquati, the Valerii Corvini, the Salinatore, the Claudii Marcelli, the Neros, the Emilii, the Fulvii, the Flamini, the Atilii, the Quinti, and the Camilli, and not with these cursed thieves among whom I was born under an evil star. And if I could only possess you in your entirety, with how many other names would I seek solace for my life and forgetfulness of this hateful age! Since I cannot find them in your works, I read of them here and there in other authors, and especially in that volume where you are to be found in your entirety but so abridged that most of the subject matter is lost though the number of books is correct. I should like you to give my greetings to your predecessors, Polybius, Quintus Claudius, and Valerius Antias, and all those whose glory was dimmed by your greater splendor. Among the more recent authors, greet for me Pliny the Younger of Verona, your

neighbor, and Crispus Sallust, who was once your rival. Tell them that their nightly vigils enjoyed no more happier a lot than yours. Farewell forever, O supreme preserver of the memory of past deeds.

From the land of the living, in that region of Italy and in that city where you were born and are buried, in the vestibule of the temple of Justina Virgo, and standing before your gravestone, on 22 February, in the year 1351 from the birth of Him whom you might have seen or heard, had you lived a little longer.



*To an unknown correspondent,\* a reply to a lengthy and highly informative letter addressed to him in the name of the poet Homer from the realm of the dead.*

Francesco sends greetings to Homer, the prince of Greek poetry. For some time now I have meant to write you and would have done so except for my feeble command of your language. For I have enjoyed little fortune in learning Greek as happened to you with Latin, which you were wont to use with our authors' assistance, and which, through their descendants' negligence, you seem to have forgotten. Cut off from either means of communication, I had remained silent. One man has once again restored you to our age in Latin dress; and by Jove, your Penelope did not wait for her Ulysses any longer or more anxiously than I have for you. Already I had gradually lost all hope, for, aside from some opening lines of several of your poems, in which I viewed you as one beholds from a distance the uncertain and shimmering look of a desired friend or a glimpse of his streaming hair, nothing of yours had reached me in Latin—in short, I had no hope of seeing you at close quarters; for that little book that commonly passes as yours, though of uncertain authorship, and though it has been derived from yours and is ascribed to you, is certainly not yours. If he lives long enough, this man will restore you to us in your entirety; for he has already begun to let us enjoy fully not only the outstanding fruits of your divine works but also the charms of conversing with you. I recently tasted the Greek flavor of one of these in Latin dress, which made me plainly see the capabilities of a vigorous and keen intellect. Therefore, although Aeneas Seneca writes that Cicero loses his customary eloquence in his poetry, and that Virgil's usual felicity of expression abandons him in his prose, and although the one interpreted many of your sayings while the other imitated you in even more things—both still remain the princes of Latin eloquence—nevertheless, I truly believe that only when compared with themselves rather than with others does each appear unequal or inferior. Otherwise, I have read verses by Cicero that are not disagreeable, and prose letters by Virgil that are not unpleasant. I am now experiencing this in your case as well, for although poetry is also your primary and particular specialty, and although, following a certain Jerome who is a skillful user of our language, I wrote that, once translated into either

\*The identity of the correspondent who wrote Petrarch a letter purporting to be from the shade of Homer continues to remain a puzzle.

Latin or Greek prose, you seemingly are transformed from a very eloquent poet into one scarcely able to speak, yet now, surprising as it may appear, I find you pleasing though translated into Latin prose. I therefore wished to preface this letter with these thoughts so that there would be no surprise at my speaking to Virgil in verse but to you in prose. I spoke to him directly, but am replying to you; and so, in his case I have employed the idiom that we possess in common, in your case I have used not your ancient language, but a new tongue used in the letter addressed to me, a tongue that I employ daily, but I suppose is strange to you. And yet, why do I say "speak" to both of you when whatever anyone may say to either of you is mere "prattle." You are unapproachable, you are more than mortal, your heads pierce the clouds; still, as a child, I find it pleasant to babble with eloquent masters. But enough on the subject of style. I now come to the contents of your letter.

You complain of certain matters when you could justifiably complain of everything, for what is there, I ask, in human affairs that can escape just complaint? When, however, laments become ineffectual, they somehow cease to be justifiable; while lacking a just cause, they are without their desired effect, which consists in offering some remedy for the present and making provision for the future while condemning the past. And yet, since they can at times relieve a grieving soul, they must not be considered completely useless. Thus, your lengthy letter, O great one, abounds in such laments, but I wish that it had been longer since nothing ever seems too long unless accompanied by tediousness. Touching briefly on particular details, I must say that my mind, in its eagerness to know and to learn, experienced a boundless and unbelievable joy in seeing what you wrote about your teachers; they were previously unknown to me, I admit, but henceforth, to the merit of their great disciple, I shall venerate them. I found delight, too, in what you wrote concerning poetry's origins in the distant past and concerning the most ancient cultivators of the Muses, among whom, along with the well-known inhabitants of Helicon, you place Cadmus, son of Agenor, and a certain Hercules, who may or may not have been Alcides. Finally, I delighted in your words about your homeland, whose identity is very doubtful in our minds, remaining unclear even to you Greeks. I also enjoyed what you wrote about pilgrimages to Phoenicia and Egypt in search of knowledge, where several centuries after you famous philosophers traveled, including Pythagoras, Plato, and the most learned and venerable Solon, who gave laws to the Athenians and in later life became a devotee of the Pierides; during his lifetime he admired you, and after his death I imagine that he has become your intimate friend. Lastly, I enjoyed reading about your books, a large number of which

even the Italians, your nearest neighbors, do not know. These barbarians who surround us—would that we could be cut off from them not only by the lofty Alps but by the ocean's breadth—these barbarians, I say, have barely heard of your name, not to mention your works; let this serve as proof of the insignificance of this mortal fame to which we aspire so longingly. With such good news you have, however, mixed the bitter grief of the loss of your works. Unhappy me, thrice unhappy, and even more! How many things perish! Indeed, how little survives of all that our blind activities have accomplished under the revolving sun! O labors and cares of men, O brief and lost time, O vanity and pride over nothing! What are we, what do we do, what do we hope for, who indeed can now entertain hope in the dim light when the supreme sun of eloquence has suffered an eclipse? Who dares complain that anything of his has been lost, who can dare hope that any fruit of his labor will endure? A considerable portion of Homer's sleepless toil has perished, not so much for us—for no one loses what he did not possess—as for the Greeks, who in trying not to yield to us in anything, surpassed us even in our sloth and in our neglect of letters. They have surely lost many of Homer's works, which were for them as so many rays of light emanating from one of their two brightest stars; and so their blindness has made them unworthy of glorying in the possession of such a light. I was also deeply moved in reading your account of your end. For although that story of your death was widespread among us, and I myself, following that tradition, repeated it with some uncertainty in one of my works, I was nonetheless pleased, and, with your leave, still am pleased to entertain a better opinion of you and of Sophocles than to believe that in such divine intellects two highly disturbing passions of the mind, grief and joy, should have held such sway. As for Philemon's death, which is truly ridiculous if we accept hearsay, I have finally learned a more serious version: his death followed a period of unconsciousness due, not to excessive laughter, as is usually related, but to the power of profound meditation. But I return to you and to your fate, which you lament profusely and vehemently. Calm yourself, for I am certain that you can if, once free of your passions, you return to your true self.

You utter many complaints about your imitators, about your ungrateful and ignorant denigrators, with just cause if you were the only one to suffer such insults, and if, furthermore, what disturbs you were not common human traits. You must therefore resign yourself, for though you are admittedly the greatest in your class, you are not alone. As for imitators, what shall I say? In beholding yourself soaring so high on the wings of fantasy, you should have foreseen that imitators would never be lacking; it must be a source of delight for you that many wish to

resemble you, but not many can. Why should you not rejoice, being assured of always occupying first place, when I, the least of men, rejoice, and not only rejoice, but even boast that I am now held in such esteem that there may be someone, if indeed there is, who wishes to follow and imitate me? I would rejoice even more should my imitators be such as to surpass me. I pray, not to your Apollo, but to my God, the true God of genius, that if anyone considers me worthy of imitation, he may overtake me with easy effort and even outstrip me. I shall believe myself truly fortunate and effective to discover among my friends—for no one is imitated unless he is loved—many who are my equal; and I shall believe myself even more fortunate if they surpass me, and from imitators become guides. For if a father's desire is for the son of his flesh to become greater than himself, what should an author desire for the child of his intellect? You who fear not that anyone be greater than you or overtake you, bear your imitators with patience, even though in the *Saturnalia* there is the unsettled controversy on the question of superiority between yourself and the one about whom you most complain, Virgil; what is more, some among us consider the issue a doubtful one, while others assign the crown unequivocally to Virgil. This I report to you not so much in support of or in opposition to either opinion, as to let you know posterity's varying opinions about you. Before continuing, it behooves me, O finest of guides, to defend Virgil, whose soul, according to Horace, is among the purest ever seen on earth. Not only true but commonly known is your statement about his imitating you, as well as many other things about which you maintain silence, perhaps out of shame or modesty; the main points are discussed in order in the *Saturnalia* along with his witty retort. Once rivals accused him of stealing some of your verses, to which he replied that it was a sign of power to have snatched the staff from Hercules; I have no doubt that you understand the veiled sarcasm of this witticism. But in order not to accuse one whom I was about to defend, as many do, I am in full agreement with all that you say. Yet I cannot calmly listen to your complaint that there is no mention of your name in his works despite his being overladen and bedecked with your spoils, while Lucan, as you correctly recall, acknowledges his indebtedness in grateful terms to the bard of Smyrna. I should even like to lend further support to your complaint. Flaccus often, and in noble words, mentions you; in a certain passage he expresses his preference for you over the philosophers, while elsewhere he assigns to you the foremost place among poets. Naso makes reference to you as do Juvenal and Statius. Why continue listing those who make mention of you? Nearly all of our writers have not been forgetful of you. "Why then," you will say, "should I

bear the ingratitude of him alone from whom I should deserve the greatest gratitude?" Before responding, I shall add yet another element to the dispute. Let anyone believe that perhaps he was similarly ungrateful to all, know that he mentions Museus, Linus, and Orpheus, and not merely once, and others, too, such as Hesiod the Ascrean and Theocritus the Syracusan. Had there been any envy in him, he would never have done so; nor does he fail to mention even Varus and Gallus as well as other contemporaries. What then? Have I not aggravated your resentment all the more despite my promise to lessen or remove it? Without a doubt if I stopped with this. But details must be attended to, and, whatever else is done, all the evidence must be brought to bear, particularly if judgment is to be passed. Naturally, with Theocritus as his guide in the *Bucolica* and Hesiod in the *Georgica*, he named each in his proper place. "And why," you will say, "having chosen me as his third guide in his heroic poem, does he make no mention of me in his work?" He would have done so, believe me, having been the gentlest and most modest of men, and, as we find written of him, "a man of irreproachable life," were it not that death interfered. Though he mentions others where it was opportune and convenient, for you alone, to whom he was much more indebted, he was reserving a special place selected after careful consideration. And what was this, do you suppose, if not the most prominent and distinguished place of all? He thus was waiting for the end of his outstanding work, where he intended to exalt your name to the heavens as his guide in sonorous verses. Where, I ask, is it more fitting to exalt one's guide than at journey's end? You have good reason, then, to mourn his premature death. The Italian world mourns with you, but there is no reason to reprove your friend. That it is so you may glean from a similar but recent example; for just as he did with you, so was he imitated by Papinius Statius, whom I mentioned, a man renowned for his remarkable intellect, and possessing singular charm and sophistication. Yet he did not openly acknowledge him as his guide except at the end of his poetic journey. Although in a less conspicuous place he had declared himself the inferior in style, it was still at the close that he openly and in good faith paid the full debt of his grateful mind to the *Aeneid*. If he too had died prematurely, he would not have mentioned Virgil, just as Virgil did not mention you. I wish that I could persuade you that it is as I say. For it is surely so, unless I am mistaken, and if perchance it were otherwise, the more reasonable opinion should be preferred in doubtful matters. Let this suffice in defense of Virgil's major works; and if you turn to the *Iuveniles ludi*, clearly his first youthful creations, you will find your name therein.

It now remains for me to touch upon other minor complaints sprinkled throughout your letter. You complain of being mangled by your imitators; that had to be so, since no one was capable of grasping you in your entirety. You are indignant at their insulting you while being clothed in your spoils, but such is the common practice; no one can be truly ungrateful unless he has received some special favor. You lament that your name, once held in great honor by the early jurists and physicians, has now become subject to their successors' contempt, and you do not understand the reason. These men are truly very different from their predecessors, for if they were of like stamp, they would love and cherish the same things. Let your indignation cease, and your sorrow as well; be of good cheer. To have been displeasing to evil and ignorant men is the first sign of virtue and genius. The radiance of your genius is so brilliant that half-blind eyes cannot endure it; it is with you as with the sun, for which it is not considered a disgrace but the highest praise that feeble eyes and nocturnal birds flee from it. Among the ancients, and among the moderns as well, if even a faint spark of pristine valor still survives in any one of them, you are considered not only a holy philosopher, as you yourself say, but, as I have noted, greater and superior to any other, one who has concealed with a charming and transparent veil a very beautiful philosophy. How monstrous men view you is of no interest to you, or rather it is of the greatest interest, for you should wish not to please those whose scorn is the first step to glory, while the next step consists in not being recognized. Now lay aside, I beg you, your anxiety and sorrow, and return to the Elysian fields, which were your early abode, one worthy of you, from which you say you were driven by such absurdities. It does not behoove the mind of a wise man to be crushed by the affronts of fools. Otherwise, what or who would put an end to such an evil, considering the words of the Hebrew sage, "The number of fools is infinite." Truer words could not have been uttered, as is attested by any street, home, or public square.

What you next complain about so bitterly seemed laughable and utterly amusing to my ears, for even sweets taste bitter to the man with a bitter palate and stomach. You weep, when it would have been more fitting to rejoice, because a common friend, whom you consider a Thessalian and I a Byzantine, has forced you to wander or, if you prefer, to be an exile within the colorful walls of my native city. Rest assured that he has done this and continues to do it in good faith and out of the most sincere love for you. Primarily for this reason, he has become very dear to all the admirers of your glory, who, though quite rare, still do exist. See to it, then, that you not become angry with that very person to whom we all, as your admirers, render thanks in your name and

ours, since, heaven willing, he will restore you to us and to the Ausonian Muses from whom you were snatched. And do not be astonished that the Fiesole valley and the Arno's banks have begotten only three friends. It is enough, it is more than enough, it is more than I hoped, to have found in such a mercenary city three friends of the Muses. Yet do not despair, the city is large and populous; if you search for a fourth you will find him, and to these I can add a fifth who is deserving, crowned as he is with the Penean or the Alphean laurel. But I know not how transalpine Babylon stole him from us. Do you think it of small account that five such men should be gathered at one time and in one city? Search in other cities. That Bologna of yours for which you sigh, though a most magnificent seat of learning, contains only one even after a thorough search; Verona has two; Sulmona one; and Mantua one, unless divine things have directed him away from earthly concerns, for he has deserted your banners to seek refuge under those of Ptolemy. How astonishing that the head of the world, Rome, has been emptied of such inhabitants except for one! Perugia contains one who might have made a name for himself were it not that he neglected himself and abandoned not only Parnassus but the Apennines and Alps as well, and now in his old age roams throughout Spain scratching away on parchments to earn his livelihood. Other cities have reared still others, but all those whom I have known have migrated from this mortal dwelling to that common and eternal city. You can thus see what I would like: that you not continue lamenting that he has led you to a land that today may possess few friends and admirers for you, but surely more than any other. Do you not know how rare men of this ilk have always been even in your country? For in our day, unless I am mistaken, this friend of ours is the only one in all of Greece. There was another, formerly my teacher, who, having raised my highest hopes, forsook me by dying at the threshold of my studies, although he had already abandoned me previously when, by considering his own interests rather than mine, he was able to advance with my assistance to an episcopal office. This being the case, be satisfied with these few friends, and forgive this enfeebled age as you would have pardoned a more flourishing one. Once there were a few, now there are very few, and soon I predict that there will be none who will prize noble studies. Abide with these few as eagerly as you can, and do not take it upon yourself to exchange our river for any larger one. You are not a sailor nor indeed a fisherman; in point of fact, if the rumor is true, and I wish it were not, your discourse with such people was not very auspicious. You liked the small Castalian fount and the low and humble Helicon. May our Arno and our hills be pleasing to you, where noble springs of intellects gush forth and the delightful

nightingales build their nests. They are few indeed, I admit, but if, as I have said, you search near and far, they are many. Aside from these, what do you hope to find among the people except fullers, weavers, and smiths, not to mention imposters, publicans, thieves of various kinds, and thousands of kinds of cheats, hostile factions that are never lacking in deceit, anxious misers and their vain dealings, and the rank and smelly dregs of the mechanical arts? Among these, as an eagle among the night owls, as a lion among pigs, you must bear with courage their jeering, saying what Ennius, who was so inferior to you, once said: "I flit about in life on the lips of learned men." Let unlearned mouths ruminate their ignorance and their tasteless chattering; what matters it to you or to your situation that they either do not know you or ridicule you, when their praise is a respectable kind of blasphemy? But, as I am the least in intellect and in years, let me appear last and let our conversation turn to me. In your present adversity you request my assistance. O cruel and unkind fate, would that there were some power in me with which I might boast forever of having aided so great a man, an honor greater than I have yet attained or hope ever to attain! I call to witness Christ, who was unknown to you, that, save tender pity and loyal advice, I have nothing with which to come to your aid. For how can one who cannot help himself help another? Perhaps you have not heard that your disciples as well as yourself were reviled out of hatred for your name and declared insane by an assembly of insane? If this happened to you in your own age and in highly cultured Athens, what do you think will happen now to other poets in other cities devoted to the pursuit of pleasure? To the ignorant multitude I appear to be one of these; this astonishes me and I wonder why it is so. I wish that their reasons were sound, but it matters not how justifiable the reason for envy if envy itself is real. Do you seek refuge on my bosom? O insensate turn of fortune's wheel! Can this be true of you for whom no royal palace would be sufficiently spacious or resplendent were loftiness of intellect to bestow material honors just as fortune dispenses power. But it is not the case, and genius so often spurns the turrets and castles of the ignorant and delights in the isolated hut. For my part, although I may not be worthy of such a guest, still I have you in Greek in my home and, as much as has been possible, in Latin, and shortly I shall possess all of you, if your Thessalian would complete what he has begun. Know, too, that in order to consign you to a more secure place, I have prepared in the depths of my heart a retreat for you with great feeling and reverence. In sum, my love for you is brighter and more glowing than the sun, and my esteem so great that there can be none greater. This, O guide and father, I have done for you because

I was able to; to free you from the multitude's scorn would result in detracting from your uniquely sublime praises, certainly something beyond me and anyone else, unless there be someone who can put an end to the multitude's madness. Although this may be possible for God, He has yet to do so, and I believe that He will not. I have said many things as though you were present, but now upon emerging from these vivid flights of the imagination, I realize how far removed you are, and I fear that it may prove annoying for you to read so many things in the shadows, except that your lengthy letter was written from there. Farewell forever, and when you have returned to your place, do give my greetings to Orpheus and Linus, Euripides and the others.

From the land of the living, in the midland between the very limpid rivers Po, Ticino, Adda, and others, from which some say Milan derives its name, on 9 October of the year 1360 of this last era.