

alarmed by what follows—"if the Fates permit pardon." For I am afraid that that inhuman Bellerophon, inflamed by anger, may be all too harsh and bloodthirsty.

Whatever may happen, we shall well do our part if I ask you and you ask our master to seek the release of the prisoner by letter to the lord of Thor. His name and the details of the story you will learn from the bearer, a countryman whom I send you for this purpose alone. The messenger is no rougher than the lover for whose folly we are seeking pardon.

Supplement to the Previous Letter

BOOK III / 22 (*Excerpt*)

To Laelius; from Vaucluse, 29 April 1346.

Petrarch reports his messenger's fascination with Laelius.

. . . Captured by his devotion to you, he now returns to you with this letter. He hopes through you to obtain the intervention of our master, that he may set free his friend, of whom I wrote you yesterday and who is now in the utmost peril—though possibly, as I have always feared, there is no chance for prayers to that judge, determined on the death of the culprit. The story goes that the judge is mad with grief and with jealousy at the ravishing of that virginal flower which, they say, he was avid to pluck; and he is furious that in the realm of love the cajolements of a poor man outweighed all his vain wealth. And even though our master should pour his words into deaf ears, he will preserve entire the merit of his mercy, thanks to your kind intervention; and the rustic intermediary will pay his debt of gratitude, with my aid. But the unhappy lover, if worse comes to worst, will pay for the sweetness of love with the bitterness of death, as many have done before. In the meantime regard the messenger as the humblest of your friends. . . .

The outcome of the village drama is unknown.

The Ascent of Mont Ventoux

BOOK IV / 1

To Father Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro;* from Malaucène, 26 April 1336.

Today I climbed the highest mountain of this region, which is not improperly called Mons Ventosus, Windy Mount. I was moved by no other purpose than a desire to see what the great height was like. I had carried this project in mind for many years, for, as you know, I had lived in these parts from childhood on, by the fate that determines human affairs. I had long planned to do what I did today. The actual impulse came when, a day or two ago, I was rereading Livy's *History of Rome*, and I happened on the passage where Philip of Macedon, who carried on the war against the Romans, climbed Mount Hemus in Thessaly.** From its summit, according to report, he thought he would be able to descry two seas, the Adriatic and the Euxine. I don't know if this is true or false, for the mountain is far from our regions, and the disagreement of commentators makes it dubious. I won't assemble them all, but Pomponius Mela accepts the statement without hesitation, while Livy thinks it false. I shouldn't have left the question long in doubt if the ascent of that mountain were as easy as this one. But to drop that matter, I shall come to our own mountain. I thought it proper for a young private person to attempt what no one criticizes in an aged king.

Thinking about a companion, I found hardly any of my friends entirely suitable, remarkable to state, for even among one's intimates a perfect concord of character and purpose is very rare. One was too phlegmatic, another too eager; one too slow, another too quick; one too gloomy, one too gay; one too dull, another more prudent than I should like. I was frightened by the muteness of one, the talkativeness of another, by the overweight of one, by another's leanness and weakness. The cold incuriosity of one, the officiousness of another discouraged me. Those are defects that are tolerable enough at home (for charity suffers all things and friendship rejects no burdens), but

* Augustinian canon, Professor of Theology, Petrarch's former confessor.

** The present Mount Balkan in Bulgaria.

they are much too serious on a journey. Thus fastidiously, with only my pleasure in view, I cast about, weighing my friends in the balance without doing any injury to friendship; and I silently condemned whatever characteristics might prove a hindrance to my proposed journey. What do you suppose? Finally I looked for aid to my own family. I broached the matter to my younger brother Gherardo, whom you know. He jumped at the idea. He was much pleased to act at the same time as friend and brother.

On the appointed day we left home and by evening reached Malaucène, at the base of the mountain, on the north side. We stayed there a day, and finally today we made the ascent with two servants, not without difficulty, for the mountain is very steep, an almost inaccessible mass of rock. But the poet well said: "Dogged labor conquers all." The long daylight, the inspiriting air, our high hearts and stout bodies, and all the circumstances helped us on our way. Our obstacle was the nature of the place.

Among the mountain's ridges we met an old shepherd, who tried to discourage us from the ascent with much talk. He said that fifty years before, with an ardent youthful purpose like ours, he had climbed to the very summit and that he had got nothing from it but toil and repentance and torn clothes and scratches from the rocks and briars. Never, he said, had he heard that anyone else either before or after had ventured to do the same. His shouted discouragements merely increased our eagerness, as young men's minds are naturally incredulous of good counselors. So the old man, recognizing that his efforts were useless, went with us a little way among the rocks and pointed out to us a steep course, crying many recommendations and warnings to our retreating backs. We had left with him our extra baggage and other encumbrances and kept only what was necessary for the climb. And so we mounted eagerly upward.

But, as often happens, fatigue soon followed our strenuous effort. So before long we sat down on a rock. Then we went on more slowly, I especially taking the rocky way at a more modest pace. My brother chose the shortest and steepest course, directly up the ridges. Softer than he, I kept turning along the slopes, and when he called to me and pointed to the shorter way, I kept answering that I would find an easier approach on another side, and I didn't mind a longer course that would not be so steep. But this was merely an excuse for laziness. While the others kept to the high ridge, I wandered in the hollows without finding any gentler upward path, and I just lengthened my journey and increased my useless labor. After thus floundering vainly

and tediously I decided to climb straight up. Exhausted and anxious, I found my brother seated, refreshed by his long wait for me. For a while we kept together. But hardly had we left that rise than what do I do but forget my previous digression and again tend to take a downward course! And again, rounding the hollows and looking for an easy way, I landed in much difficulty. Thus I kept putting off the trouble of climbing; but man's wit can't alter the nature of things, and there is no way for anyone to reach the heights by going downward.

In short, to my brother's great amusement and to my fury, the same thing happened to me three or four times within a few hours. Being so befooled, I sat down in a hollow. My thought quickly turned from the material to the spiritual, and I said to myself in approximately these words: "What you have experienced so often today in the ascent of this mountain certainly happens to you and to many who are striving for the blessed life. But the spiritual straying is not so easily to be perceived, for the movements of the body are in the open, whereas those of the soul are hidden and invisible. The life that we call blessed is situated on a high place; and narrow, we are told, is the way that leads to it; and many hills stand in the way, and we must advance from virtue to virtue up shining steps. The summit is the ultimate goal, the terminus of the road on which we journey. Everyone wishes to arrive there, but, as Ovid says: 'To wish is not enough; to gain your end you must ardently yearn.' You, certainly, both wish and ardently yearn, unless you are fooling yourself, as you so often do. What then holds you back? Surely nothing but the level road that seems at first sight easier, amid base earthly pleasures. But after much wandering you will either have to climb upward eventually, with labors long shirked, to the heights of the blessed life, or lie sluggishly in the valley of your sins. And if—I shudder at the thought!—the darkness and the shadows of death find you there, you will spend an eternal night in perpetual torture."

These thoughts, remarkably enough, spurred my mind and body to accomplish what remained to be done. God grant that my soul may follow the road for which I long night and day, as today I journeyed with my corporeal feet, conquering all difficulties! And why not? The agile, immortal soul can gain its goal in a twinkling, with no intermediate stages. That should be much easier than today's journey, step by step, through the compliance of my feeble, mortal body, burdened by its heavy members.

One hill dominates the others. It is called by the mountaineers *Filiolus*, or Little Son; why, I don't know, unless by antiphrasis, as is

often the case, for it seems the father of all the mountains round about. There is a small level space at the top. There, exhausted, we came to rest.

And now, my dear Father, since you have heard the troubles mounting in the heart of the mounting man, do please hear the rest, and give an hour to reading the events of my day.

At first, affected by the rare quality of the air and by the wide-spreading view, I stand as if stunned. I look about. Clouds lie far below. The tales of Athos and Olympus seem less incredible, when what I had read of them comes true on this less famous mountain. I look toward Italy, whither most my soul inclines. The noble snow-topped Alps seem close by, far away though they are. (Through them that fierce enemy of the Roman name once made his way, splitting the rocks with vinegar, if we can believe the story.) I admit that I sighed for the Italian skies, evident more to my thought than to my eyes, and an unspeakable longing invaded me to see again my friend [Giacomo Colonna] and my native land, although I reproached myself for this somewhat unmanly weakness. (Yet there might be excuse for both my desires, and excellent authorities could be alleged in support.)

Then a new thought came to me, rather of time than of space. I said to myself: "Today ten years have passed since you finished your youthful studies and left Bologna. Oh immortal God! Oh immutable Wisdom! What changes in your character have these years seen!" I suppress much, for I have not yet reached a safe harbor from which to look back on the storms of the past. The time will perhaps come when I shall review all my past deeds in their order, prefacing them with the words of your St. Augustine: "I wish to recall the filth of my past and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not that I love them, but that I may love thee, O my God!" Indeed, a heavy, a dubious burden still lies upon me. What I used to love, I love no longer. No, I am lying. I love it still, but more moderately. No, again I have lied. I love, but with more shame, more sadness; and now at last I have told the truth. This is the fact: I love, but I love what I long not to love, what I should like to hate. I love nonetheless, but unwillingly, under compulsion, with sadness and mourning. I feel in myself, wretchedly, the sense of Ovid's famous line: "I shall hate if I can; otherwise I shall love in my own despite."

Less than three years have passed since that perverse and guilty desire that totally possessed me, reigning without opposition in my heart's chambers, began to find a champion struggling against it. Between the two impulses a grueling battle has long been fought in

my mind by the two men within me, and the outcome is still uncertain.

Thus my thoughts ran back over the previous ten years. Then I transported my distresses to the future, and I asked myself: "If you should by chance prolong this transitory life for ten years more, and continue approaching virtue, substituting new dispositions for old, as you have in the past two years, breaking down your old obstinacy, could you not then, with luck, encounter death at forty and calmly renounce that residuum of life that dwindles into old age?" Such thoughts as these, Father, ran through my mind. I was happy at my progress, I wept for my imperfections, and I took pity on the common inconstancy of human actions; and I forgot what the place was, why I had come there, and how I must have looked to the others.

Then, dismissing my troubles to some more suitable occasion, I looked about me and saw what I had come to see. It was already time to think of starting back, for the sun was descending and the great shadow of the mountain was extending below. Roused and warned, I looked back to the west. The Pyrenean range, boundary of France and Spain, was not visible, not because of any intervening obstacle, but because of the weakness of human vision. On the other hand I could clearly see the Cévennes to the right, and to the left the sea beyond Marseilles and Aigues-Mortes, all several days' journey distant. The Rhone itself lay under our eyes.

While I was admiring all these features, now recognizing some earthly object, now uplifting my soul, like my body, it occurred to me to look at the *Confessions* of Augustine, the gift of your love. (I keep it always with me, for the sake of the author and of the donor. It's of pocket size, but its small volume contains infinite sweetness.) I opened it to read whatever might start forth; what but pious and devout words could start forth? Now by chance it opened to the tenth book. My brother stood intently by, waiting to hear what Augustine would say through my lips. I call God to witness, and my brother too, that the first words on which my eyes fell were these: "Men go to admire the high mountains and the great flood of the seas and the wide-rolling rivers and the ring of Ocean and the movements of the stars; and they abandon themselves!"

I was stunned, I admit. Asking my brother, who was eager to hear more, not to bother me, I shut the book. I was angry with myself for admiring the things of this world, when I should have learned long since from the pagan philosophers themselves that nothing is admirable except the soul, beside the greatness of which nothing is great.

Then, sated with sight of the mountain, I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time no one heard me utter a word until we got to the bottom. That quotation had given me enough food for thought, and I couldn't conceive that it had emerged by chance. I was sure that what I read had been written for me and for no one else. I was reminded that Augustine had thought the same when, as he himself tells, he was reading the Epistles and first happened on the passage: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences." The same thing happened earlier to St. Anthony when he was listening to the Gospel, where it is written: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." As if this Scriptural passage had been uttered for him alone, he drew the kingdom of Heaven to himself, as his biographer Athanasius says. And as Anthony, on hearing these words, asked nothing further, and as Augustine, after reading the significant words, stopped short, so did I, after the few words I have recorded, put an end to my reading.

I thought in silence of the vanity of men's purposes. Neglecting the nobler part of themselves, they disperse themselves in a multitude of trifles and waste themselves in vain shows, and look abroad for what they could find within. I wondered also at the nobility of the human spirit—unless, degenerate, it has wandered from its primitive origins and has turned to shame what God gave it for honor. How often, on the descent, I turned around and looked back at the mountain peak! It seemed hardly more than a cubit high, in comparison with the height of human thought, unless this is plunged in the filth of earth! This thought possessed me for a time: if we were willing to endure so much labor and sweat to raise our bodies a little closer to Heaven, what cross, what prison, what rack should terrify the soul in its approach to God, treading down upthrusting pride and all man's mortal lot? How few are they who are not tempted from this path by fear of hardship or by desire of ease! How happy is such a man, if there be any such! It is he, I think, the poet had in mind:

Happy the man who is skilled to understand
Nature's hid causes; who beneath his feet
All terrors casts, and death's relentless doom,
And the loud roar of greedy Acheron.

How eagerly we should strive to tread beneath our feet, not the world's heights, but the appetites that spring from earthy impulses!

Amid these surging emotions, with no consciousness of the rough and stony way, I came back in deep night to the little country inn from which I had set forth before daybreak. The full moon gave us welcome assistance as we descended. Then, while the servants were busy getting a meal, I retired to a private room to write all this to you hastily and extemporaneously. I was afraid that if I should put it off and go to another place my mood might change and I would lose my eagerness to write you.

Observe then, loving Father, that I wish to keep nothing of myself secret from you. I display to you not only the course of my life but also my various thoughts. And I ask your prayers that these vague, wandering thoughts may some day gain coherence. Now so vainly dispersed, may they be turned to the one good, true, certain, stable end! Farewell.

Two Offers of Laureateship in a Day

BOOK IV / 4

To Cardinal Giovanni Colonna; from Vaucluse, 1 September 1340.

I am in a dilemma; I don't know which way to turn. The story is remarkable—but short. Today, about nine A.M., I received letters from the Roman Senate, summoning me most urgently and persuasively to Rome to receive the laurel crown of poetry. Then this afternoon about four o'clock a messenger arrived on the same errand from the illustrious Roberto dei Bardi, Chancellor of the University of Paris. He is a fellow Florentine and very sympathetic to my purposes. He urges me, with very compelling arguments, to come to Paris.

Who, I ask you, would ever have guessed that such a thing could occur among our crags? Since in fact it seems almost incredible, I am sending you both letters, including the seals. One letter calls me eastward, the other westward; you will see how I am torn hither and thither by weighty considerations. I know that there is nothing secure in human affairs, and that assuredly in most of our concerns and actions we are deluded by shadows. And yet, as a young man's mind craves glory more than virtue, and as you have encouraged me in your intercourse to seek glory, why should I not admit my own desire for it? At least as much as did that mightiest of African kings, Syphax, when at the same time his friendship was besought by the world's two

Defense of Quotations

BOOK VI / 4 (Excerpt)

To Giovanni Colonna di San Vito; from Avignon, 25 September, probably 1342.

Yes, I use a great many quotations; but they are illustrious and true, and, if I am not mistaken, they convey authority pleurably. People say that I could use fewer. Of course I could; I might even omit them entirely. I shan't deny that I might even be totally silent; and perhaps that would be the wisest thing. But in view of the world's ills and shames it is hard to keep silent. I think I have been patient enough in not yet trying my hand at satire, since, long before our present horrors, I find it written: "it is very hard not to write satires."

I am forever talking, forever writing, not so much to benefit our times, which have fallen to such a sad state, as to discharge my mind and myself of my thoughts by writing them down. However, if anyone asks why I so abound with quotations and seem to dwell on them so lovingly, I can merely reply that I think my reader's taste is like mine. Nothing moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men. I like to rise above myself, to test my mind to see if it contains anything solid or lofty, or stout and firm against ill-fortune, or to find if my mind had been lying to me about itself. And there is no better way of doing this—except by direct experience, the surest mistress—than by comparing one's mind with those it would most like to resemble.

Thus, as I am grateful to my authors who give me the chance of testing my mind against maxims frequently quoted, so I hope my readers will thank me. Perhaps I am mistaken in this hope; but there is no mistake in this statement; I am giving the true cause of my practice. There is another reason; I write for myself, and while I am writing I eagerly converse with our predecessors in the only way I can; and I gladly dismiss from mind the men with whom I am forced by an unkind fate to live. I exert all my mental powers to flee contemporaries and seek out the men of the past. As the sight of the former offends me, so the remembrance of the latter and their magnificent deeds and glorious names fill me with unthinkable, unspeakable joy. If this were generally known, many would be stunned to learn that I am happier with the dead than with the living. . . .

Charms and Shortcomings of Vaucluse as a
Common Residence

BOOK VIII / 3 (Excerpt)

To "Olympius";* from Parma, 18 May 1349.

. . . Vaucluse might offer us, as it once did me, a very agreeable retreat for a short time, when we were bored with city pleasures, but in the long run it would neither promise nor provide the things needful. If we are sensible, we must not merely look far ahead, but right to the end, to avoid Seneca's reproach to the human race: "Everyone thinks about parts of life, no one thinks of the whole." Quite true; hence our hasty judgments, so that in the press of our varied occupations, sadly and absurdly enough, we don't know where to steer on life's sea. I know that Vaucluse is a delightful place, particularly in summer; and that I liked it better than anyone is indicated by my ten years' stay here. May I decently boast to you, who are my other self? The peace of its hills, founts, and woods has gained, not to say fame, but at least notoriety from my sojourn there. I might venture that with many Vaucluse is no less celebrated for my name than for its remarkable fountain. I say this to remove any suspicion that I now scorn that countryside, which I always found exactly suited to my tastes and tasks, and where often I exchanged my city preoccupations for rustic repose. By my choice, it was there that I labored for fame with my prose and verse, constructing within the rude walls a similar edifice, but with, I hope, solider cement.

There, I remember happily, I began my *Africa*, with such enthusiasm and impetus that now, revising it critically, I am almost shocked at my own boldness in laying the foundations. There I wrote a large share of my letters in prose and verse, and I composed almost all my *Bucolicum carmen*, in how short a time you would be amazed to learn. No locality ever gave me more leisure or a keener stimulus. That solitude encouraged me to assemble the lives of illustrious men of all lands and times. There I undertook to treat and applaud, in separate

* Luca Cristiani, a friend since college days in Bologna.

once seeing the revered face of that worthy and illustrious man—not to mention yourself—before I should go away. I thought that after I had once departed I should long be deprived of that pleasure. I waited two months there [in Avignon] where your letters reached me. When finally I was overcome by the boredom of the Curia, I gave up, I admit, and I retreated, but no farther than to my retreat of the Fountain of the Sorgue, which, by its delightful contrast, refreshes me when worn out by the distresses of the Court.

So now I am here; and here, unless forced by grim necessity, I shall await you. I don't know why it is, in spite of my long experience—perhaps the air here forbids strange impressions to enter our minds, perhaps our well-named Closed Valley does not admit a breath from without—but not a single poet has yet caught my disease here, except one old peasant, who, though old, is beginning "to dream of twin-ridged Parnassus," as Persius says. If the contagion should creep in here, we are done for; the shepherds, the fishermen, the hunters, the plowmen, the very cattle will ruminant their poems, will low in numbers.

So keep well, remember me, and farewell.

Life at Vacluse

BOOK XIII / 8

To Francesco Nelli; from Vacluse, summer 1352.

I am spending the summer at the Fountain of the Sorgue. I really might as well stop here; you can fill in the rest. But since you order me to write, I shall give you a brief description.

I have declared war on my body. As God is my witness—and without his helping hand I should die—my gullet, stomach, tongue, ears and eyes often seem to me not parts of my body but wicked enemies. They have been the source of many evils, as I remember; especially the eyes, which have led me to the edge of many a precipice. So I have shut them to nearly every sight but sky, mountains, and fountains. They may not look on gold, gems, ivory, purple gowns, horses—except for two scrawny creatures that transport me and my one manservant about these valleys. Further, they may not look on the face of any woman except that of my housekeeper. If you should see

her you would think you were gazing on the Libyan or Ethiopian desert, a face so dry within, so sunburnt, sustained by no vital juices. If Helen had had such a face, Troy would still be standing; if Lucretia, Tarquin would not have been banished from Rome; if Virginia, Appius would not have ended his life in prison. But don't let my description of her face detract from proper appreciation of her character. Her soul is as white as her face is dark. This is a fine case in evidence that a woman's ugliness does not impair the soul. (I might have something to say about this, if Seneca had not dealt with it abundantly in his letter about Claranus.) My peasant woman has this peculiarity, that, although beauty is regarded rather as a feminine than as a masculine attribute, she feels the lack of beauty so little that she would seem to regard beauty as a deformity. No one could be more faithful, humble, or hardworking. She works all day in the fields under a sun so hot the cicadas can hardly bear it, and with her tough skin defies Cancer and Leo. Returning home at evening, the tireless old woman puts her indomitable little body to the household tasks, like a young girl just out of bed. There's never any murmuring, complaining, or upset, only an incredible care for her husband and children and for my guests and an equally incredible unconcern for herself. This iron woman has only a bed of brushwood laid on the floor, and bread as hard as clay for food, and for drink a watery wine that tastes like vinegar; and if you give her anything more delicate she thinks, because of long deprivation, that everything dainty is disagreeable. But that's enough about my countrywoman; I shouldn't have mentioned her if this weren't a rustic letter.

Thus I mortify my eyes. And what of my ears? Where is the sweetness of song, flute, and lyre that so enrapture me? The wind has blown away all that delight; now I hear nothing but the occasional lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the songs of birds, the unceasing murmur of water.

And what of my tongue, with which I once beguiled myself and perhaps occasionally others? Now it lies still, silent often from morning to night; for it has no one to talk to except myself.

And as for my palate and my stomach, I have so trained them that often the same loaf satisfies my farmer and myself—it often tastes extremely good. And if someone sends me a snowy loaf, I let the bearers eat it. Thus custom has become my pleasure. And so my farmer, hard-bitten himself but a tender guardian of me, disputes with me only on this score, that my food is coarser than I can bear indefinitely. On the contrary I think that I can bear such diet over a long

period better than tender food, which, according to Juvenal, becomes so tiresome in five days that you can't continue it. Grapes, figs, walnuts, almonds are my joy. I love the little fish that abound in our river; especially when I can watch them taken with hook or net.

What shall I say of my clothes, of my footgear? I have made a great change; I no longer wear my special costume. "Special," I say, because it was a little unusual. I liked to be conspicuous, within the bounds of decency and propriety. You would call me a farmer or a shepherd, though of course I still possess plenty of fine clothes. The only reason for my change of costume is that I have got sick of what I used to like. The chains that once bound me have been cast off; the eyes that once I sought to please are closed in death; and if they were still open, I think they would not hold me under their accustomed spell. I satisfy my own eyes only if I am free and independent.

And what about my little house? You would think it the home of Cato or Fabricius. I live with my dog and two servants. My other servants I sent to Italy; and I wish I had sent them to India and that they would never return, for they made the only storms that wrecked my peace. The farmer lives in the wing of my house, always at hand when I need him; and to prevent his getting on my nerves I am soon going to shut him off with a little door.

I have arranged two little gardens here, perfectly suited to my tastes and purposes. If I should begin to describe them to you I should go on forever. I doubt if there is a similar site anywhere in the world; and, to confess my unmanly weakness, my only complaint is that it is not in Italy. I commonly call it my transalpine Helicon. One of the gardens is shady, just the place for solitary study; it is sacred to our Apollo. It stands by the source of the Sorgue; beyond are only cliffs and wilderness, accessible to birds and wild beasts alone. The other garden is close to my house. It looks better tended; it is dear to Bacchus. It is located, remarkably enough, right in the middle of the swift, lovely stream. Nearby, separated only by a little bridge adjoining the house, is a vaulted cave in the rock formation, which saves me from feeling the summer's heat. It is a place that stimulates study. I think it is not unlike the little hall where Cicero used to declaim, except that he did not have the Sorgue flowing by. In this cave I pass my noondays; in the morning I seek the hills, in the evening the meadows. Or I go to the Fountain and my rougher garden. There, where my arts have conquered nature, there is a place amid the waters, under the high cliff, cramped indeed but full of inspiration, where even the sluggish soul can rise to the noblest concerns.

Well, what do you expect? Perhaps I could live here happily if Italy were not so far away and Avignon so near. I cannot hide my conflicting impulses. Love of Italy tempts and teases me; hatred of Avignon afflicts me; its dreadful stench, poisoning the whole world, revolts me. What wonder if its nearness pollutes the blameless purity of this poor little patch of country?

Thus you are informed of my present state. I long for nothing except you and the few other friends who remain to me. And I fear nothing except a return to the cities.

And so farewell.

His Dog; and Canine Fidelity

BOOK XIII / II

To Matteo Longo, Archbishop of Liège; from Vaucluse, 25 August, probably 1351.

When you went away, your pitch-black dog, swifter than the wind, faithful beyond canine nature, "stood stock-still and moved not from the way," as Virgil says of Creusa. But the rest doesn't fit, for I don't think he "sank down, all foredone." No running, no obstacle, no steepness of the way could tire him who can, amazingly, seize a bird in flight and outstrip a hare. But such exercise is good for spirited creatures, while too much repose ruins them.

Being lost, no doubt, not recoiling from the journey but losing track of your course, and not knowing what to do in his distress, he would have gone to the woods to find his food—an easy matter for him—if Mother Nature had not interposed her law, that this animal does not live apart from men. Of all creatures under man's domination none is more faithful than the dog, as everyone knows, and none can be parted from man with greater difficulty. We know that some peoples used troops of dogs in battle instead of soldiers; and at need they did their duty very faithfully and never dodged the fight. We have read of some dogs who died for their masters, and of others who defended them vigorously and successfully from injury. Others, no less faithfully but less happily, served as guards until they fell transfixed, and not till they were destroyed was there any way to bring the

masters low. Others survived their slain lords, and though cruelly wounded they would not surrender, and having failed to protect the beloved bodies from men's assaults they yet defended them in death from scavenging birds and beasts. Some avenged the death of their masters; others dug up with their claws the buried bodies, indicated with distressful barks the slayer hiding in a crowd and sank their fangs in the culprit and forced him to confession. Others, at their masters' death, refused all food until they died. This happened not long ago in Padua, in the case of a very eminent man to whom in his life I owed much, and to whom I am still indebted after his life's end.* After his cruel death, ever to be deplored, his dog, whom I knew well, so acted. We have heard of some that clung fiercely to their masters' grave-stones, and could not be dislodged until they died of hunger. Others jumped on their masters' funeral pyres and with them perished in the flames. Pliny the Younger and Solinus tell a marvelous story, how the king of the Garamantes returned from exile by the aid of two hundred dogs who fought for him against his enemies. And there was a sad tale in Rome of a dog who could not be separated from his master and who followed him even into a prison cell; and when the master was executed the dog showed his grief by mighty howlings; and when people in pity offered him food, he would take it and put it in his dead master's mouth; and finally when the body was cast into the Tiber the dog jumped in and tried to bear the beloved burden to the surface, thus offering, as Pliny says, "to the multitude a marvelous example of animal fidelity." There are innumerable such stories of canine constancy, as I said before.

Hence, when you disappeared, where should your dog turn, since by nature he kept you ever in mind, shuddered at his empty life, and scorned to serve anyone else? The poor creature had only one recourse; he returned to his familiar home, where he had happily lived under your rule, whither he had often brought a blood-dripping wild goat or a hare, and had been awarded therefor your palm of victory. But not finding any of your people there, he kept jumping wretchedly at your closed door, so that he wrung the hearts of all the passersby and filled us with regret for you. Then first we began to recognize our loss; we realized that you, whom we thought to be present, were far away. When the dog saw me he growled; but when I talked to him soothingly he soon wagged his tail and followed me of his own accord.

* Evidently Jacopo da Carrara, tyrant of Padua, murdered by his half-brother.

Now he accompanies me to the woods; he is my soldier. At my command he attacks wild creatures, and often brings me welcome booty. He is ready to come to you at your call; but he is happy in the meantime that good fortune has brought him to a friendly door.

Farewell.

Troubles of the Rich and Great

BOOK XIV / 1 (*Excerpts*)

To Cardinal Talleyrand, Bishop of Albano; from Vacluse, 22 September 1352.

You command me to write in a clear style; and I have every wish to obey you in everything. But on one point we disagree. What you call "clear" is something close to the ground; I think that the higher the style the clearer, provided it doesn't get involved in its own clouds. . . .

You great folk can never permit yourselves any action that you want to keep hidden. Whatever one of you does everybody will soon know. This is the affliction of illustrious men; they have no secrets, everything is revealed, the houses of the mighty are full of cracks, they are not staunch, all they contain escapes into public notice. We know what the great have for lunch and dinner, what they say at table and in the bedroom. Whatever emerges from their lips is studiously reported; their casual words are judgments; every chance remark is presumed to be long meditated; the slightest joke is taken seriously. In short with so many observers intent upon reading the great man's mind by his face he can hardly keep his thoughts hidden.

You ask my advice? It is merely that you should always live as if in public, act as if you were visible to all men, think as if your thoughts were manifest to all, regard your house as a public theatre and your breast as the temple of God. I think that this should be your course and that of all great men. Otherwise they will not escape the harsh judgment of the people and the censure of fame, not to mention reproaches of conscience. It is not enough for them to watch constantly their words and deeds; they must forever make provision for public opinion; their names must always be bandied about by the basest of men. No high and happy station can secure them from this. The poor,

invoked the name of Christ with tears. I was deeply distressed, though I should have grieved more if I had not long foreseen the case, on account of his age. I must therefore go to Vaucluse; please give me permission, most glorious Fathers, to leave this city, where I am not needed, for the country, where I must make provision for the care of my little lands and even more of my library.

I wish you both a tranquil, happy life.

His Brother Gherardo's Heroic Conduct during the Plague

BOOK XVI / 2

To Gherardo; probably from Vaucluse, January or February 1353.

I was dining one day with that holiest and worthiest of men, Bishop Hildebrand of Padua, who then illumined his city with his virtuous beams, and who has now added a new star to heaven's galaxy. And by chance arrived two monks of your order. One was Italian, prior of the monastery of Casula, which overhangs Albenga on the Ligurian coast; the other French, from Valbonne, near the right bank of the Rhone. The Bishop, delighted at their appearance, greeted them warmly, as was his custom, and queried them on many subjects until evening. When, most importantly, he inquired what had brought them to Padua, they answered that they were commissioned by their order to found a Carthusian monastery in the Treviso region, if they might gain the Bishop's favor, and that of certain other worthy and devout citizens. I don't know how the project has turned out or what its prospects are.

In the course of the conversation our host, a man of exemplary life, sound doctrine, and chastened speech, brought up your name and inquired how contented you were with your lot and with your vocation. They vied with each other in making wonderful reports about you, and in particular the following one. When the great Plague spread over all lands and seas, it attacked the men of your order and invaded the very castle where you bear arms for Christ. And your prior, a man of holy zeal, as I personally know, was so terrified by the unforeseen affliction that he counseled flight. And you replied in a manner both

Christian and philosophic that the advice was good, provided there was any place anywhere inaccessible to death. And when he insisted nonetheless on a general flight, you said rather sharply that he might go where he thought best, but you would remain in the post assigned to you by Christ. And when he insisted over and over, and pointed out, among other terrors, that your body would lie unburied, you answered that this was the smallest of your worries, that where you might lie was no concern of yours, but rather of your survivors. And finally, they said, the prior went off to his home, and soon afterwards death tracked him there and bore him off, while you remained untouched, under the care of him who holds in his hand the Fount of Life. And in a few days death had carried away the thirty-four men who were there, and you remained alone in the monastery.

They added this: that you would not be frightened off by any contagious disease, that you stood by your dying brothers and received their final words and their last kisses. And often in a single day you buried three or even more, with unwearied devotion, bathing their cold limbs, carrying them on your back to the graves you had scooped for them; for there was none but you to dig and to give the dying their just due.

Finally only you and one faithful dog remained. You watched all night, giving only the briefest hours of daylight to necessary repose; for often night prowlers, with whom this region abounds, would come in the eerie silences of the night; and you, or rather the Christ that was in you, met these marauders with words now gentle, now stinging, and thus drove them off, so that they could do no injury to the sacred structure.

When finally that terrible summer was over you sent requests to the nearby houses of your fellow servants of Christ that someone be sent as custodian in your place. When this was done you journeyed to the Grande Chartreuse, and as the only remaining practitioner of your cult in your region you, who were no prior, confronted the Grand Prior and eighty-three priors assembled from other places. And by a singular and unusual honor you obtained that a prior and monks should be assigned to you from various monasteries, according to your choice; and with them you would rebuild the monastery laid waste by the death of your companions. Thus you returned very gay, as from a mighty triumph. And thus by your care, wisdom, and constancy the venerable cenobium of Montrieux was restored after being deserted. And our visitors said finally that among all those trials and many others besides you preserved your stoutness of body and your sturdy

health, and, as is proper for a monk, a decent exterior. This would astonish me, did I not know the old saw: "holy men build noble bodies." In fact, the health of the spirit often defends and preserves the health of the body, the strength of the limbs, and the beauty of the face.

Anyway, while the visitors were telling these stories and many others about you, the Bishop looked at me with tears of joy in his eyes. I don't know if my own eyes were dry, but certainly my heart was not. His glance drew that of the others to me; and whether by divine prompting or by mental suggestion they saw you in my face, and embraced me with mingled joy and lamentation, saying: "How are you blest to possess such a noble brother!" They said much besides, which I can best consign to silence.

So good-bye, my dear brother; and concerning all I have written above, strive to carry on to the end as you have so well begun.

Invitation to Vaucluse

BOOK XVI / 6 (Excerpt)

To Niccolò di Paolo dei Vetuli, Bishop of Viterbo; from Vaucluse, 15 February 1353.

. . . Do please bear in mind that nothing, so far as I know, can be compared with this solitude, where our Socrates and I are eagerly awaiting you, and where, by God's favor, you may restore your body and bring peace to your soul. Here is no threatening tyrant, no insolent Jack-in-office, no foul-mouthed slanderer, no wrath, no civil faction, no complaints, plots, clamor, no shouting men, summoning bugles, clash of arms; and, further, no avarice, envy, ambition, no need to cross the thresholds of the mighty with palpitating heart; but rather you will find here joy, simplicity, freedom, and that blessed state midway between riches and poverty. Here you will find a sober, humble, gracious rusticity, a harmless peasantry, an inoffensive population in a peaceful land. Their Bishop, the best of men and lover of all good men, will receive you as a brother, since he treats us as his sons. And look abroad; here the air is bland, the winds gentle; the land is sunny, the waters bright, the river full of fish, the groves shady,

the caverns dripping, and there is many a grassy nook and smiling meadow. You will hear the lowing of cattle, the song of birds, the murmur of the streamside nymphs. Our pleasant retreat is hidden away, and so it is called the Closed Valley. But round about are hills rich with vines and olives. Not to dwell indecently on food and drink—as is indeed not my habit—I shall merely report that all the products of our land and waters are such that you might ascribe them to Paradise, in theological parlance, or more poetically to the Elysian Fields. And if anything further should be wanting in our little village—for men are often much more dainty than they need to be—it can readily be supplied from the riches of nearby towns. In short, not to go into too great detail, you will find here the peace and quiet you long for, and—the greatest boon for a studious mind—you will find a great abundance of books, offering you their fellowship and faithful friendship. You will consort with saints, philosophers, poets, orators, historians. And Socrates and I shall be close at hand, and trying not to bore you. We are already running to greet you in spirit, and we are making ready this placid haven to be your retreat from the storms of your busy life. . . .

A Happy Encounter on His Way to Visit His Brother in Montrieux

BOOK XVI / 8

To Laelius in Rome; from Vaucluse, 24 April 1353.

I was on my way to revisit my brother—who is also, as he says himself, your brother, our brother, Christ's brother. It was the 19th of April; I was between Aix and St-Maximin, when I saw advancing down the middle of the road a large party of Roman ladies. The wonderful thing is that I recognized their class and origin at a distance, by their appearance and conduct. However, I wanted to make sure that I had not jumped to a conclusion. But when I had come close and heard their voices in conversation no possible doubt could remain.

I stop; and as if in ignorance I put to them Virgil's question, but in our vulgar tongue: "What is your race? Whence come you here?" At the first sound of Italian speech they all stop with glad exclamations;

my parents' desires—who hoped much of one who was devoid of hope—I bent my back under the rod of studies in civil law. Everyone except me hoped that I would derive great profit therefrom. I was indeed aware what I might have achieved in that field; I did not distrust my own mind but I could not bear to turn my mind into money. Therefore as soon as I was left free, I cast off that intolerable burden from my shoulders and set forth upon my chosen course with no hope, but without a care in the world. Though I suffered much, I have gained far more than I could have hoped. But I don't imply, with my remark about lack of hope, that I was in despair. I am referring only to what are called worldly goods; in all else I hope ardently, sinner though I am.

It has been pleasant for me to recall all these things to you, who have known me since my early days. I don't think I have digressed much from my subject, since all these considerations have derived from my deep consciousness of the brevity of life. Therein, I think, I have made some small progress in life, as I compare my youth with the present. Then I trusted the words of the wise, as I have just stated; now I put my faith in them, but also in myself and in my own experience. Then, standing doubtful and insecure on the threshold, I looked only forward; now, looking both forward and back, I recognize the truth of what I read; I experience what then I imagined. I see myself rushing to my end with such speed that I cannot describe it or easily imagine it. I need no authority of poet or philosopher; I am my own witness, my own author. In a brief space my face has changed and so has my habit of mind. Nothing remains now what it was then, not merely when I wrote you that letter, but when I began to write this letter. As my pen moves so do I, but much faster, for the pen follows the sluggish dictation of the mind, while I follow nature's law, and run, speed, gallop to my end; already I perceive my goal. I dislike what I used to love, and delight in my old aversions. I used to take pleasure in myself, I loved myself; and now what? I hate myself. No, I am lying. No one ever felt hatred for his own flesh. Shall I say: "I do not love myself?" I am not even sure that I can truthfully say that. This only can I allege confidently: "I do not love my sins; I do not love my way of life, unless it can be amended and changed for the better." But why should I hesitate to say outright that I hate my sin, my evil habits, and the self I am? For I have learned from Augustine that no one can become what he wishes to be unless he hates himself as he is.

I had reached this point in my letter, and I was wondering what I

should say further or what I should not say, and meanwhile, as is my custom, I was tapping the blank paper with my pen top. My action brought me a subject, for I reflected how in that brief interval time was flowing on, and I was flowing with it, slipping down, departing, or to use the right word, dying. We are continually dying; I while I am writing these words, you while you are reading them, others when they hear them or fail to hear them, we are all dying. I shall be dying when you read this, you die while I write, we both are dying, we all are dying, we are dying forever. . . .

A Fanatic Admirer of Cicero

BOOK XXIV / 2

To Enrico Pulice of Vicenza; 13 May, probably 1351.

Spending the night in a suburb of Vicenza as a guest, I found a new subject for a letter to you. I left Padua about noon, and it happened that I arrived at the gates of your city about sundown. I was undecided whether to stop there for the night or to go on, for I was in a hurry and the light would last for some time still. But who can conceal himself from the eyes of his lovers? You arrived with a group of eminent men, who abound in that little city. This removed all question. You captured my hesitating spirit with the snare of your cheery and varied talk. Though I intended to push on, I lingered; and when I noticed that the light was fading, night was already upon us. I remarked then, and not for the first time, that nothing robs us of time unawares like conversation with friends. They are the great thieves of time, though we should not regard time as stolen or lost that we spend on our friends—or that we devote to God.

Well, not to dwell on all the details, you remember that by chance someone mentioned Cicero, as is so often the case among scholarly men. That name put an end to our random talk. We all concentrated on him; from then on we dealt with nothing but Cicero. We took turns singing his praises, or better his panegyric. But on this earth is nothing perfect; there is no man in whom one may not justly find some fault, no man whom we may not modestly criticize. While I like nearly everything in Cicero, beloved and venerated above all men;

while I admire his golden eloquence and his celestial genius, I cannot praise his frailty of character, his inconstancy, evident in many indications. When I hinted this I saw that all present were astonished at the strangeness of my opinion, and especially a certain old man whose name escapes me but whose face I remember well. He is a fellow townsman of yours, and a venerable scholar.

The circumstances seemed to demand that I should extract my letter-book from its box. When I produced it, it provoked even more talk. For among my many letters to contemporaries there are a few addressed to illustrious ancients, inserted for variety's sake and as a pleasant little diversion. These would startle a reader not forewarned, on his finding such famous ancient names mixed with modern ones. Among them are two to Cicero himself. The first makes strictures on his character; the second praises his genius. You read these aloud to the intent listeners. A warm but friendly argument followed. Some approved my words and admitted that Cicero was properly criticized. But the old gentleman would have none of it. He was so captured by Cicero's fame and so filled with love for the author that he preferred to applaud even his errors, to accept his darling's vices with his virtues, rather than to condemn the slightest fault in his paragon. Thus he found no answer to me or to others, except to oppose to our words the splendor of Cicero's name. He kept stretching out his hand and exclaiming: "Gently, please, gently with my Cicero!" When I asked him whether one might suppose that Cicero had ever made a mistake in anything, he would shut his eyes and turn his face aside as if the words had struck him a blow; he would groan: "Alas, are they denouncing my Cicero?" It was as if we were talking not of a man but of a god. So I asked him whether he thought Cicero was a god or a man.

"A god!" he immediately replied. Then, realizing what he had said: "A god of eloquence!"

"Quite so," said I. "For if he is a god, he could not have erred. True, I have never yet heard him called a god; but if Cicero calls Plato his god, why should you not call Cicero yours? Except that our religion does not approve of our setting up our own gods."

"I was joking," said he. "I know Cicero was a man, but he was a man of divine genius."

"That's better," said I. "For Quintilian called him celestial in language. But if he was a man, he certainly could err, and in fact he did."

When I said this, he shuddered and turned away, as if I were

attacking not another's fame but his own life. And what could I say, who am such a profound admirer of Cicero? I felicitated the old gentleman on his zeal and ardor, though it smelt a little of pythagoreanism. I was very happy to find such a cult for a great genius, such reverence, that a mere suspicion of human weakness in it was regarded almost as sacrilege. And I marveled at discovering a man who loved Cicero more than I did myself, for I have always loved him above all men. The old gentleman kept the same deep-rooted opinion of him that I had held as a boy. And even at his age my friend could not entertain the thought that if Cicero was a man, he must consequently have erred in a few cases, if not in many. I think he had faults, indeed I know it, although in no one else's work do I take more pleasure. Cicero himself was well aware of his faults, and often bewailed them bitterly. Unless we admit that he was conscious of them, in our eagerness to praise we deny him self-knowledge, and also we deny him modesty, which prompts much of our praise of his philosophy.

Anyway, on that day we talked long, and when the hour grew late we rose and abandoned the argument. But you asked me, since time was too short at the moment, to send you from my first stop copies of my two letters, so that you might examine them in detail and become a peacemaker between the parties, or possibly a defender of Cicero's high purpose. I applaud your intention, and enclose the copies you ask for. I do so, rather strangely, in fear of winning my case, and in hope of defeat. I must warn you that if you do win, you will be taking on more of a task than you realize. For Annaeus Seneca demands that you be his champion in a similar conflict. My next letter criticizes him, in fact. I played a game with these great geniuses, impudently perhaps, but affectionately, distressedly, and, I think, truthfully; somewhat more truthfully than I liked, indeed. Many things in both authors delighted me; only a few things disturbed me. It was the latter things that moved me to write the letters; perhaps today I should not do so. For it was long ago that I scribbled them off (though I have put them last in my book, on account of their dissimilarity in subject from the others).

I still grieve for the fate of these great men, though I cannot overlook their faults. But it won't escape you that I do not condemn Seneca's private life or Cicero's attitude toward the state. Let us not confuse the two cases; I am now dealing with Cicero alone. I know that he was a most vigilant, worthy, effective consul and that he was always a very patriotic citizen. And yet—! I certainly cannot praise his inconstancy in friendship, his bitter, pestilential, causeless quarrels,

harming only himself, his misjudgment of his own position in the state, so contrary to his usual keenness, and finally his youthful taste for wrangling, unseemly in an elderly philosopher. And you must realize that neither you nor anyone else can make a proper judgment without faithfully reading through all Cicero's letters, out of which the controversy arose.

Farewell.

A Letter to Cicero

BOOK XXIV / 3

To Marcus Tullius Cicero; from Verona, 16 June 1345.

Franciscus sends his greetings to Cicero.* I have been hunting for your letters long and persistently. I discovered them where I least expected to, and avidly I read them. I could hear your voice, Marcus Tullius, confessing much, complaining of much, speaking in various moods. I was already well aware what a master you were for others; now at last I learned what kind of a guide you were for yourself.

Now, wherever you are, it is your turn to listen, not to good counsel but to the laments inspired by the true love of an adorer, who speaks from times long after yours. He writes in tears. O perturbed, uneasy spirit! Or to quote your own words, O noble, ill-fated elder! Why did you choose to involve yourself in so many vain contentions and unprofitable quarrels? Why did you abandon the retirement proper to your age, profession, and fortune? What false dazzle of glory led you, an old man, to implicate yourself in the wars of the young? What tempted you to dealings that brought you to a death unworthy of a philosopher? Alas, you forgot your own wise advice to your brother, and the salutary counsels of your own masters. Like a traveler in a dark night, you carried a lantern, which has served to light for others the way on which you yourself stumbled and fell.

I shan't mention Dionysius, or your brother and your nephew,

* Petrarch had discovered in the cathedral library of Verona a manuscript of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, a work previously unknown. These letters revealed the intimate Cicero, the ambitious and unscrupulous politician, the intriguer and courtier. Also, in their occupation with the concerns of everyday life, the "familiar letters" suggested to Petrarch that his own might make a book.

and, if you are willing, even Dolabella. Now you praise them all to the skies, now you overwhelm them suddenly with abuse. Perhaps this is pardonable. I omit your treatment of Julius Caesar, whose well-tested clemency set free even those who assailed him. I say nothing of Pompey the Great, with whom, it seemed, you were on such a friendly footing that you could do with him what you liked. But what frenzy provoked you against Mark Antony? Love of the republic, I suppose you would say; but you admit that the republic had already totally collapsed. And if fidelity to the state and love of liberty impelled you, why were you so familiar with Augustus? What answer can you give to your Brutus, who said: "If indeed you are so fond of Octavius, it must be that you are not opposing a tyrant but are seeking one friendly to you." And this is my last and most serious grievance, unhappy Cicero: you reviled the very man you had previously lauded,* though he had done you no harm, but had merely failed to check your enemies. I grieve for your fate, my poor friend; I am filled with shame and distress for your errors. With that same Brutus, "I can put no trust in those arts by which, I know, you made your own character." What avails it to instruct others, what boots it to be forever talking in elegant phrases about the virtues if you do not listen to your own words? How much better it would have been for you, the philosopher, to have grown old in country peace, meditating, as you yourself write somewhere, on eternal life, not on this transitory existence! How much better if you had never held the fasces of power, never longed for triumphs, never corrupted your spirit with any Catilines!

But how vain are my words! Farewell forever, my Cicero.

Written among the living, on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of Transpadane Italy, on the 16th of June, in the 1345th year of that Lord whom you did not know.

* Apparently Brutus.

