

and upon the fate of mortal men?" And this too: "How few will ever succeed in not diverging from this path because of fear of hardship or desire for smooth comfort?"²² Too fortunate would be any man who accomplished such a feat—were there ever such anywhere. This would be him of whom I should judge the Poet was thinking when he wrote:

Happy the man who succeeded in baring the causes of things
And who trod underfoot all fear, inexorable Fate and
Greedy Acheron's uproar. . . .²³

How intensely ought we to exert our strength to get under foot not a higher spot of earth but the passions which are puffed up by earthly instincts."

Such emotions were rousing a storm in my breast as, without perceiving the roughness of the path, I returned late at night to the little rustic inn from which I had set out before dawn. The moon was shining all night long and offered her friendly service to the wanderers. While the servants were busy preparing our meal, I withdrew quite alone into a remote part of the house to write this letter to you in all haste and on the spur of the moment. I was afraid the intention to write might evaporate, since the rapid change of scene was likely to cause a change of mood if I deferred it.

And thus, most loving father, gather from this letter how eager I am to leave nothing whatever in my heart hidden from your eyes. Not only do I lay my whole life open to you with the utmost care but every single thought of mine. Pray for these thoughts, I beseech you, that they may at last find stability. So long have they been idling about and, finding no firm stand, been uselessly driven through so many matters. May they now turn at last to the One, the Good, the True, the stably Abiding.

Farewell.

On the twenty-sixth day of April, at Malaucène.

22. [Cf. *Matt.* 7: 13-15.]

23. [Virgil *Georgica* ii. 490-92.]

ON HIS OWN IGNORANCE AND THAT OF MANY OTHERS

Opera (Basel, 1554), pp. 1123-68; (1581), pp. 1035-59; L. M. Capelli, *Pétrarque: Le traité De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (Paris, 1906); and P. Rajna, "Il codice Hamiltoniano 493 della R. Biblioteca di Berlino," *Rendiconti dell'Accademia dei Lincei*, XVIII (5a ser., 1909), 479-508. The Dedication, dated January 13, 1368, belongs in Book xiii of the *Semiles*, as No. 5, but is printed before the text in the Basel Editions of the *Opera*.

To the grammarian Donato the Apennine-born, with a little book dedicated to him

HERE at last, my friend, you have the little book long since expected and promised, a little book on a vast matter, namely, "On my own ignorance and that of many others." Had I been allowed to beat it out on the anvil of my inventive genius with the hammer of study, you may believe me, it would have grown into a camel's load. For can there be a wider field, a vaster ground for talking, than a treatise on ignorance and especially on mine? You shall read this book, as you are in the habit of listening to me when I tell tales at the fireside on winter nights, rambling along wherever the impulse takes me. I have called it a book, but it is a talk. It has nothing of a book besides the name: neither the bulk nor the disposition; it has not the style and, above all, not the gravity of a book, since it was written quickly on a hasty journey.

However, I have had the whim to call it a book, because I wanted to win your favor with a small present and a great name. I was convinced that whatever comes from me will please you. Nevertheless, I intended to cheat you. It is customary to cheat another in this manner even among friends. When we send them a few apples or some choice morsel of dainty food, we put these things into a silver vessel and wrap it in pure white

THE BOOK OF

FRANCESCO PETRARCA THE LAUREATE

ON HIS OWN IGNORANCE AND THAT OF MANY OTHERS

To the *grammarians Donato the Apennine-born*

SHALL we never have any respite? Must this pen always needs fight? Shall we never have a holiday? Must we respond every day to praises from our friends, every day make reply to the insults of envious rivals? Will no hiding-place ever protect us from jealousy, will no length of time extinguish envy? Shall I never find quiet repose by fleeing almost everything for which mankind strives and fervently exerts itself? Will my declining and wearied age not at last procure me a release? Envy is a persistent poison. Long since my age would have freed me from duties toward the state;³ it does not free me from envy. The state, to which I owe so much, gives me a discharge from my obligations; envy, to which I owe nothing, disturbs me. Once, I must confess, the times encouraged a friendlier style. A more serene manner of speaking was always congenial to my nature and would befit my present age. Pardon me, my friends, and you, reader, pardon me, whoever you are. And you above all, my dearest Donato, to whom I tell all this, forgive me. I must speak, not because it is the best thing to do, but because it is so hard to refrain. Reason advises me to keep silent; an indignation which, if I am not mistaken, is proper and dignified, and a just grief extort words from me. Most avidly craving for peace, I am thrust into war. Again, you see, we are driven forward against our will; again we are dragged before a censorious tribunal—I do not know whether I ought to call it the tribunal of envious friendship or of friendly envy.

What is impossible for you, malicious grudge, if you can 3. [At fifty the citizen of the Roman republic reached the age limit of military service, and at sixty he was no longer obliged to accept a public office (Seneca *De brevitate vite* 20. 4; Livy *History of Rome* xlii. 33; Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* ix. 2. 85. Petrarca had passed even the later limit three years before he began this book.]

linen. What is sent does not then become more. It does not become more valuable but is made more agreeable to him who receives it and more honorable for the sender. Thus I have made a trifling thing more honorable by a beautiful wrapping when I call a book what I might have called a letter.

It will not be the less valuable to you because it is interspersed with countless obliterations and additions and completely crammed with marginals on the borders of its pages.¹ It has lost somewhat of its decorous appearance to the eye, but your mind will surely appreciate that just as much gracefulness has been added. You will realize all the more that you are nearest to my heart, since I write you in such a way that you will regard all these additions and erasures as signs of close friendship and affection.

Moreover, I did not want you to doubt that the book is my work; I have written it in my hand, which has been so familiar to you for years. Almost by intention it comes to you deformed by so many wounds and will remind you that Suetonius Tranquillus has written something similar about the emperor Nero: "There came into my hands some little tablets and small notebooks, in which several well-known verses of his were entered in his own handwriting. It was easy to recognize that they were not copied from elsewhere or written upon dictation, but set down by their inventor or begetter. So much was crossed out, inserted, and written above the lines."² So far Suetonius.

I will not write more at present. Farewell and remember me. Goodbye.

Padua, on the thirteenth of January, from the bed of my pains, in the eleventh hour of night.

1. [This is actually the case in both autograph copies.]

2. [Suetonius *Life of Nero* 52.]

inflare even the hearts of friends? Much I have had to experience before; this kind of evil I have never yet experienced. Now for the first time my fate throws into my path this gravest and worst of evils. Clashes with enemies have often a prosperous issue; wrath against an enemy is sweet, as some are pleased to say—sweet at any rate is victory over him. But if you are to fight with friends, it is equally miserable to win or to lose. However, I am at war neither with friends nor with enemies but with envy. It is not a new enemy, though its manner of fighting is new. With bow and quiver it comes to the battlefield; it attacks with arrows and strikes from afar. There is one advantage: it is blind. You can easily evade it if you see it in time. It shoots without aim and often wounds its own ranks. This monster I must now pierce, while friendship must remain unscathed.

It is certainly a precarious task to stab one of two persons while they are clinging closely together without hurting the other. I believe you will remember how Julius Caesar was once engulfed by an unexpected outbreak of fighting in Alexandria.⁴ "Then he dragged King Ptolemy with him into all the vicissitudes of battle," determined not to perish without him. This is supposed to have been no small reason for his escape, since those who hated him and loved Ptolemy thought it would be difficult to kill the foe and at the same time save their king. You will also not have forgotten, I guess, how on the day, when the kingdom of Persia was freed from servile tyranny by the shrewdness of the wise Hortanes and the bravery of the seven valiant men, one of the conspirators, "Gophirus, grasped one of the two tyrants in a dark place and bade his companions strike at the man even through his own body, lest, if he himself were spared, the tyrant might escape."⁵ Now sacred friendship calls upon me to stab

4. [Lucan *Pharsalia* x. 458-64; Caesar *De bello civili* iii. 109.]

5. [Petraea knew of the dramatic scenes which happened in 521 B.C., when the Persian nobility revolted against a usurper to the throne, from the summary which Justin (*Historia Philippica* i. 9. 9-23) gives of the extensive account in Herodotus' *History* (iii. 63-79). In the Greek text

with the point of my pen, even through its own breast, the impious grudge it is clutching gently in its bosom in unequal embrace. It is hard to distinguish between two that are clinging together so tightly in such darkness. However, I will try to do so. Then the foe fell, while Gophirus remained unhurt; now bitter envy is to be crushed and dispatched, while sweet friendship is to be saved. If friendship is true friendship—and this can only be accomplished by true virtue⁶—it will rather be hurt while envy is exterminated, if it cannot be done otherwise, than remain unhurt while envy survives and dominates.

But let us now at last come to the matter. It will be known to you no less than to me, as soon as I begin to speak of it—and, if I am not mistaken, even before I begin. Perhaps it will be even better known to you, since a friend is more concerned for the reputation of a friend than for his own.⁷ We become more easily and more honorably annoyed when something is said against friends than when it happens to ourselves. Many a man has not minded insults against himself and has been praised for this attitude; nobody has yet been able calmly to witness or hear an affront against a friend. It does not require the same grade of magnanimity to remain unmoved by offenses against others as we must have when we ourselves are insulted.

Besides, how can you fail to know what you yourself made known to me first and what you were grieved to see me treat scornfully and jokingly? I shall, therefore, speak of things known to you, not because I want them to become still better known to you. You shall know how I feel against envy and begin to feel like me and shall not bewail another's wound more vehemently than your own. You shall also learn what kind of

the two protagonists were called Otanes and Gobryas. It has not been explained as yet why Petrarca uses the strange variant forms "Hortanes" and "Gophirus."⁷

6. [Cicero *Laelius, de amicitia* 6, 20.]

7. [*Ibid.* 16. 57.]

weapon I use against it; how, by long practice and diligent application, I have grown deaf to the murmur of those who are barking at me, and how I have been hardened against their envious teeth.

And this is now the gist of the present story:

As had come to be their custom, there called on me these four friends whose names you need not be told, since you know them all. Moreover, an inviolable law of friendship forbids mentioning the names of friends when you are speaking against them, even if they do not behave like friends in a particular case. They came in pairs, as equality of character or some chance bound them together. Occasionally all four of them came, and came with astonishingly winning manners, with a gay expression on their faces, and started an agreeable conversation. I have no doubt they came with good and pious intentions. However, through some cracks an unfortunate grudge had crept into hearts that deserve a better guest. It is incredible, though it is true—if only it were not too true! The man whom they wish not only good health and happiness, whom they not only love but respect, honor by their visit and venerate, to whom they try with greatest effort to be not only kind but obedient and generous—this very same person is the object of their envy. So full of patent and hidden frailties is human nature.

What is it that they envy me? I do not know, I must admit, and I am amazed when I try to find out. Certainly it is not wealth, for every single one of them surpasses me as much in wealth as "the British whale is bigger than the dolphin,"⁸ as that man has said. Moreover, they wish me even greater wealth. They know that what I have is moderate, not my own property but to be shared with others. It is not magnificent but very modest without haughtiness and pomp. They know that it really does not deserve any envy. They will not envy me my friends.

8. [Juvenal *Satire* 10. 12. In some cases Petrarca observes a stylistic principle common to medieval writers of not mentioning the name of an author who is quoted. Usually he calls Juvenal "the saryrist"; here he speaks only of "that man" (*illie*).]

The greater part of them death has taken from me, and I have the habit of sharing them willingly, just like everything else, with other friends. They cannot envy me the shapeliness of my body. If there was ever such a thing, it has vanished entirely in the course of the years that vanish all. By God's overflowing and preserving grace it is still quite satisfactory for my present age, but it has certainly long since ceased to be enviable. And if it were still as it was once, could I forget or could I then have forgotten the poetic sentence I drank in as a small boy: "Shapeliness is a frail possession,"⁹ or the words of Solomon in the book in which he teaches the young: "Gracefulness is deceitful and beauty is vain."¹⁰ How should they then envy me what I do not have, what I held in contempt while I had it, and what I would despise now to the utmost were it given back to me, having learned and experienced how unstable it is?

They cannot even envy me learning and eloquence! Learning, they declare, I have absolutely none. Eloquence, if I had any, they despise according to the modern philosophic fashion. They reject it as unworthy of a man of letters. Thus only "infantile inability to speak" and perplexed stammering, "wisdom" trying hard to keep one eye open and "yawning drowsily," as Cicero calls it,¹¹ is held in good repute nowadays. They do not call to mind "Plato, the most eloquent of all men,"¹² and—let me omit the others—"Aristotle sweet and mild,"¹³ but whom they made trite. From Aristotle's ways they swerve, taking eloquence to be an obstacle and a disgrace to philosophy, while he considered it a mighty adornment and tried to combine it with

9. [Ovid *Ars amatoria* ii. 113.]

10. [Prov. 30: 31.]

11. [*De oratore* iii. 51. 198; ii. 33. 144-45.]

12. [*Ibid.* i. 11. 47.]

13. [Cicero *Topica* 1. 2; *De oratore* i. 1. 49: cf. *Academica priora* ii. 38. 119; Seneca *Naturales quaestiones* vi. 13. 1; Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* x. 1. 83, a passage missing in Petrarca's Quintilian but known to him from John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*, 22 (ed. Webb 859a).]

philosophy, "prevailed upon," it is asserted, "by the fame of the orator Isocrates."¹⁴

Not even virtue can they envy me, though it is beyond doubt the best and most enviable of all things. To them it seems worthless—I believe because it is not inflated and puffed up with arrogance. I should wish to possess it, and, indeed, they grant it to me unanimsously and willingly. Small things they have denied me, and this very greatest possession they lavish upon me as a small gift. They call me a good man, even the best of men. If only I were not bad, not the worst in God's judgment! However, at the same time they claim that I am altogether illiterate, that I am a plain uneducated fellow.¹⁵ This is just the opposite of what men of letters have stated when judging me, I do not care with how much truth. I do not make much of what these friends deprive me of, if only what they concede me were true. Most gladly should I divide between me and these brothers of mine the inheritance of Mother Nature and heavenly Grace, so that they would all be men of letters and I a good man. I should wish to know nothing of letters or just so much as would be expedient for the daily praise of God. But, alas, I fear I shall be disappointed in this my humble desire just as they will be in their arrogant opinion. At any rate, they assert that I have a good character and am very faithful in my friendship, and in this last assertion they are not mistaken, unless I am.

This, incidentally, is the reason why they count me among their friends. They are not prevailed upon to do so by my efforts in studying the honorable arts or the hope ever to hear and learn truth from me. Thus it comes plainly to what Augustine tells of his Ambrose, saying: "I began to love him, not as a

14. [Cicero *De oratore* iii. 35. 141; *Tusculanae disputationes* i. 4. 7.]

15. [In conformity with classical as well as contemporary custom, Petrarca uses *idiotia* for a man without higher education, in contrast to *litteratus*, but the word was already in his time gradually acquiring the meaning of "simpleton," though not yet that of "feeble-minded." This degradation of the term was certainly due to the power of the Humanistic concept of man, of which learning is an essential factor.]

teacher of truth, but as a man who was kind to me".¹⁶ or what Cicero feels about Epicurus: Cicero approves of his character in many passages, while he everywhere condemns his intellect and rejects his doctrine.¹⁷

Since all this is the case, it may be doubtful what they envy me, though there is no doubt that they do envy me something. They do not well conceal it and do not curb their tongues, which are urged by an inward impulse. In men otherwise neither unbalanced nor foolish this is nothing but a clear sign of undisciplined passion. Provided that they are envious of me as they obviously are, and that there is no other object of their envy—the latent virus is expanding by itself at any rate. For there is one thing, one empty thing, that they envy me, however trifling it may be: my name and what fame I have already won within my lifetime—greater fame perhaps than would be due to my merits or in conformity with the common habit which but very rarely celebrates living men. It is upon this fame that they have fixed their envious eyes. If only I could have done without it both now and often before! I remember that it has done me harm more often than good, winning me quite a few friends but also countless enemies. It has happened to me as to those who go into battle in a conspicuous helmet though with but little strength: they gain nothing from the dazzling brightness of this chimera except to be struck by more adversaries. Such pestilence was once but too familiar to me during my more flourishing years; never was there one so troublesome as that which has now blazed up. I am now an anvil too soft for young men's wars and for assuming such burdens, and this pestilence revives unexpectedly from a quarter from which I do not deserve it and did not suspect it either, at a moment when it should have been

16. [*Confessions* v. 13. 23.]

17. [While Cicero condemns the philosophy of Epicurus wherever he speaks of him (e.g., *De finibus* ii. 30. 98), he frankly acknowledges the unimpeachable character of the great philosopher (*ibid.* 2. 25. 80-81; 30. 96).]

long since overcome by my moral conduct or consumed by the course of time.

But I will go on: They think they are great men, and they are certainly rich, all of them, which is the only mortal greatness nowadays. They feel, although many people deceive themselves in this respect, that they have not won a name and cannot hope ever to win one if their foreboding is right. Among such sorrows they languish anxiously; and so great is the power of evil that they stick out their tongues and sharpen their teeth like mad dogs even against friends and wound those whom they love. Is this not a strange kind of blindness, a strange kind of fury? In just this manner the frantic mother of Pentheus tears her son to pieces¹⁸ and the raving Hercules his infant children.¹⁹ They love me and all that is mine, with the single exception of my name— which I do not refuse to change. Let them call me Thersites²⁰ or Choerilus,²¹ or whatever name they prefer, provided I thus obtain that this honest love suffers not the slightest restriction. They are all the more ablaze and aglow with a blind fire, since they are all such fervent scholars, working indefatigably all night long.

However, the first of them has no learning at all²²—I tell you only what you know—the second knows a little; the third not much; the fourth—I must admit—not a little but in such confused and undisciplined order and, as Cicero says, “with so much frivolity and vain boasting that it would perhaps be better to know nothing.”²³ For letters are instruments of insanity for many, of

18. [Ovid *Metamorphoses* iii. 711–28.]

19. [Seneca *Heracles furens* 987–1023.]

20. [Homer *Iliad* ii. 212–17; Ovid *Ex Ponto* iii. 9. 10; iv. 13. 15.]

21. [About Choerilus, who won a fortune but also the name of a very bad poet by a panegyric poem on the heroic deeds of Alexander the Great, Petrarca got his information from the pseudo-Acronian scholia to Horace *Epistles* ii. 1. 233–34.]

22. [Cf. the marginal note in Codex Marcianus Lat. IV 86 mentioned on p. 29.]

23. [Tusculanae disputationes ii. 4. 12.]

arrogance for almost everyone, if they do not meet with a good and well-trained mind. Therefore, he has much to tell about wild animals, about birds and fishes: how many hairs there are in the lion's mane; how many feathers in the hawk's tail; with how many arms the cuttlefish clasps a shipwrecked man; that elephants couple from behind and are pregnant for two years; that this docile and vigorous animal, the nearest to man by its intelligence, lives until the end of the second or third century of its life; that the phoenix is consumed by aromatic fire and revives after it has been burned; that the sea urchin stops a ship, however fast she is driving along, while it is unable to do anything once it is dragged out of the waves; how the hunter fools the tiger with a mirror; how the Arimasp attacks the griffin with his sword; how whales turn over on their backs and thus deceive the sailors; that the newborn of the bear has as yet no shape; that the mule rarely gives birth, the viper only once and then to its own disaster; that moles are blind and bees deaf; that alone among all living beings the crocodile moves its upper jaw.²⁴

24. [Petrarca ridicules the incoherent, incorrect, and often intentionally distorted notions concerning natural history that stuck to the mind of the average man with a Scholastic education. With the exception of the first three items, which he seems to have added on his own in order to give his spirited peroration a more vivid touch, he chose them somewhat at random from reference books then generally considered as trustworthy. Many of these data figure in the big compilation of natural history which Vincent of Beauvais, the Parisian encyclopedist of the preceding century, had published under the title of *Speculum naturale* (no modern edition; *editio princeps* ca. 1478). This learned polymath had indeed not intended to do more than offer a conveniently arranged survey of what older authors had said about various subjects, and Petrarca had read most of them in their own writings too. Besides, he may have consulted other thirteenth-century works that cover the same field, like Alexander Neckam's *De rerum naturis* (ed. Th. Wright in *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* [1863]) and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* (short translated selections published by R. Steele in *Medieval Lore* [London, 1907 and 1924]).

A few of the statements cited by Petrarca bear witness to more or less reliable observation and can be traced back to Greek science of the time when Greek scholars had overcome the habit of handing down unchecked assertions. Aristotle speaks in similar terms of the pregnancy and longevity of elephants and their almost human intelligence, the movable upper jaw of the crocodile, and the sterility of the mule (*Historiae*

All this is for the greater part wrong, as has become manifest in many similar cases when animals were brought into our part of the world. The facts have certainly not been investigated by those who are quoted as authorities for them; they have been all the more promptly believed or boldly invented, since the animals live so far from us. And even if they were true, they would not contribute anything whatsoever to the blessed life. What is the use—I beseech you—of knowing the nature of quadrupeds, fowls, fishes, and serpents and not knowing or even neglecting

animalium v. 14. 546 b 11; x. 46. 630 b 18-25; i. 11. 492 b 23-24; *De generatione animalium* ii. 8. 747 a 24). All this had found its way into Pliny's *Natural History* (viii. 10. 28; i. 1; 3. 6; x. 45. 128; viii. 25. 89; xi. 37. 159) and Isidore's *Origins* (xii. 2. 16; 2. 15; 6. 20). However, Aristotle was also responsible for the wrong notion of the blindness of the mole, whose small eyes he believed to be completely covered by its fur (*Metaphysics* iv. 22. 1022 b 26; *De anima* iii. 1. 425 a 11). The deafness of the bees he had stated in a very conspicuous place—in the Introduction to the *Metaphysics* (i. 1. 980 b 23). He seems, indeed, to have doubted it later on, as the more cautiously chosen words in his *History of Animals* (ix. 40. 627 a 15) would suggest. However, those who read the *Metaphysics* during their university years remembered too well what the philosopher said there; and the better tradition to be found in Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* x. 20. 63) did not leave a lasting impression in their memory.

Statements which annoyed Petrarca particularly as being bold lies and impudent inventions we know to be the product of the poetical imagination of various ancient nations who lived around the eastern Mediterranean and in the Near East. One is the fable of the Arimasps, of whom Greek legends told that they had but one eye in their forehead and were incessantly struggling with the griffin birds that guarded the gold of the Scythian mines in the farthest northeastern corner of the inhabited world (*Pliny Nat. Hist.* vii. 2. 10). The beautiful myth of the phoenix cremating itself and reviving from the ashes after having outlived all other animated beings on earth (*ibid.* x. 2. 2-3; Isidore *Origins* xii. 7. 22) had originally been told of the holy sun-bird of Egyptian Heliopolis and had become popular in Christian literature as an allegory of the Resurrection.

Old pseudo-scientific learning is preserved in the story of the abnormal birth of vipers, which were believed to bite their way through the womb of their mothers, thus revenging their fathers who had been cruelly murdered by their wives (*Pliny Nat. Hist.* x. 62. 170; Isidore *Origins* xii. 4. 10-11). This story was nowhere supported in Aristotle's genuine works but was readily accepted in the Latin-speaking West, since a queer etymology helped to interpret the word "viper" as "giving birth in violence" (*viperā -vi pariens*). A similar etymological trick made people swallow the grotesque nonsense that the little sucker fish (*echezeis* in Greek, *remora* in Latin), which is equipped with a suction plate enabling it to cling to

man's nature, the purpose for which we are born, and whence and whereto we travel?²⁵

These and like matters I have often discussed with these "scribes"²⁶ who are most learned, not in the Law of Moses and the Christian Law, but, as they flatter themselves, in the Aristotelian law. I did so more frankly than they were accustomed to hear and perhaps with less caution: talking with friends, I did not think of any harm that might derive from it. At first they were astonished, then they became angry, and, as they felt that

smooth surfaces, had the miraculous power of stopping ships in their course; and this had even been transferred to the sea urchin because of the similarity of the names (*echinus*: *Pliny Nat. Hist.* xxxii. praef. 1-9; Isidore *Origins* xii. 6. 34). In an interesting article (*Speculum* XXII [1947], 205 ff.), Professor Pauline Aiken proves that this "telescoping" of two different animals, like many other amusing misinterpretations of ancient sources, must be debited to Thomas de Cantimpré.

The belief that the she-bear licks her newborn cubs into shape had its roots in a passage of Aristotle's *Historia animalium* (vi. 30. 579 a 18), where a group of mammals including the bear are said to be born disproportionately small and not yet fully developed in all their limbs. This correct statement had not yet become absurd in the form reported by Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* viii. 36. 116), where we learn that the bear must warm its cubs by pressing them to its womb, but the apparent identity of vulgar Latin *orsus* = "bear," Latin *orsus* = "beginning," and *ore suo* = "with its mouth," seems to have produced the ridiculous story before the second century A.D., when it appears even in the Greek text of Aelian's *History of Animals*.

A typical Munchausen yarn is preserved in the stories of how hunters evaded the fury of a tigress after having stolen her brood from her lair: on their flight they let the pursuing tigress see her own image in a mirror and mistake it for one of her lost cubs running toward her (somewhat differently related by *Pliny Nat. Hist.* viii. 18. 66; cf. Isidore *Origins* xii. 6. 34). To the same category belongs the often-repeated account of the exciting adventure which happened to seafarers who landed on a whale and took it for an island, until it turned over and divered into the sea, a popular "true story" that has, for instance, been inserted into the legend of the westward voyage of the Irish St. Brendan.]

25. [The distinction between unprofitable knowledge and learning that spurs a man to a decent and happy mode of living is characteristic for Petrarca's Augustinian attitude: Augustine *Confessions* x. 8. 15 (see p. 44); cf. also Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes* ii. 412.]

26. [The word "scribe," by which the title of the learned Jewish record-keepers is rendered in the New Testament, has become equivalent to hypocrite, because of Christ's grim words against them and the Pharisees in the Gospels, particularly in Matthew, chap. xxiii.]

my words were directed against their sect and the laws of their father, they set up a council among themselves to condemn for the crime of ignorance—not me whom they undoubtedly love—but my fame which they hate. If only they had called others to this court! Then there would perhaps have been opposition to the sentence they intended to pronounce. However, to keep the verdict harmonious and unanimous, only these four convened. They discussed many different matters concerning the absent and undefended defendant—not because they disagreed in their opinions, for they all felt the same way and intended to say the same thing, but they were arguing with each other and against their own sentence after the manner of expert judges. Thus they wanted to render a decision with more color by sifting and squeezing the truth through the narrow sieve of contradictions.

As the first point, they said that public renown supported me, but replied that it deserved little faith. So far they did not lie, since the vulgar mass very rarely sees the truth. Then they said that friendship with the greatest and most learned men, which has adorned my life—as I shall boast before the Lord—stood against their verdict. For I have enjoyed close friendship with many kings, especially with King Robert of Sicily, who honored me in my younger years with frequent and clear testimonials of my knowledge and genius.²⁷ They replied—and here I will not say their iniquity but their vanity evidently made them lie—that the king himself enjoyed great fame in literary matters but had no knowledge of them; and the others, however learned they were, did not show a sufficiently perspicacious judgment concerning me, whether love of me or carelessness was the cause. They then made another objection against themselves, saying that the last three Roman popes had vied with each other in inviting me—in vain, it is true—to a high rank in their intimate

27. [King Robert "the Wise" of Sicily had been Petrarca's generous sponsor for his coronation as poet laureate on the Roman Capitol in 1341 (cf. E. H. Wilkins, "The Coronation of Petrarch," *Speculum*, xviii [1943], 180-85).]

household;²⁸ and that Urban himself, who is now at the head, was wont to speak well of me and had already bestowed on me a most affable letter. Besides, it is known far and wide and doubted by no one that the present Roman emperor—for there has been no other legitimate emperor at this time—counts me among his dear familiars and has been wont to call me to him with the weight of daily requests and repeated messages and letters.²⁹ In all this they feel that some people find some proof that I must have a certain value. However, they resolve this objection too, maintaining that the popes went astray together with the others, following the general opinion about me, or were induced to do so by my good moral behavior and not by my knowledge; and that the emperor was prevailed upon by my studies of the past and my historical works, for in this field they do not deny me some knowledge.

Furthermore, they said, another objection against them was my eloquence. This I do not acknowledge altogether, by God not. They pretend that it is a rather effective means of persuasion. It might be the task of a rhetor or an orator to speak oppositely in order to persuade for a purpose, but many people without knowledge had succeeded in persuading by mere phrases. Thus they attribute to luck what is a matter of art and bring forth the widespread proverb: "Much eloquence, little wisdom."³⁰ They do not take into account Cato's definition of the orator,³¹ which contradicts their false charge. Finally, it was

28. [Three predecessors of Urban V wanted Petrarca for the important office of apostolic secretary, which he three times refused, though it would have opened the highest ecclesiastical career to him.]

29. [Since 1351 Petrarca had tried to urge Charles IV into a vigorous intervention in Italian affairs (*Fam.*, x. 1; xii. 1; xviii. 1). The emperor was at no time willing to accept Petrarca's advice in political matters but received him most graciously when he came to Italy in 1354 and invited him to his court repeatedly at later times.]

30. [Sallust *Catilina* 5. 4.]

31. [In the definition of the perfect orator attributed to Cato the Elder (Seneca *Rhetor Controversiae* i. praef. 9; Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* i. praef. 1. 9; xii. 1. 44) irrefragable moral goodness is included as an essential quality.]

said that the style of my writing is in opposition to their statement. They did not dare to blame my style, not even to praise it too reservedly, and confessed that it is rather elegant and well chosen but without any learning. I do not understand how this can be, and I trust they did not understand it either. If they regain control of themselves and think over again what they have said, they will be ashamed of their silly ineptitude. For if the first statement were true—which I for my part would neither assert nor make myself believe—I have no doubt that the second is wrong. How could the style of a person who knows nothing at all be excellent, since theirs amounts to nothing, though there is nothing they do not know? Do we so far suspect everything to be fortuitous that we leave no room for reason?

What else do you want? Or what do you believe? I think you expect to hear the verdict of the judges. Well, they examined each point. Then, fixing their eyes on I know not what god—for there is no god who wants iniquity, no god of envy or ignorance, which I might call the twofold cloud-shrouding truth—they pronounced this short final sentence: I am a good man without learning. Even if they have never spoken the truth and never shall speak it, may they have spoken it at least this once! O bounteous, O saving Jesus, true God and true Giver of all learning and all intelligence, true "King of Glory" and "Lord of all powers of virtue,"³² I now pray to Thee on the knees of my soul: If Thou dost not wish to grant me more, let it be my portion at least to be a good man. This I cannot be if I do not love Thee dearly and do not adore Thee piously. For this purpose I am born, not for learning. If learning happens to come along, it inflates, it tears down; it does not build up. It is a glittering shackle, a toilsome pursuit, and a resounding burden for the soul. Thou knowest, O Lord, before whom all my desire and all my sighs are expanded: Whenever I have made a sober use of learning, I have sought in it nothing but to become good. It was

32. [Pss. 23(24): 7-10; 45: 8 and 12(46: 7 and 10; 68: 7; 69: 6); 79: 20-80: 19]; 83: 2, 4, 9, 13(84: 1, 3, 8, 12).]

not that I was confident that learning can achieve this or that anyone can achieve it beside Thee, although Aristotle and many others have promised just this.³³ I believed that the road on which I made my way would become more honorable and more clearly marked, and at the same time more pleasant with the aid of literary erudition, under the guidance of Thee and no one else. "Thou who lookest into the hearts and reins,"³⁴ Thou I knowest that it is as I say. I never was such a youth, never eager for fame to such a degree—though I do not deny I coveted it occasionally—that I should not have wished to be good rather than learned. I desired to be both, I confess, since human longing is boundless and insatiable until it comes to rest in Thee, above Whom there is no place to which it could still rise. I desired to be both good and learned. Now that the latter is wrenched from me or denied me, I am grateful to my judges for leaving me the better of the two, provided they have not lied on this point also and granted me what they are not, intending to rob me of what they wanted to have. I was to find a comfort for my loss, though an empty one. They dealt with me after the fashion of envious women. When a woman is asked whether the woman next door is beautiful, she says that she is good and has good and decent manners. All good qualities—just such as are not true—she allows her, because she wants to spoil her of the single and perhaps even true title, beauty. But Thou, my God, "Lord of Learning," "besides Whom there is no other god,"³⁵ Thou Whom I must and will prefer to Aristotle and all the philosophers and poets and all those who "boastingly make many haughty words,"³⁶ to learning and doctrines and to all things whatsoever: Thou canst grant me the true name of a good man

33. [*Ethica Nicomachea* ii. 2. 1103 b 24. Petrarca owned and read this book in the *translatio vetus* made about 1250 under the supervision of Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln (Paris, Bibl. Nat., fonds Latin, Codex 6458).]

34. [Ps. 7: 10(9).]

35. [I Kings (1 Sam.) 2: 2-3.]

36. [*Ibid.*]

which these four grant me untruly. I pray to Thee, grant it to me. I do not ask so much for the good name which Solomon prefers to "precious ointments";³⁷ I ask for the thing itself. I want to be good, to love Thee, and to deserve to be loved by Thee—for no one repays his lovers like Thee—to think of Thee, to be obedient to Thee, to set my hope in Thee, and to speak of Thee. "Let all that is obsolete, shrink back from my mouth; let all my thoughts be prepared unto Thee." For it is true: "The bow of the mighty man has been overcome and the weak have been girded with strength."³⁸ Happier by far is one of these feeble ones who believe in Thee, than Plato, Aristotle, Varro, and Cicero, who with all their knowledge did not know Thee. "Brought before Thee and put next to Thee Who art the Rock, their judges are overthrown and their learned ignorance has become manifest."³⁹

Therefore, let learning be the portion of those who take it away from me, or since it cannot be their portion, unless I am mistaken, let it be the portion of those who may have it. Let them keep their exorbitant opinion of everything that regards them, and the naked name Aristotle which delights many ignorant people by its four syllables.⁴⁰ Moreover, let them have the vain joy and the unfounded elation which is so near to ruin; in short, let them have all the profit people who are ignorant and

37. [Eccles. 7:2.]

38. [Ps. 140(141):6, combined with I Cor. 10:4 in Augustine's *Enarratio in psalmum CXL* (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, XXXVII, 1828); cf. *Fam.*, XVII, 2, 41-42.]

39. [These words from Augustine's *Epistle* 130. 15. 28 ("Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum" = *GSEL*, XLIV, 72) are famous as the title of the epoch-making book *On Learned Ignorance* by Nicolaus Cusanus. It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the philosopher-cardinal owned a copy of Petrarca's *De ignorantia* made from one of the two autograph copies (Cues on the Mosel, Bibliotheca Cusana, Codex 200). Petrarca uses the words here to convey that his opponents do not possess the blessed ignorance which Augustine calls enlightened by the teachings of the Holy Spirit.]

40. [In the Latin original the word "Aristoteles" has five syllables.]

puffed up earn from their errors in vague and easy credulity. My portion shall be humility and ignorance, knowledge of my own weakness, and contempt for nothing except the world and myself and the insolence of those who are condemning me, and, furthermore, distrust in myself and hope in Thee. Finally, may God be my portion and what they do not envy me, illiterate virtue. They will burst into loud laughter when they hear this and will say that I speak piously without learning like any old woman. People of their kind, timid as they are with the fever of literary erudition, know nothing so vile as piety; truly and soberly literate men love it above all things. For them it is written: "Piety is wisdom."⁴¹ However, my talking will confirm the others more and more in their opinion that I am "a good man without learning."

What shall we say now, my most faithful Donato? I speak to you, since the sting of their grudge has wounded you more than myself, whom it actually stung. What shall we do, my friend? Shall we appeal to fairer judges or shall we keep silent and confirm their decision by our silence? I prefer the latter course. I want you to know that I do not in the least refuse to await the tenth day.⁴² This very moment I acquiesce in the verdict of any judge whomsoever. I implore you and everyone whom it may concern, all you who have passed a quite different sentence on me, to hold your hands up as I do and let their verdict become right by patiently accepting it. I wish it were right on the point they concede me. Willingly I confess and freely I declare their verdict is right in what they deprive me of, though I emphatically deny that they are the right judges. Perhaps they will seek support in the law of which their god Aristotle speaks when he says: "Everybody judges well of what he knows and is a good

41. [Cf. Eccles. 1:22, 25; 19:18.]

42. [In *Novella* xxiii. 1 the emperor-legislator Justinian determined that an appeal was to be considered valid if made within ten days after a sentence had been passed.]

after having been called illiterate. Learning is an adventitious ornament; reason an inborn part of man. I should not be so much ashamed of lacking erudition as of lacking reason. I had enough reason to have avoided their snares. It would not have been so easy for them to catch me by their tricks. I was trapped in my own purity and caught in the most decent veil of friendship, which I believed to be true. It is but too easy to deceive one who is confiding in you.

I have told you before and now repeat it: Like many other citizens of that very beautiful and very great city, they used to come and see me, very often two at a time, occasionally also all four of them together. I was delighted and received them as though they were angels of God. I forgot everything besides them, since they occupied my mind entirely, cheering me up wonderfully. Without delay we started long and various talks, as is the custom among friends. I paid no attention to what I said or how I said it. I had nothing else in mind than to show a joyful face and a still more joyful heart at the arrival of such guests. At times it was joy that forced me to keep silent; at times it was also a kind of reverence which told me not to block their strong desire to speak by interrupting them, as happens in such cases, and from joy I said either nothing or mere commonplace. I have not been taught to dress up or dissemble or feign anything in the company of friends. I am wont to carry my mind on my tongue and face and never to speak to friends in any other way than I would to myself. "Nothing is more pleasant," as Cicero says.⁵³

Why ought we to display ostentatiously our eloquence or our learning before friends who see our hearts, our affection, and our entire personality, provided they do not question us with the intention of putting us to the test but of learning from us? In the latter case no ostentation or embellishment is needed but a trustful sharing of knowledge and all other things, free from reserve and envy. I therefore often wonder why so great a

53. [Laelius, *de amicitia* 6. 22.]

prince as the Emperor Augustus could take so much pains with trifles, amid such concern for important matters, that he never said a word without thorough deliberation and frequently preferred to address in written form, not only the people and the Senate, but even his wife and friends.⁵⁴ Perhaps he did so in order to avoid letting slip by chance from his mouth a superfluous or foolish word for which his heavenly speech could be denounced or criticized. He may have been justified in so acting when from the highest peak he was addressing his subjects in written form, in oracles as it were. I prefer a casual way of talking with friends and no elaborate sentences. Goodbye to eloquence if it must be obtained with such constant effort! I had rather not be eloquent than always on my guard and pedantic. This was always my intention when with dear friends and intimates, especially when they were familiar with my powers.

Lately I have practiced it more than ever in the company of these four friends, and in my friendly faith I inadvertently fell into the trap of hostile calumny. I said nothing that was carefully polished, nothing that was anxiously prepared. Whatever came to my mind sprang from my mouth before it even got there. They trapped me according to a preconceived plan and tested every single word of mine, taking whatever I said as if I had nothing better to say and could not say it more elegantly. This they did once and again and again, until they found themselves easily confirmed in a sentence they wished to be true. Nothing is easier than to persuade people who want to be persuaded and already believe. This made them speak to me all the more confidently as to an ignorant fellow and to laugh at my ignorance, as I now believe. At the time I did not suspect it in the least. As I took no precautions and was but a single man, I was entangled by the artifices of many and herded into the crowd of the ignorant without being aware of it.

They used to raise an Aristotelian problem or a question concerning animals. Then I was either silent or made a joke or be-

54. [Suetonius *Life of Augustus* 84.]

gan another subject. Sometimes I smiled and asked how on earth Aristotle could have known something for which there is no reason and which cannot be proved by experience. They were amazed and felt angry at me in silence. They looked at me as though I were a blasphemer to require anything beyond his authority in order to believe it. Thus we clearly ceased to be philosophers and eager lovers of wisdom and became Aristotelians, or, more correctly, Pythagoreans. They revived the ridiculous habit of allowing no further question if "he" had said so. "He," as Cicero tells us, "was Pythagoras."⁵⁵ I certainly believe that Aristotle was a great man who knew much, but he was human and could well be ignorant of some things, even of a great many things.

I should say more if those who are as much friends of truth as they are of sects permitted. By God, I am convinced and I have no doubt that "he went astray," as the saying goes, "the whole length of the way,"⁵⁶ not only in what is of little weight, where an error is unimportant and by no means dangerous, but in matters of the greatest consequence, and precisely in those regarding supreme salvation. Of happiness he has indeed said a good deal in the beginning and at the end of his *Ethics*.⁵⁷ However, I will dare to say—and my censors may shout as loud as they please—he knew so absolutely nothing of true happiness that any pious old woman, any faithful fisherman, shepherd or peasant is—I will not say more subtle but happier in recognizing it. I am therefore all the more astonished that some of our Latin authors have so much admired that Aristotelian treatise as to consider it almost a crime to speak of happiness after him and that they have borne witness of this even in writing.

It may perhaps be daring to say so, but it is true, unless I am mistaken: It seems to me that he saw of happiness as much as the night owl does of the sun, namely, its light and rays and not

55. [*De natura deorum* i. 5. 10.]

56. [Terence *Eunuchus* ii. 2. 4 (245).]

57. [Aristotle *Eth.* Nic. i. 2-13. 1095 a 15; x. 7-10. 1177 a 14 ff.]

the sun itself. For Aristotle did not establish happiness within its own boundaries and did not found it on solid ground, as a high building ought to be founded, but far away in foreign territory on a trembling site, and consequently did not comprehend two things, or, if he did, ignored them.⁵⁸ These are the two things without which there can be absolutely no happiness: Faith and Immortality.⁵⁹ I already regret saying that he did not comprehend them or ignore them. For I ought to have said only one of the two phrases. Faith and immortality were not yet comprehended: he did not know of them, nor could he know of them or hope for them. The true light had not yet begun to shine,⁶⁰ which lights every man who comes into this world. He and all the others fancied what they wished and what by his very nature every man wishes and whose opposite no one can wish: a happiness of which they sang as one sings of the absent beloved, and which they adorned with words. They did not see it. Like people made happy by a dream, they rejoiced in an absolute nothing. In fact, they were miserable and to be roused to their misery by the thunder of approaching death, to see with open eyes what that happiness really is like, with which they had dealt in their dreams.⁶¹

Some may believe that I have said all this out of my own imagination and therefore but too frivolously. Let them then read Augustine's thirteenth book on the Trinity. There they will find many weighty and acute discussions on this subject against those philosophers who—I use his words:—"shaped their happy lives for themselves, just as it pleased each of them."⁶² This, I confess, I have said often before, and I will say it as long

58. [Cf. Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* vi. 14. 6 (CSEL XIX, 535).]

59. [Augustine *De Trinitate* xiii. 7. 10-8. 11 (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, XLII, 1020-21).]

60. [John 1:9.]

61. [Cf. Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* v. 13. 15 (CSEL, XIX, 441-42); Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum CXL* 19. v. 6 (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, XXXVII, 1328).]

62. [*De Trinitate* xiii. 7 (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, XLII, 1021).]

as I can speak, because I am confident that I have spoken the truth and shall speak it in the future, too. If they consider it a sacrilege, they may accuse me of violating religion, but then they must accuse Jerome too, "who does not care what Aristotle but what Christ said."⁶³ I, on the contrary, should not doubt that it is they who are impious and sacrilegious if they have a different opinion. God may take my life and whatever I love most dearly before I change this pious, true, and saving conviction or disown Christ from love of Aristotle.

Let them certainly be philosophers and Aristotelians, though they are neither, but let them be both: I do not envy them these brilliant names of which they boast, and even that wrongly. In return they ought not to envy me the humble and true name of Christian and Catholic. But why do I ask for this? I know they are willing to comply with this demand quite spontaneously and will do what I ask. Such things they do not envy us; they spurn them as simple and contemptible, inadequate for their genius and unworthy of it. We accept in humble faith the secrets of nature and the mysteries of God, which are higher still; they attempt to seize them in haughty arrogance. They do not manage to reach them, not even to approach them; but in their insanity they believe that they have reached them and strike heaven with their fists. They feel just as if they had it in their grip, satisfied with their own opinion and rejoicing in their error. They are not held back from their insanity—I will not say by the impossibility of such an attempt, as is expressed in the words of the Apostle to the Romans: "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?"⁶⁴ Not even by the ecclesiastical and heavenly counsel: "Seek not what is above thee and search not out things above thy strength; the things that God hath commanded to thee, think thereupon always and be not inquisitive in His many works; for it is not necessary for thee to behold what is hidden."⁶⁵ Of all this I will

63. [*Adversus Pelagianos* i. 19 (Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, XXIII, 512c).]

64. [*Rom.* 11: 34.]

65. [*Eccles.* 3: 22.]

not speak: indiscriminately they despise whatever they know has been said from Heaven—yea, let me say, what is actually true—whatever has been said from a Catholic point of view. However, there is at least a witty word not ineptly said by Democritus: "No one looks at what is before his feet," he said; "it is the regions of the sky they scrutinize."⁶⁶ And there are very clever remarks Cicero made to ridicule frivolous disputants who are heedlessly arguing and arguing about nothing, "as if they just came from the council of the gods"⁶⁷ and had seen with their eyes what was going on there. And, finally, there are Homer's more ancient and sharper words, by which Jupiter deters in grave sentences not a mortal man, not any one of the common crowd of the gods, but Juno, his wife and sister, the queen of the gods, from daring to investigate his intimate secret or presumptuously believing it could be known to her at all.⁶⁸

But let us return to Aristotle. His brilliance has stunned many bleary and weak eyes and made many a man fall into the ditches of error. I know, Aristotle has declared himself for the rule of one, as Homer had done before him. For Homer says thus, as far as it has been translated for us into our prose: "Multidominion is not good; let one be the lord, one the supreme commander";⁶⁹ and Aristotle says: "Plurality of rule is not good; let therefore one be the ruler."⁷⁰ Homer meant human rulership, Aristotle divine dominion; Homer was speaking of the princi-

66. [Petarca could not know that this line, here referred to as a saying of Democritus because of Cicero *De divinatione* ii. 13. 30, was in fact taken from Ennius' drama *Iphigenia*, as we now know from the same Cicero's *De republica* i. 8. 30, a work recovered in 1820.]

67. [*De natura deorum* i. 8. 18.]

68. [*Iliad* i. 544-50; 560-67.]

69. [*Ibid.* ii. 204. Translating the Homeric word *polykoinonie*, Petarca's Greek interpreter, Leontius Pilatus, used a Latin word of his own invention: "multidominium."]

70. [*Metaphysics* xii. 9. 1076 a 4. Though Petarca does not mention it here, he knew that this line, which he read in William of Moerbeke's version, is but another translation of the Homeric hexameter. Cf. Petarca's marginal note in his *Iliad*: "Hinc Ari(stoteles)."]

pate of the Greeks, the other of that of all men; Homer made Agamemnon the Atreide king and ruler, Aristotle God—so far had the dazzling brightness of truth brought light to his mind. He did not know who this king is, I believe, nor did he know how great He is. He discussed the most trifling things with so much curiosity and did not see this one and greatest of things, which many illiterate people have seen, not by another light, but because it shed a very different illumination. If these friends of mine do not see that this is the case, I see that they are altogether blind and bereft of eyesight; and I should not hesitate to believe that it must be visible to all who have sound eyes, just as it can be seen that the emerald is green, the snow white, and the raven black.

Our Aristotelians will bear my audacity in a more balanced mood when I say that this is not merely my opinion of a single man, though I mention him alone. However ignorant I am, I do read, and I thought I understood something, before these people discovered my ignorance. I say, I do read; but in my more flourishing years I read even more assiduously. I still read the works of poets and philosophers, particularly those of Cicero, with whose genius and style I have been particularly delighted since my early youth. I find much eloquence in them and the greatest elegance and power of words. What he says regarding the gods themselves, on whose nature he has published books under this title, and religion in general, sounds to me all the more like an empty fable the more eloquently it is presented. I thank God in silence that He gave me sluggish and moderate gifts and a mind that does not saunter wantonly and "does not seek things above itself,"⁷¹ not curious in scrutinizing what is difficult to investigate and pestiferous when discovered. I am grateful that I love Christ all the more and become all the firmer in the faith in Him, the more I hear sneering at His faith. My experience has been like that of one who has been rather lukewarm in his love for his father and hears people now raise their

71. [Eccles 3 : 22.]

voice against him. Then the love which seemed to be lulled to sleep flames up immediately; and this must necessarily happen if the son is a true and genuine son. Often, I call Christ Himself to witness, blasphemies uttered by heretics have turned me from a Christian into a most ardent Christian. For while the ancient pagans may tell many fables about their gods, they do not, at any rate, blaspheme; they have no notion of the true God; they have not heard of Christ's name—and faith results from hearing. The voices of the Apostles were heard all over the earth, and their words spread unto the end of the world; but, when their words and doctrines were resounding all over the globe, these men were already dead and buried. Thus they are to be pitied rather than culpable. Then envious soil had obstructed their ears, through which they might have drunk in the saving faith.

Of all the writings of Cicero, those from which I often received the most powerful inspiration are the three books which, as I said before, he entitled *On the Nature of the Gods*.⁷² There the great genius speaks of the gods and often ridicules and despises them—not too seriously, it is true. It may be that he was afraid of capital punishment,⁷³ which even the Apostles feared, before the Holy Ghost came to them.⁷⁴ He ridicules them with very effective jokes, of which he has always so many at hand, to make it clear to everyone who understands how he feels with regard to what he has undertaken to discuss. When I read these passages, I often have compassion for his fate and grieve in silent sorrow that this man did not know the true God. He died only a few years before the birth of Christ. Death had closed his eyes when, alas, the end of the error-stricken night and darkness, the first rise of truth, the dawn of true light and

72. [In the following chapter Petrarca has inserted entire passages from this work of Cicero, which was one of the main sources for his knowledge of Greek philosophy.]

73. [Cf. Cicero *De natura deorum* i. 22. 60-23. 63; Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* ii. 3. 1-6 (CSEL, XIX, 104).]

74. [John 20 : 19-23 : "for fear of the Jews."]

the sun of justice were so near. In the countless books he wrote, Cicero, indeed, often falls short and speaks of "gods," engulfed by the torrent of vulgar error, as I said before; but at least he ridicules them, and even in his youth, when he wrote his book *About Invention*, he said that "those who have devoted their energies to philosophy do not believe there are gods."⁷⁵ Now it is a fact that it is true and supreme philosophy to know God, not "the gods"—always provided that such knowledge is accompanied by piety and faithful worship.

When the same Cicero in his later years, in the books he wrote *About the Gods*—not about God—gains control of himself, how is he lifted up by the wings of genius! At times you would think you were hearing not a pagan philosopher but an Apostle. Thus he says, for instance in the first book, opposing Velleius, who is defending the doctrine of Epicurus: "You have censured those who beheld the world and its limbs: heaven, earth, the seas, and their insignia—the sun, the moon, and the stars—and found out how the seasons bring about maturation, alteration, and all kind of vicissitudes, and who thereupon began to suspect from the magnificent and wonderful works produced that there is some excellent and outstanding nature that makes, moves, rules, and governs all this."⁷⁶

In the second book he says: "When we look at the sky and behold the heavenly bodies, what can be so manifest and perspicuous as that there is a Divine Being of most outstanding mind, by whom all this is ruled?" And in the same book: "Chrysippus has a most acute mind, but, when he says all this, it seems that he has learned it from nature and did not discover it by himself." "If there is anything in the nature of things," he says, "which the mind and reason of man and human might and power cannot produce, the being that has produced it is cer-

75. [*De inventione* i. 29. 46.]

76. [*De natura deorum* i. 36. 100: words spoken by C. Aurelius Cotta, whom Cicero presents as the opponent of both the Epicurean and the Stoic participants in the discussion.]

tainly better than man. All the heavenly things, and all that has an everlasting order, cannot be made by man. Therefore, that which has made all this is better than man. Yet how should you call it, if not God?"⁷⁷ And afterward, not much later: "Since all the parts of the world are so made up that they could not be better fitted for use or more beautiful to behold, let us see whether they are fortuitous or such as could by no means remain together in their condition unless they were under the control of a Divine Providence that acts reasonably. If then what has been wrought by nature is better than what has been produced by art, and if art does not make anything without reason, nature cannot well be regarded as being without reason. If you know that art has been employed when you look at a statue or a painted panel; if you do not doubt that a ship is moved by reason and art, when from a distance you see it on its course; if you understand that a sun-dial or a water-clock indicates the hours by art and not by chance—then it is not consistent to assume that the world, which comprises all these arts and artisans and everything else, is bare of counsel and reason. Suppose somebody brought into Scythia or into Britain the globe recently constructed by our friend Posidonius, in which various revolutions make the sun and the moon and the five planets do just what they do in the sky every day and night—who in these barbarian countries would doubt that this globe was made by reason? These thinkers, however, are not sure whether our world, from which everything originates and comes to be, is the product of chance or of necessity or of Divine Reason and Intellect. They believe Archimedes was more efficient in imitating the revolutions of the sphere than Nature in effecting them, although in many parts these revolutions are so much more cunningly contrived than the others are imitated."⁷⁸

77. [*Ibid.* ii. 2. 4. Here and in most of the following passages Lucilius Balbus, the defender of the Stoic tenets, is speaking.]

78. [*Ibid.* 6. 16.]

robbed by these four highwaymen who are looting my knowledge and fame. There is nothing left that would belong to me, and my poverty must be an excuse for my inopportunely and impudently if I am cadging other people's property. If you ask what kind of poverty I am suffering from, ignorance is the mind's great poverty; there is no greater except vice. But I will not squeeze all these three Ciceronian books into this little booklet here. I will transcribe no more from Cicero today, though he has often treated a great many of these problems with much care in laborious argumentation, elsewhere, and particularly in these books, in order to make us understand from all we see that there is a God, the Maker and Ruler of all.

His argument can be summed up more or less in this way: he puts before us almost all heavenly and earthly things, the spheres of heaven and the stars, the stability and fertility of the earth, the usefulness of the sea and the streams, the variety of the seasons and the winds, herbs, plants, and trees and animate beings, the wonderful nature of birds, quadrupeds, and fishes, the manifold advantages derived from all these things, like food, handicraft, transportation, remedies against illness, hunting and fowling, architecture and navigation, and innumerable arts—and all this devised either by ingenious minds or by nature. Furthermore, he points out the miraculously coherent structure and disposition of body, sense and limbs, and finally reason and sedulous activity. Everything he displays with great care and eloquence. I wonder whether any writer ever treated these matters with greater heed and keener insight. And all this he does merely to lead us to this conclusion: whatever we behold with our eyes or perceive with our intellect is made by God for the well-being of man and governed by divine providence and counsel.⁸⁶ And even when he descends to individuals, when he mentions, if I am right, fourteen outstanding Roman leaders, Cicero adds: "We must believe that without the aid of God none of them was the man he was," and soon afterward:

86. [A brief summary of the speech delivered by Balbus (see n. 77).]

"Without divine inspiration no one was ever a great man."⁸⁷ And by inspiration a pious man can doubtless understand nothing but the Holy Ghost. Therefore, not to speak of his eloquence, which was unequaled among men, what would any Catholic author change in this sentence?

What shall we conclude from all this? Shall I count Cicero among Catholics? I wish I could. Were I but allowed to do so, if He who gave him such gifts had but permitted him also to know Himself, as He granted permission to seek Him! Though the true God does not need our praise and mortal speech, we should now have hymns to the glory of God in our churches that would not be more true and holy, I presume—for this can neither be nor is it to be hoped for—but perhaps more melodious and more resounding.

However, far be it from me to espouse the genius of a single man in its totality because of one or two well-formulated phrases. Philosophers must not be judged from isolated words but from their uninterrupted coherence and consistency. This I have learned from Cicero himself and from inborn reason. Who is so uncouth that he does not occasionally say a graceful word? But is that enough? Often one word hides for the moment much ignorance; often bright eyes and fair hair veil ugly defects of the body. He who wants to be safe in praising the entire man must see, examine, and estimate the entire man. It happens that, side by side with what is pleasing, something else is hidden that offends as much or even more. Thus Cicero himself returns to his "gods" to the point of nausea, in the very same book in which he has discussed many subjects most seriously and in a manner very closely resembling piety. He gives an account of the names and qualities of each of these gods, no longer intent on dealing with the providence of "God" but with that of "the gods." Listen, please, what he puts in: "We must venerate and worship these gods," he says, "and the best and at the same time the most chaste form of worshipping the

87. [*De natura deorum* ii. 66. 165-67.]

gods, that which is overflowing with piety, is adoring them with unabatedly pure, unpolluted, and uncorrupted mind and voice."⁸⁸

Alas, my dear Cicero, what did you say? So quickly have you forgotten the one God and yourself. Where did you leave that "outstanding Nature" and "that Divine Being of most outstanding mind"? Where is now "the God who is better than man," and "the Maker of whatever cannot be made by human reason," "the Maker of all that is in heaven, and of the everlasting order we behold"? Where did you leave "the everlasting heavenly and divine mansion," moreover "the Ruler and Supervisor and, as it were, Architect of this huge work"? You have almost driven Him out of the starry mansion you had allotted Him in that beautiful confession by giving Him such mean and unworthy companions, though He disdains them and proclaims through the voice of a prophet: "See ye that I alone am, and there is no other god besides me."⁸⁹ Who are these new, these recent and infamous gods whom you try to smuggle into the house of the Lord? Are they not those of whom another prophet says: "All gods of the nations are demons; it is the Lord who makes the heavens."⁹⁰ Just now you spoke of that Maker and Creator of the heavens and all things, pleasing with good reason the ears and heart of a pious hearer. Thus quickly you group Him with rebellious creatures and impure spirits. With one word you tear down whatever you seemed to say wisely and soberly.

But what am I saying? With one word? No, with many words. Often, yes everywhere, you stumble back with staggering steps like a sleeper and adore the gods you have just ridiculed. Even sun and moon and stars, and finally this whole tangible world we behold and touch, and on which we tread, you make an animated being with sense, and—the very silliest thing

88. [*Ibid.* 28. 71.]

89. [Deut. 32 : 39.]

90. [Ps. 95 (96) : 5.]

you can think of—a god. It is true that you allot these words not to yourself but to Balbus, who speaks in your book.⁹¹ This is perhaps an Academic caution.⁹² However, at the end of the book, not daring to say that the discussion we hear from Balbus is more true, you have called it "more like unto truth,"⁹³ for fear of sinning against the laws of the Academy. Thus it must seem that you have approved and made your own whatever he has brought forth in his disputation. In this manner what you prefer to allot to another is actually your own property, while you let your opinions rather be pronounced by the fictitious mouth of another according to the Platonic method.

It is true that in one passage Balbus himself seems to introduce one god, though in manifold names.⁹⁴ This is the shield to protect errors the Stoics used to employ in order to excuse the mad belief in the existence of a crowd of gods. They claim that but one and the same god is meant and must be understood by different names. Thus there would be, for instance, one god, and he would be called "Ceres on earth, Neptune in the sea, Jupiter in the ether,"⁹⁵ and Vulcanus in the fire. However, everyone must see how frivolous this excuse and semblance of truth really is when he observes how in the writings of pagan authors one god enjoys a pre-eminence above others, how they are at variance and war with each other, and—let me omit the rest—how different their rites are. There can be no true God, unless He is one. He is not anywhere greater or smaller, for He is always the same, and cannot be or have been occasionally in con-

91. [Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* ii. 3. 1-2 (CSEL, XIX, 103), where a lost passage of Cicero's *De natura deorum* is preserved.]

92. [The precept of the Academic sect never to make a statement regarding ambiguous matters (cf. Cicero *De natura deorum* i. 1. 1).]

93. [*Ibid.* ii. 40. 95.]

94. [*Ibid.* 30. 77, quoted by Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* i. 5. 24 (CSEL, XIX, 17), where he tries to prove that Cicero occasionally professed faith in the one God.]

95. [*De natura deorum* ii. 28. 71; i. 15. 40.]

flict with Himself. He does not take His delight at one time with a sheep and at another with a bull: He takes it always in the offerings of praise and justice of the contrite spirit and of tears. He is one in heaven and on earth; in both places He has "one Substance and one Name." "Philosophers who are called theologians"—that is, theologians of gods, not of the one God—have seen that what is told of Jupiter is not becoming to the god Jupiter, and speak, therefore, of "two Jupiters," as Lactantius reports, "one natural, the other fabulous," or of "three Jupiters," as Cicero tells us.⁹⁶

He who wants to know how much weight such evasive aberrations and such subterfuges of fiction carry and how much they are to be valued will find it explained by Lactantius of Formiae⁹⁷ himself in the second book of his *Institutiones*. It is disgusting to mention even with few words that some speak of five suns and just as many Mercuries, Dionysuses, and Minervas, of four Vulcans, four Apollos, and four Venuses, of three Aesculapiuses, three Cupids, and three Dianas,⁹⁸ of six Herculeses according to Cicero and forty-three according to Varro.⁹⁹ They are not ashamed to say such things; we should be ashamed to hear, far more to believe, them. Who, I should like to know, would not become enraged at such silly talk? Who could bear such trickery? All this is so full and so completely crammed with empty dreams that sometimes I feel compassion

⁹⁶. [Lactantius *Divinae institutiones*, i. 11. 37 (CSEL, XIX, 43); Cicero *De natura deorum* iii. 21. 53.]

⁹⁷. [Petraea believed that Lactantius was a native of Formiae near Naples, because Firmianus, the family name of this author, who almost certainly came from North Africa, was sometimes corrupted into Formianus.]

⁹⁸. [Cicero *De natura deorum* iii. 21. 54-23. 60, rearranged according to the number of divine individuals bearing the same name.]

⁹⁹. [*Ibid.* 16. 42. In his *Commentary on the Aeneid* (viii. 564) Servius quotes Varro as his authority for the statement that all strong and brave heroes were once called Hercules. Reading this in his copy of Servius, Petraea wrote a passage from Augustine's *City of God* (xviii. 19) on the margin, since he found told there that Samson, the judge of the Hebrews, was believed to be Hercules because of his miraculous strength.]

and indignation that the noble Latin idiom is employed and wasted on such cares. Of other things everybody may think as he pleases. But is it not an awful circling-around, a revolting play, and a loathsome fable to invent five suns? It has been said that "the sun is called Sol, because it shines solely."¹⁰⁰ When, on the other hand, it has been at times reported as a miracle that several suns seemed to be visible simultaneously—not that they were really seen—this was probably due to a defect of the eyes or a disturbance of the mind.¹⁰¹ The ancients, and particularly Cicero, may pardon me if I say: this great man devoted much energy to compiling what, as it seems to me, ought not to have been written and, as I think, ought not to be read either, unless such futile stories are to be read and become known in order that love of the True Deity and the One God, contempt for superstition imported from abroad, and reverence for our religion are to be roused in the hearts of those who read it. There is no way of learning to understand a thing more clearly except by comparing it to its contrast. Nothing makes light so deserving to be loved as hatred of darkness.

If I have said all this of my Cicero, whom I admire in many ways, what do you expect me to say of others? Many men have written many things in a subtle manner, some even in grave, pleasant, and eloquent form. But they have blended some false, dangerous, and ridiculous things with their words, as if they were mixing poison with honey. A discussion of all this would take too much time and is not to the point here. Not in every case should I have the excuse Cicero had: not everyone is so alluring; and, though their subjects may also be sublime, they have not all his sweetness of speech. It happens often that one and the same song sounds pleasant or annoying according to the different persons who sing it, and a different voice produces the same song very differently.

I will not leave the matter without an example: Who does not

100. [*De natura deorum* iii. 21. 54; ii. 27. 68.]

101. [*Ibid.* ii. 5. 14.]

thousand years—as many as you like, until the number has no longer a name—and eternity is absolutely null. In the first case there is a number great beyond all measure on one side and a number small beyond all measure on the other. However, both are certainly finite. In the other case there is an infinite number here and a finite one there, which, however great, must not be judged small but null in comparison to it, as the great Augustine says when he is discussing the problem so effectively in the twelfth book of his *City of God*.¹³¹

And this is the perplexity which forced philosophers to propound the eternity of the world, since they wanted to avoid God appearing to have been idle so long. To this opinion which is held by many, Theodosius Macrobius refers in a few words in the second book of his commentary on the sixth book of Cicero's *Republic*. "Philosophy is the authority," he says, "that the world has been always, founded by God, it is true, but outside the range of time. For time could not be before the world was, since it is nothing else than the course of the sun which makes time."¹³² This, however, is ruled out by Cicero himself in these words: "It does not follow that there were no ages, if there were no world—ages I call here not those which are made up by a number of days and nights in the annual courses, for I admit, that these ages could not be without the rotation of the world. There was, however, from infinite times an eternity measured not by any limit of time; but in terms of space it can be understood how it was. For it does not enter in the least into our thoughts that there was a time when there was none."¹³³ These words Augustine inserts into the passage mentioned above, almost to the letter. It is to that eternity of which we are told in the preceding passage that ingenious rather than pious men add various changes caused by "conflagrations and inundations of the earth"¹³⁴ which were inflicted upon the

131. [xii. 13.]

132. [Macrobius *Scipio's Dream* ii. 10. 9.]133. [Cicero *De natura deorum* i. 9. 21.]134. [Plato *Timaeus* 22 C-E; cf. Macrobius *Scipio's Dream* ii. 10. 19.]

world. Accordingly, it might appear temporal and, so to speak, new, being actually eternal.

But let me now at last, though late enough, return to where I started. For I have been driven off my course by the chain of related subjects. In this whole field Aristotle must be most carefully avoided, not because he committed more errors, but because he has more authority and more followers.

Forced by truth or by shame, they will perhaps confess that Aristotle did not see enough of divine and eternal things, since they are far removed from pure intellect. However, they will contend that he did foresee whatever is human and temporal. Thus we come back to what Macrobius says when he is disputing against this philosopher either jokingly or in earnest. "It seems to me that there was nothing this great man could not know."¹³⁵ Just the opposite seems to me true. I would not admit that any man had knowledge of all things through human study. This is why I am torn to pieces, and though envy has another root; this is what is claimed to be the reason: I do not adore Aristotle.

But I have another whom to adore. He does not promise me empty and frivolous conjectures of deceitful things which are of use for nothing and not supported by any foundation. He promises me the knowledge of Himself. When He grants this to me, it will appear superfluous to busy myself with other things that are created by Him—one will see that it is easy to grasp them and, consequently, ridiculous to investigate them. It is He in whom I can trust, whom I must adore; it is He whom my judges ought to worship piously. If they did, they would know that philosophers have told many lies—those I mean who are philosophers by name, for true philosophers are wont to say nothing but what is true. However, to their number Aristotle does not belong, nor even Plato, of whom our Latin philosophers have said that "he came nearer to truth than any one of the entire set of ancient philosophers."¹³⁶

135. [*Scipio's Dream* ii. 15. 18.] 136. [Augustine *City of God* viii. 9.]

These friends of ours, I have already said, are so captivated by their love of the mere name "Aristotle" that they call it a sacrilege to pronounce any opinion that differs from his on any matter. From this position they derive their crucial argument for my ignorance, namely, that I said something of virtue—I do not know what—otherwise than he did and did not say it in a sufficiently Aristotelian manner. It is very possible that I said something not merely different but even contradictory. I should not necessarily have said it badly, for I am "not bound to swear to the words of any master," as Horace says of himself.¹³⁷ It is possible, too, that I said the same thing he said, though in other words, and that these friends of mine who judge of everything without understanding everything, had the impression that I said something else. The majority of the ignorant lot clings to words, as the shipwrecked do to a wooden plank, and believe that a matter cannot be better said and cannot be phrased otherwise: so great is the destitution of their intellect or of their speech, by which conceptions are expressed. I must confess, I have not too much delight in that man's style, as we have it; though I have learned from Greek witnesses and from Cicero's authority, long before I was condemned by the verdict of ignorance, that it is sweet¹³⁸ and rich and ornate in his own tongue. It is due either to the rudeness or to the envious disposition of his interpreters that his style has come down to us so harsh and shabby. It cannot fully please our ears and does not stick to our memory. For this reason it is occasionally more agreeable for the hearer and more convenient for the speaker to express Aristotle's mind not in the words he used but in one's own.

Moreover, I do not dissemble what I have said very often to friends and must now write down here. I am well aware of the great danger threatening my fame and of the great new charge

137. [*Epistles* i. 1. 14.]

138. [See p. 53.]

of ignorance brought against me. Nevertheless, I will write it down and will not fear the judgment of men: Let all hear me who are Aristotelians anywhere. You know how easily they will spit at the lonely stranger, this tiny little booklet; they are a lot prone to insult. But for this the little book may take care itself. Let it look for a linen cloth to wipe itself clean; I shall be content if they do not spit at me. Let all the Aristotelians hear, I say, and since Greece is deaf to our tongue, let all those hear whom all Italy harbors and France and contentious Paris with its noisy Straw Lane.¹³⁹

I have read all Aristotle's moral books if I am not mistaken. Some of them I have also heard commented on. I seemed to understand something of them before this huge ignorance was detected. Sometimes I have perhaps become more learned through them when I went home, but not better, not so good as I ought to be; and I often complained to myself, occasionally to others too, that by no facts was the promise fulfilled which the philosopher makes at the beginning of the first book of his *Ethics*, namely, that "we learn this part of philosophy not with the purpose of gaining knowledge but of becoming better."¹⁴⁰ I see virtue, and all that is peculiar to vice as well as to virtue, egregiously defined and distinguished by him and treated with penetrating insight. When I learn all this, I know a little bit more than I knew before, but mind and will remain the same as they were, and I myself remain the same. It is one thing to know, another to love; one thing to understand, another to will. He teaches what virtue is, I do not deny that; but his lesson lacks the words that sting and set afire and urge toward love of virtue and hatred of vice or, at any rate, does not have enough of such power. He who looks for that will find it in our Latin writers, especially in Cicero and Seneca, and, what may be

139. [Most of the classrooms of the medieval Parisian university were located on Straw Street (Rue de Fouarre); cf. Dante *Paradiso* 10. 137, a line familiar to Petrarca.]

140. [*Eth.* *Nic.* i. 1. 1094 b 23-1095 a 6.]

Horace astonishing to hear, in Horace, a poet somewhat rough in style but most pleasing in his maxims.¹⁴¹

However, what is the use of knowing what virtue is if it is not loved when known? What is the use of knowing sin if it is not abhorred when it is known? If the will is bad, it can, by God, drive the lazy wavering mind toward the worse side, when the rigidity of virtue and the alluring ease of vice become apparent. Nor ought we to be astonished. Aristotle was a man who ridiculed Socrates, the father of this kind of philosophy, calling him—to use his own words—"a peddler in morals, and despised him," if we believe Cicero, "though Socrates despised him no less."¹⁴² No wonder that he is slow in rousing the mind and lifting it up to virtue. However, everyone who has become thoroughly familiar with our Latin authors knows that they stamp and drive deep into the heart the sharpest and most ardent stings of speech, by which the lazy are startled, the ailing are kindled, and the sleepy aroused, the sick healed, and the prostrate raised, and those who stick to the ground lifted up to the highest thoughts and to honest desire. Then earthly things become vile; the aspect of vice stirs up an enormous hatred of vicious life; virtue and "the shape, and as it were, the face of honesty," are beheld by the inmost eye "and inspire miraculous love" of wisdom and of themselves, "as Plato says."¹⁴³ I know but too well that all this cannot be achieved outside the doctrine

141. [Petraea mentions Horace together with the two moral philosophers, because the Roman poet was admired much more for the sound moral advice his satirical sermons offered the reader than for the artistic quality of his poetry.]

142. [Aristotle *Metaphysics* i. 6. 987 b 1. The rendering in the *translatio vetus* can easily mislead one to believe that Aristotle speaks here disrespectfully of Socrates. Moreover, the passage which Petraea quotes from Cicero's *De officiis* (i. 1. 4) has the reading "Socrates" instead of "Socrates" in his copy. It seems that Petraea, who in most cases is an astonishingly critical reader of classical texts, did not recall to his memory that Socrates, having been dead for sixteen years when Aristotle was born, could not well despise him (the same error is found in Petraea's *Fami.*, X, 5, 15).]

143. [Cicero *De officiis* i. 5. 14.]

of Christ and without His help: no one can become wise and good who has not drunk a large draught—not from the fabulous spring of Pegasus in the folds of Mount Parnassus¹⁴⁴—but from the true and unique source which has its origin in heaven, the source of the water that springs up in eternal life. Those who drink from it no longer thirst. However, much is achieved also by the authors of whom I have just spoken. They are a great help to those who are making their way to this goal.

This is what many a man has thought of many of their writings, and Augustine professes such an opinion, explicitly naming Cicero's *Hortensius*, in grateful remembrance of what he experienced while reading it.¹⁴⁵ For though our ultimate goal does not lie in virtue, where the philosophers locate it, it is through the virtues that the direct way leads to the place where it does lie; and these virtues, I must add, must be not merely known but loved. Therefore, the true moral philosophers and useful teachers of the virtues are those whose first and last intention is to make hearer and reader good, those who do not merely teach what virtue and vice are and hammer into our ears the brilliant name of the one and the grim name of the other but sow into our hearts love of the best and eager desire for it and at the same time hatred of the worst and how to flee it. It is safer to strive for a good and pious will than for a capable and clear intellect. The object of the will, as it pleases the wise, is to be good; that of the intellect is truth. It is better to will the good than to know the truth. The first is never without merit; the latter can often be polluted with crime and then admits no excuse. Therefore, those are far wrong who consume their time in learning to know virtue instead of acquiring it, and, in a still higher degree, those whose time is spent in learning to know God instead of loving Him. In this life it is impossible to know God in His fulness; piously and ardently to love Him is possible. This love is a blessing at all times whatsoever; this knowl-

144. [Ovid *Metamorphoses* v. 250-67.]

145. [Augustine *Confessions* iii. 4. 7; viii. 7. 17.]

edge sometimes makes us miserable—as does that knowledge the demons have, who tremble below in hell before Him they have learned to know. Things that are absolutely unknown are not loved; but, for those to whom more is not granted, it is sufficient to know God and virtue so far as to know that He is the most lucid, the most fragrant, the most delectable, the inextinguishable source of all that is good, from which, through which, and in which we are as good as we are, and to know that virtue is the best thing next to God Himself. When we know this, we shall love Him for His sake with our heart and marrow, and virtue we shall love for His sake too. We shall revere Him as the unique author of life; virtue we shall cultivate as its foremost adornment.

Since this is the case, it is perhaps not reprehensible, as my judges think, to trust our own philosophers, although they are not Greek, particularly in matters of virtue. If following them, and perhaps my own judgment too, I said something, even if Aristotle has said it otherwise or said something different, I hope not to lose my good reputation before fairer judges. Well known is the Aristotelian habit, as it is expressed by Chalcidius in Plato's *Timaeus*: "In a manner peculiar to him he picks out from a complete and perfect dogma what appears to him to be right and neglects the rest in disdainful lack of interest."¹⁴⁶ I may therefore have said that he disdained to treat or neglected some matters or perhaps did not think of them. I may really have said so; it is not incompatible with human nature, though, if we follow our friends, that it does not agree with the fame of the great man—provided I said something of the kind—for I do not remember well what it was, and these men assail me with accusations that are not all too sincere and not definite enough and make use of suspicions and murmured hints instead. Is this, then, a sufficient reason for plunging me so deep into the floods of ignorance and charging me with every error, because I was mistaken on one single point—on a point on which I was per-

¹⁴⁶. [Chalcidius *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* xi. 250.]

haps not even wrong while they were? Must I be condemned as always in error and knowing nothing whatever?

Here someone might say: What does all this mean? Do you snarl at Aristotle too? At Aristotle not in the least but in behalf of the truth which I love though I do not know it. I snarl at the stupid Aristotelians, who day by day in every single word they speak do not cease to hammer into the heads of others Aristotle whom they know by name only. He himself, I suppose, and their audience will at last become sick and tired of it. For recklessly these people distort his words into a wrong sense, even those which are right. Nobody loves and respects illustrious men more than I. To genuine philosophers and particularly to true theologians I apply what Ovid says: "Whenever poets were present, I believed gods were there in person."¹⁴⁷ I would not say all this of Aristotle if I did not know him to be a very great man. He was a very great man, I know, but, as I have said, he was human. I know that much can be learned from his books, but I am convinced that outside of them much can be learned also; and I do not doubt that some men knew a great deal before Aristotle wrote, before he studied, before he was born. I will mention only Homer, Hesiodus, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Diogenes, Solon, and Socrates,¹⁴⁸ and the prince of philosophy, Plato.

And who, they will say, has assigned this principate to Plato? I answer, not I, but truth, as is said—that truth which he saw and to which he came nearer than all the others, though he did not comprehend it. Moreover, there are many authorities who assign this highest rank to him: first of all Cicero¹⁴⁹ and Virgil—who does not mention his name, it is true, but was a follower

¹⁴⁷. [*Tristia* iv. 10. 42.]

¹⁴⁸. [Homer: cf. *Horace Satirae* i. 10. 50; *Ars poetica* 401; Hesiodus: *Cicero Cato maior, de senectute* 15. 54; Pythagoras: *ibid.* 7. 23, etc.; Anaxagoras: *De naturam deorum* i. 11. 26, etc.; Democritus: *De divinatione* i. 3. 5; Diogenes of Apollonia: *De natura deorum* i. 12. 29; Solon: *Augustine City of God* xviii. 25, etc.; Socrates: *Cicero Academica posteriora* i. 4. 15-16.]

¹⁴⁹. [*De oratore* i. 11. 47; *De finibus* v. 3. 7.]

of his¹⁵⁰—then Pliny¹⁵¹ and Plotinus,¹⁵² Apuleius¹⁵³ and Macrobius,¹⁵⁴ Porphyry¹⁵⁵ and Censorinus,¹⁵⁶ Josephus,¹⁵⁷ and among our Christian authors Ambrose,¹⁵⁸ Augustine,¹⁵⁹ and Jerome,¹⁶⁰ and many others still. This could easily be proved if it were not known to everybody.

And who has not assigned this principle to him except the crazy and clamorous set of Scholastics? That Averroes prefers Aristotle to all others comes from the fact that he undertook to comment upon his works and made them, as it were, his own property. These works deserve much praise, but the man who praises them is suspect. For it comes back to the old adage: "Every tradesman praises his own merchandise." There are people who do not dare to write anything of their own. Eager to write, they become interpreters of the works of others. Like those who have no notion of architecture, they make it their profession to whitewash walls. They attempt to obtain the praise they cannot hope to acquire by themselves, not even with the help of others, unless they praise above everyone else those authors and their books—the objects of their efforts—in an excited and at the same time immoderate tone and always with great exaggeration. There are a great many people who comment upon the works of others—or, should I say, devastate them?—especially nowadays. More than any other work the *Book of*

150. [Augustine *City of God* x. 30. 22-26.]

151. [Nat. Hist. vii. 30. 110.]

152. [Enneads iii. 5. 1; cf. Augustine *City of God* ix. 10; Macrobius *Scipio's Dream* i. 8. 5.]

153. [De deo Socratis, p. 691; De Platonis dogmate, passim.]

154. [Scipio's Dream ii. 15. 18.]

155. [Augustine *City of God* vii. 25; x. 9-11.]

156. [De die natali 14. 12.]

157. [Contra Apionem (in the version attributed to Rufinus) ii. 31. 37 (CSEL, XXXVII, 124).]

158. [De Abrahami ii. 7. 37 (CSEL, XXXII, 593).]

159. [City of God viii. 4; ii. 14; Contra Academicos iii. 17. 37 (CSEL, LXIII, 75).]

160. [Adversus Pelagianos i. 14 (Migne, Pat. Lat., 506 D).]

Sentences would bear witness to such devastation in a clear and complaining voice if it could speak: it has been the victim of thousands of such craftsmen.¹⁶¹ And was there ever a commentator who did not praise the work he had adopted as though it were his own, or even more profusely than he would have extolled his own, since it is a token of refined manners to praise the work of another, while it betrays vanity and haughtiness to praise one's own product?

Let me omit those who chose entire books: one of them, or the most prominent of them, is Averroes. It is well known what Macrobius, an eminent commentator, but an eminent writer too, added at the end of his commentary, in which it was his purpose to interpret not even all the books of Cicero's *Republic* but only a part of one of them: "I must indeed declare," he says, "that there is nothing more perfect than this work: it contains the whole philosophy in its complete and perfect state."¹⁶² Imagine, now, he spoke not of a part of a book but of all the books of all philosophers. Even with more words he could not have said more, for to a complete and perfect state only superfluous things can be added. Can therefore more than this complete perfection be contained in all the books that ever have been or will be written by philosophers—always provided that even all books taken together could ever contain or will contain this perfection and that something is not missing in the first of them just as it will be missing in the very last?

So much for this matter. I know—as I have said before—that I am striking the hard rock of fame in not only mentioning such great philosophers but attempting to compare them with one

161. [Peter Lombard, the great theologian of the University of Paris (d. 1160 as bishop of Paris), wrote the most authoritative textbook for a general course in theology, which was commented upon again and again by later theologians (e.g., by Thomas Aquinas). Petrarca mentions his countryman with marked national pride as one of the outstanding foreign scholars who contributed to the fame of French civilization (*Invektiva contra Gallum* 18. 71 [ed. Cocchia, *Atti della R. Acc. di Archeologia, etc.* (Napoli), VII (new ser., 1920), 184].)]

162. [Scipio's *Dream* ii. 17. 17 (the concluding sentence of this book).]