

## NOVEL VI

*A worthy man by an apt saying puts to shame the wicked hypocrisy of the religious.*

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When all had commended the virtue of the Marchioness and the spirited reproof which she administered to the King of France, Emilia, who sat next to Fiammetta, obeyed the queen's behest, and with a good courage thus began:

My story is also of a reproof, but of one administered by a worthy man, who lived the secular life, to a greedy religious, by a jibe as merry as admirable. Know then, dear ladies, that there was in our city, not long ago, a friar minor, an inquisitor in matters of heresy, who, albeit he strove might and main to pass himself off as a holy man and tenderly solicitous for the integrity of the Christian Faith, as they all do, yet he had as keen a scent for a full purse as for a deficiency of faith. Now it so chanced that his zeal was rewarded by the discovery of a good man far better furnished with money than with sense, who in an unguarded moment, not from defect of faith, but rather, perhaps from excess of hilarity, being heated with wine, had happened to say to his boon companions, that he had a wine good enough for Christ Himself to drink. Which being reported to the inquisitor, he, knowing the man to be possessed of large estates and a well-lined purse, set to work in hot haste, "cum gladiis et fustibus," to bring all the rigour of the law to bear upon him, designing thereby not to lighten the load of his victim's misbelief, but to increase the weight of his own purse by the florins, which he might, as he did, receive from him. So he cited him to his presence, and asked him whether what was alleged against him were true. The good man answered in the affirmative, and told him how it had happened. "Then," said our most holy and devout inquisitor of St. John Goldenbeard, (1) "then hast thou made Christ a wine-bibber, and a lover of rare vintages, as if he were a sot, a toper and a tavern-haunter even as one of you. And thinkest thou now by a few words of apology to pass this off as a light matter? It is no such thing as thou supposest. Thou hast deserved the fire; and we should but do our duty, did we inflict it upon thee." With these and the like words in plenty he upbraided him, bending on him meanwhile a countenance as stern as if Epicurus had stood before him denying the immortality of the soul. In short he so terrified him that the good man was fain to employ certain intermediaries to anoint his palms with a liberal allowance of St. John Goldenmouth's grease, an excellent remedy for the disease of avarice which spreads like a pestilence among the clergy, and notably among the friars minors, who dare not touch a coin, that he might deal gently with him. And great being the virtue of this ointment, albeit no mention is made thereof by Galen in any part of his Medicines, it had so gracious an effect that the threatened fire gave place to a cross, which he was to wear as if he were bound for the emprise over seas; and to make the

ensign more handsome the inquisitor ordered that it should be yellow upon a black ground. Besides which, after pocketing the coin, he kept him dangling about him for some days, bidding him by way of penance hear mass every morning at Santa Croce, and afterwards wait upon him at the breakfast-hour, after which he was free to do as he pleased for the rest of the day. All which he most carefully observed; and so it fell out that one of these mornings there were chanted at the mass at which he assisted the following words of the Gospel:

You shall receive an hundredfold and shall possess eternal life. With these words deeply graven in his memory, he presented himself, as he was bidden, before the inquisitor, where he sat taking his breakfast, and being asked whether he had heard mass that morning, he promptly answered:

"Yes, sir." And being further asked: "Heardest thou aught therein, as to which thou art in doubt, or hast thou any question to propound?" the good man responded:

"Nay indeed, doubt have I none of aught that I heard; but rather assured faith in the verity of all. One thing, however, I heard, which caused me to commiserate you and the rest of you friars very heartily, in regard of the evil plight in which you must find yourselves in the other world." "And what," said the inquisitor, "was the passage that so moved thee to commiserate us?" "Sir," rejoined the good man, "it was that passage in the Gospel which says:

"You shall receive an hundredfold." "You heard aright," said the inquisitor; "but why did the passage so affect you?" "Sir," replied the good man, "I will tell you. Since I have been in attendance here, I have seen a crowd of poor folk receive a daily dole, now of one, now of two, huge tureens of swill, being the refuse from your table, and that of the brothers of this convent; whereof if you are to receive an hundredfold in the other world, you will have so much that it will go hard but you are all drowned therein." This raised a general laugh among those who sat at the inquisitor's table, whereat the inquisitor, feeling that their gluttony and hypocrisy had received a home-thrust, was very wroth, and, but that what he had already done had not escaped censure, would have instituted fresh proceedings against him in revenge for the pleasantry with which he had rebuked the baseness of himself and his brother friars; so in impotent wrath he bade him go about his business and shew himself there no more.

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1 The fiorino d'oro bore the effigy of St. John.