

THE
COLLOQUIES
OF
Erasmus

TRANSLATED BY
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The Shipwreck

First printed in the edition of August, 1523 (Basel, Johannes Froben).

A pilot who has grown old would be a discovery even more amazing than a despot who reached old age, says a character in Plutarch (*Septem sapientium convivium*, in the Loeb edition of the *Moralia*, II, 353, 355); and a literary tradition as extensive as it was ancient testified to this conviction of the perils of voyages. We may be reasonably sure that *The Shipwreck*, one of the most popular of Erasmus' colloquies, was mainly the achievement of artistic imagination, but its themes and incidents have so many literary antecedents that a reader who took the trouble could find plenty of comparable or contributory passages in earlier texts. To take only two obvious examples, the undergirding of the ship and the hospitable reception of survivors immediately recall St. Paul's adventures as related in Acts, chaps. 27 and 28.

Use of familiar themes does not rule out the possibility that the colloquy was based on an actual shipwreck. Professor Preserved Smith not only believed it was but that the very ship, and the man who was the source of Erasmus' information, could be named (*Key to the Colloquies*, pp. 18-20). Identification depends on the assumption that "Adolph" is Adolph of Burgundy, Lord of Veere and Beveren and Admiral of Flanders, whom Erasmus had long known. In January, 1516, a Scotch merchant ship was wrecked off the coast of Friesland but the crew were saved. The ship was first seized by an Imperial prefect, next captured by the Duke of Gelderland, then recovered from him by the prefect and taken to the port of Veere. Moreover, the ship in Erasmus' dialogue has an Italian envoy to Scotland aboard. The Scotch government, at the time of the shipwreck just mentioned, was having a diplomatic correspondence with the Holy See. All this evidence, when taken together, proves, it is suggested, that Erasmus is telling a true story he must have heard from Adolph. "Proves" seems too strong a word, but there is no difficulty in supposing that some shipwreck he knew about supplied Erasmus with material for the colloquy. The question of sources, while assuredly of interest, does not affect the merits of *The Shipwreck* as a piece of dramatic dialogue or its reputation as a work remembered and imitated by other writers. The long scenes in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* IV, 18-24 (enlarged for the 1552 edition) seem to have been inspired by this colloquy (cf. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XII, 1949, pp. 97-99). Thomas Heywood turned the colloquy into English verse (*Pleasant Dialogues and Dramas*, 1637). In *The Tempest*, I, ii, 196-200, Shakespeare's lines may have derived from Erasmus' description of the "fiery ball," St. Elmo's fire. Possibly Defoe too owes something to this dialogue. That it is the source of chap. 57 in Charles

Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth* is beyond question. A reader who turns from this dialogue to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (V, 1-2) will notice similarities, but there does not appear to be any evidence of Ibsen's acquaintance with Erasmus.

To call this colloquy "the most exquisite satire on medieval doctrine ever made" (Andrew D. White, *Autobiography*, II [New York, 1917], 554) is an extravagant judgment, but it does rank with the best satirical writing produced in the sixteenth century. Naturally it pleased most those readers who shared Erasmus' scorn of pretended piety and enjoyed his ironic treatment of superstition. As might be expected, his clerical enemies at the Sorbonne and in Spain accused him of being irreverent in certain passages dealing with the invocation of saints and the Virgin Mary. His defense—that he was only attacking silly superstitions, and that anyway the scenes were dramatically appropriate—failed, as usual, to placate his critics. See LB, IX, 942C-943E; 1086C-F.

ANTONY, ADOLPH

ANTONY. Terrible tales you tell! That's what going to sea is like? God forbid any such notion should ever enter my head!

ADOLPH. Oh, no, what I've related up to this point is mere sport compared with what you'll hear now.

ANTONY. I've heard more than enough of disasters. When you're recalling them I shudder as if I myself were sharing the danger.

ADOLPH. To me, on the contrary, troubles over and done with are enjoyable.—On that same night something happened which in large part robbed the skipper of his hope of safety.

ANTONY. What, I beseech you?

ADOLPH. The night was partially clear, and on the topmast, in the "crow's-nest" (as I think they call it), stood one of the crew, looking out for land. Suddenly a fiery ball appeared beside him—a very bad sign to sailors when it's a single flame, lucky when it's double. Antiquity believed these were Castor and Pollux.

ANTONY. What's their connection with sailors? One was a horse-man, the other a boxer.

ADOLPH. This is the poets' version. The skipper, who was by the helm, spoke up: "Mate"—that's what sailors call one another—"see your company alongside there?" "I see it," the man replied, "and I hope it's good luck!" Soon the blazing ball slid down the ropes and rolled straight up to the skipper.

ANTONY. Wasn't he scared out of his wits?

ADOLPH. Sailors get used to marvels. After stopping there a moment, it rolled the whole way round the ship, then dropped through the middle hatches and disappeared. Toward noon the storm began to rage more and more.—Ever seen the Alps?

ANTONY. Yes, I've seen them.

ADOLPH. Those mountains are warts compared with the waves of the sea. Whenever we were borne on the crest, we could have touched the moon with a finger; whenever dipped, we seemed to plunge through the gaping earth to hell.

ANTONY. What fools they are who trust themselves to the sea!

ADOLPH. Since the crew's struggle with the storm was hopeless, the skipper, pale as a ghost, at last came up to us.

ANTONY. His pallor portends some great disaster.

ADOLPH. "Friends," he says, "I'm no longer master of my ship; the winds have won. The only thing left to do is to put our hope in God and each one prepare himself for the end."

ANTONY. Truly a Scythian speech.

ADOLPH. "But first of all," he says, "the ship must be unloaded; deadly necessity compels it. Better to save life at the cost of goods than for both to perish together." The plain fact convinced them. A lot of luggage filled with costly wares was tossed overboard.

ANTONY. This was sacrificing for sure!

ADOLPH. On board was a certain Italian who had served as legate to the King of Scotland. He had a chest full of silver plate, rings, cloth, and silk robes.

ANTONY. He didn't want to come to terms with the sea?

ADOLPH. No, instead he wanted to go down with his beloved treasures or else be saved along with them. So he protested.

ANTONY. What did the skipper do?

ADOLPH. "We're quite willing to let you perish alone with your goods," said he, "but it's not fair for all of us to be endangered because of your chest. Rather, we'll throw you and the chest together into the sea."

ANTONY. True sailor's talk!

ADOLPH. So the Italian, too, threw his goods overboard, cursing away by heaven and hell because he had entrusted his life to so barbarous an element.

ANTONY. I recognize the Italian accent.

ADOLPH. Soon afterward the winds, unappeased by our offerings, broke the ropes and tore the sails to pieces.

ANTONY. Catastrophe!

ADOLPH. At that moment the skipper comes to us again.

ANTONY. To make a speech?

ADOLPH. "Friends"—he begins by way of greeting—"the hour warns each of us to commend himself to God and prepare for death." Questioned by some familiar with seamanship as to how many hours

he thought he could keep the ship afloat, he replied that he couldn't promise anything, but not more than three hours.

ANTONY. This speech was even sterner than the first one.

ADOLPH. After saying this, he orders all the shrouds to be slashed and the mast sawn off down to its socket and thrown into the sea, together with the spars.

ANTONY. Why this?

ADOLPH. With the sail ruined or torn, the mast was a useless burden. Our whole hope was in the tiller.

ANTONY. What about the passengers meanwhile?

ADOLPH. There you'd have seen what a wretched plight we were in: the sailors singing *Salve Regina*, praying to the Virgin Mother, calling her Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation, flattering her with many other titles the Sacred Scriptures nowhere assign to her.

ANTONY. What has she to do with the sea? She never went voyaging, I believe.

ADOLPH. Formerly Venus was protectress of sailors, because she was believed to have been born of the sea. Since she gave up guarding them, the Virgin Mother has succeeded this mother who was not a virgin.

ANTONY. You're joking.

ADOLPH. Prostrating themselves on the deck, some worshiped the sea, pouring whatever oil they had on the waves, flattering it no differently from the way we do a wrathful sovereign.

ANTONY. What did they say?

ADOLPH. "O most merciful sea, O most kind sea, O most splendid sea, O most lovely sea, have pity on us! Save us!" Many songs of this kind they sang to the sea—which was deaf.

ANTONY. Absurd superstition! What did the rest do?

ADOLPH. Some did nothing but get sick. Many made vows. There was an Englishman who promised heaps of gold to the Virgin of Walsingham if he reached shore alive. Some promised many things to the wood of the Cross at such and such a place; others, again, to that in some other place. The same with respect to the Virgin Mary, who reigns in many places; and they think the vow worthless unless you specify the place.

ANTONY. Ridiculous! As if saints don't dwell in heaven.

ADOLPH. Some pledged themselves to become Carthusians. There was one who promised to journey to St. James at Compostella barefoot, bareheaded, clad only in a coat of mail, begging his bread besides.

ANTONY. Did nobody remember Christopher?

ADOLPH. I couldn't help laughing as I listened to one chap, who in a loud voice (for fear he wouldn't be heard) promised a wax taper as big as himself to the Christopher in the tallest church in Paris—a mountain rather than a statue. While he was proclaiming this at the top of his lungs, insisting on it again and again, an acquaintance who chanced to be standing by nudged him with his elbow and cautioned: "Be careful what you promise. Even if you sold all your goods at auction, you couldn't pay for it." Then the other, lowering his voice—so Christopher wouldn't overhear him, of course!—said, "Shut up, you fool. Do you suppose I'm serious? If I once touch land, I won't give him a tallow candle."

ANTONY. Blockhead! Batavian, I suppose.

ADOLPH. No, a Zeelander.

ANTONY. I'm surprised nobody thought of the apostle Paul, who was once shipwrecked himself, and when the ship broke leaped overboard and reached land. No stranger to misfortune, he knew how to help those in distress.

ADOLPH. Paul wasn't mentioned.

ANTONY. Did they pray all the while?

ADOLPH. Strenuously. One chanted *Salve Regina*, another *Credo in Deum*. Some had certain queer beads, like charms, to ward off danger.

ANTONY. How devout men are made by suffering! In prosperity the thought of God or saint never enters their heads. What were you doing all this time? Making vows to any of the saints?

ADOLPH. Not at all.

ANTONY. Why?

ADOLPH. Because I don't make deals with saints. For what else is that but a bargain according to the form "I'll give this if you do that" or "I'll do this if you'll do that"; "I'll give a taper if I can swim"; "I'll go to Rome if you save me."

ANTONY. But you called on some saint for help?

ADOLPH. Not even that.

ANTONY. But why?

ADOLPH. Because heaven's a large place. If I entrust my safety to some saint—St. Peter, for example, who perhaps will be first to hear, since he stands at the gate—I may be dead before he meets God and pleads my cause.

ANTONY. What did you do, then?

ADOLPH. Went straight to the Father himself, reciting the *Pater Noster*. No saint hears sooner than he or more willingly grants what is asked.

ANTONY. But didn't your conscience accuse you when you did

this? Weren't you afraid to entreat the Father, whom you had offended by so many sins?

ADOLPH. To speak frankly, my conscience did deter me somewhat. But I soon recovered my spirits, thinking to myself, "No father is so angry with his son that, if he sees him in danger in a stream or lake, he won't grasp him by the hair and pull him out." Of all the passengers, none behaved more calmly than a certain woman who was suckling a baby.

ANTONY. What did she do?

ADOLPH. She was the only one who didn't scream, weep, or make promises; she simply prayed in silence, clasping her little boy. —While the ship was continually battered by the sea, the skipper undergirded it with ropes both fore and aft, for fear it might break to pieces.

ANTONY. Miserable protection!

ADOLPH. Meantime an old priest, a man of sixty named Adam, jumped up. Stripped to his underclothes, and with his shoes and leggings removed, he urged us all to prepare likewise for swimming. And standing so in the middle of the ship, he preached to us a sermon from Gerson on the five truths concerning the benefit of confession. He urged everyone to be ready both for life and for death. A Dominican was there, too. Those who wished confessed to these two.

ANTONY. What did you do?

ADOLPH. Seeing everything in an uproar, I confessed silently to God, condemning my unrighteousness before him and imploring his mercy.

ANTONY. Where would you have gone had you died in that condition?

ADOLPH. That I left to God the Judge, for I was unwilling to be judge of my own cause; nevertheless a strong hope possessed my mind the whole time. —While all this is going on, the captain returns to us in tears. "Get ready," says he, "because the ship will be useless to us in a quarter of an hour." It was already shattered in some places and drawing water. Soon afterward a sailor reports seeing a church tower in the distance and beseeches us to appeal to whichever saint took that church under his protection. Everyone falls to his knees and prays to the unknown saint.

ANTONY. If you had invoked him by name, he might have heard.

ADOLPH. We didn't know his name. As much as he could, meanwhile, the skipper steered the ship in that direction. By now it was breaking up, taking in water everywhere, and clearly about to fall to pieces had it not been undergirded with ropes.

ANTONY. A bad state of affairs!

ADOLPH. We were carried far enough in for the inhabitants of the place to see our plight. Groups of them rushed to the shore, and taking off hats and coats and sticking them on poles urged us toward themselves and by lifting their arms to heaven indicated their pity for our lot.

ANTONY. I'm waiting to hear what happened.

ADOLPH. The whole ship was filled with water now, so that thereafter we would be no safer in ship than in sea.

ANTONY. At that moment you had to fall back on your last hope.

ADOLPH. On suffering, rather. The crew released the lifeboat and lowered it into the sea. Everyone tried to hurl himself into it, the sailors protesting in the uproar that the lifeboat would not hold such a crowd, but that everybody should grab what he could and swim. The situation did not allow leisurely plans. One person snatches an oar, another a boathook, another a tub, another a bucket, another a plank; and, each relying on his own resources, they commit themselves to the waves.

ANTONY. What happened during this time to that poor woman, the only one who did not weep and wail?

ADOLPH. She was the first of them all to reach shore.

ANTONY. How could she do that?

ADOLPH. We had put her on a warped plank and tied her in such a way that she couldn't easily fall off. We gave her a small board to use as a paddle, wished her luck, and shoved her off into the waves, pushing with a pole to get her clear of the ship, where the danger lay. Holding her baby with her left hand, she paddled with the right.

ANTONY. Brave woman!

ADOLPH. Since nothing else remained, one man seized a wooden statue of the Virgin Mother, now rotten and mouse-eaten, and, putting his arms around it, began to swim.

ANTONY. Did the lifeboat come through safely?

ADOLPH. The first to go down. And thirty people had thrown themselves into it.

ANTONY. What mishap caused that?

ADOLPH. Before it could get away it was overturned by the lurching of the big ship.

ANTONY. A cruel business! What then?

ADOLPH. While looking out for others, I nearly perished myself.

ANTONY. How so?

ADOLPH. Because there was nothing left for me to swim on.

ANTONY. Cork would have been useful there.

ADOLPH. In that emergency I would rather have had plain cork tree than golden candlestick. Casting about, I finally thought of the stump of the mast. Since I couldn't pry it loose by myself, I enlisted the help of another man. Supporting ourselves on this, we put to sea, I holding the right end and he the left. While we were tossing about in this way, that priest who preached on board threw himself in our midst—on our shoulders. Big fellow, too. "Who's the third?" we yell. "He'll be the death of us all." He, on the other hand, says calmly, "Cheer up, there's plenty of room. God will help us."

ANTONY. Why was he so late in starting to swim?

ADOLPH. Oh, he was to be in the lifeboat along with the Dominican (for everybody conceded this much honor to him), but although they had confessed to each other on the ship, nevertheless some condition—I don't know what—had been forgotten. There on the edge of the ship they confess anew, and each lays his hand on the other. While they're doing this, the lifeboat goes down. Adam told me this.

ANTONY. What became of the Dominican?

ADOLPH. According to Adam, after entreating the aid of the saints he threw off his clothes and began to swim.

ANTONY. Which saints did he invoke?

ADOLPH. Dominic, Thomas, Vincent, and I don't know which Peter, but first and foremost he placed his trust in Catherine of Siena.

ANTONY. Christ didn't come to mind?

ADOLPH. This is what the priest told me.

ANTONY. He'd have swum better if he hadn't thrown off his sacred cowl. With that put aside, how could Catherine of Siena recognize him?—But go on with what happened to you.

ADOLPH. While we were still tossing beside the ship, which was rolling from side to side at the will of the waves, the broken rudder smashed the thigh of the man who was holding on to the left end of the stump. So he was torn away. The priest, saying a prayer *Requiem aeternam* for him, took his place, urging me to keep hold of my end with confidence and kick my feet vigorously. We were swallowing a lot of salt water all this while. Thus Neptune saw to it that we had not only a salty bath but even a salty drink, though the priest showed us a remedy for that.

ANTONY. What, please?

ADOLPH. Every time a wave came rushing upon us, he turned the back of his head to it and kept his mouth closed.

ANTONY. That's a doughty old fellow you describe.

ADOLPH. When we'd made some progress after swimming a

while, the priest, who was very tall, said, "Cheer up, I'm touching bottom!" I didn't dare hope for such great luck. "We're too far from shore to hope for bottom." "Oh, no," he replied, "I feel land with my feet." "Maybe it's something from the chests that the sea has rolled this way." "No," he said, "I feel land plainly by the scraping of my toes." After we had swum a while longer in this direction and he again touched bottom, "Do what you think best," he said, "I'm giving up the whole mast to you and trusting myself to the bottom"; and thereupon, after waiting for the waves to subside, he went on foot as fast as he could. When the waves overtook him again, he resisted by clasping his knees with his hands and putting his head under water, as divers and ducks do; when the waves receded, up he popped and moved on. When I saw he was successful at this, I imitated him. Standing on the coast were men—hardy fellows and used to the water—who by means of extremely long poles, held out from one to the other, braced themselves against the force of the waves; so that the one farthest out held his pole to the swimmer. When this was grasped, all heaved toward shore and the swimmer was hauled safely to dry land. A number were rescued by this device.

ANTONY. How many?

ADOLPH. Seven, but two of these died when brought to a fire.

ANTONY. How many were you in the ship?

ADOLPH. Fifty-eight.

ANTONY. O cruel sea! At least it might have been satisfied with a tenth, which is enough for priests. From so large a number how few returned!

ADOLPH. We were treated with wonderful kindness by the people there, who looked after our needs with astonishing eagerness: lodging, fire, food, clothing, money for travel.

ANTONY. What people were they?

ADOLPH. Hollanders.

ANTONY. No people could be more kindly, though they do have savage neighbors. I guess you won't visit Neptune very soon again after this.

ADOLPH. No, not unless God takes my reason from me.

ANTONY. And I for my part would rather hear such tales than experience the events at first hand.

EUTRAP. What's that?

FAB. First, that you advise me about the care of the child's health; then, when he's stronger, about what steps to take to develop his moral character.

EUTRAP. I'll be glad to do that insofar as I know how, but in our next chat. Just now I'm off to plead with your husband and parents.

FAB. I hope and pray your plea will please!

A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake

First printed in the edition of February, 1526 (Basel, Johannes Froben).

This famous colloquy was published before the typical doctrines, policies, or activities of Continental reformers received support or approval of any kind from the English government or churchmen, yet certain of the religious institutions and customs described here came to an end in England sooner than its author or the earliest readers of the dialogue could have foreseen. It anticipates in striking fashion some of the very arguments used by Henry VIII and the English reformers, after 1535, to justify the dissolution of monastic houses. As late as 1531 attacks on pilgrimages were punished severely. In 1527, Thomas Bilney of Cambridge, who had preached against relics, images, and pilgrimages, was arrested for heresy but recanted. Four years later he began to preach more boldly, was seized as a relapsed heretic, and burned. Yet in that same year, 1531, Convocation acknowledged Henry VIII as "Supreme Head" of the Church in England, "as far as the law of Christ allows" (this qualifying clause was omitted in the Supremacy Act of 1534), and in the next three years Parliament and Convocation, under pressure by the Crown, abolished the papal prerogatives in England. In 1536 the government began to suppress monasteries, destroy their shrines, and confiscate their treasures. (Note Erasmus' prediction in *The Godly Feast*, p. 70.) The first Royal Injunctions of 1536 forbade the clergy to "set forth or extol any images, relics, or miracles for any superstition or lucre" or to "allure the people by enticements to the pilgrimage of any saint"; the second injunction, 1538, required that "feigned images" be removed (*Documents Illustrative of English Church History*, ed. H. Gee and W. J. Hardy [London, 1896], pp. 271, 277).

In 1536 or 1537 an anonymous English translation of Erasmus' colloquy appeared as *The Pilgrimage of Pure Devotion* (text in *The Earliest English Translations of Erasmus' Colloquia*, ed. H. de Vocht [Louvain, 1928], pp.

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101-95). Since it is most unlikely that a work so useful as propaganda would have been permitted to come out at this time without approval of the government, there is good reason to suppose Cromwell or his agents had it made. It was not the only colloquy convenient for propaganda (see p. 359, on *The Funeral*).

Official or semi-official sponsorship of translations of his writings was but one of many ways in which the scholarship and ideas of Erasmus came to influence the Tudor Church. To students of sixteenth and seventeenth-century intellectual and religious history that influence seems unmistakable, though we do not yet have a thorough study of it. Nor can we answer the interesting question of whether Henry VIII had read *Perigrinatio religionis ergo*. If the history of Erasmus' reputation in England and his contacts with the king and the court be taken into consideration, there is nothing against surmising that Henry had done so. He was certainly familiar with other writings by Erasmus.

Unlike the earlier and briefer *Rash Vows* (pp. 4-7), to which it is superior in every respect, *A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake* is based on actual experiences, though undoubtedly these are transformed by artistic imagination. Some critics have complained that Erasmus must be an unreliable witness. To expect the colloquy to have the accuracy of a guide-book is to misunderstand the author's purposes. His antecedent opinions on pilgrimages and relics, plus his desire to tell a good story, make him a somewhat prejudiced reporter; and we should remember that he did not write the colloquy until long after his visits and so could have forgotten details. The main points, the intention, and the tone are clear enough.

Erasmus had visited the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in the summer of 1512 and possibly again in 1514. He had likewise composed a Greek poem in honor of the Blessed Virgin, as Ogygius had done (p. 299; text of Erasmus' poem in *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus*, ed. C. Reedijk [Leiden, 1956], p. 303). The date of his visit to the other celebrated shrine, that of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury, is uncertain but must have been between the summer of 1512 and the summer of 1514. "Gratianus Pullus," who accompanied him and was so indignant about relics (pp. 309, 310) is John Colet; see the introduction to *The Whole Duty of Youth*, pp. 31-32. Robert Aldridge, who acted as interpreter, was a Cambridge scholar and associate of Erasmus; in later life he became Provost of Eton and Bishop of Carlisle.

The letter of Mary to "Glaucoplurus," lamenting the depredations of zealots who strip her churches of wealth, was suggested by recent events in Zürich, where the Zwinglians and their supporters were destroying images in churches. "Glaucoplurus" is a Greek version of "Ulrich," Zwingli's first name. In *De utilitate Colloquiorum* (p. 631), Erasmus says this colloquy first of all rebukes iconoclasts. So it does, but this defense begs the point, for the entire passage in which the letter is included is ironic. Furthermore the passage is brief by contrast with the amount of space given to the other two topics which, as *De utilitate Colloquiorum* observes, are treated in the colloquy: the spiritual worth or harm of pilgrimages and the false claims made for relics.

On images, pilgrimages, invocation of saints, and relics, Erasmus wrote much to which orthodoxy could not object, but much too that gave offense; some pages in *The Shipwreck*, for example (pp. 138-46). On these subjects, as so often happened, it was not merely his statements themselves but their insinuations or tone that pleased many readers and provoked many others. That images provided "silent poetry," he granted (*De amabili ecclesiae concordia*, LB, v, 501B; *Symbolum*, *ibid.*, v, 1187D), but he deplored and ridiculed superstitions and abuses attached to the *cultus divorum* (cf. *EE*, vii, 460.26-461.29). Superstition prevails "when everything is sought of saints as though Christ were dead, or when we beg the help of saints as though they were more compassionate than God" (*ibid.*, ix, 163.220-21).

"Menedemus" suggests "stay-at-home." It was likewise the name of two ancient philosophers (see Erasmus' *Appophthegmata*, LB, iv, 317D, 332E-333C, 339D-E, 350C). "Ogygius" may have been named from Ogygia, a western island mentioned in the *Odyssey*; or it may stand for "Boeotian," i.e., "simpleminded," "stupid." Ogygius was the mythical founder of Thebes in Boeotia. Cf. *Adagia*, ii, ix, 50 (LB, ii, 674B-C).

For information on Walsingham and Canterbury in Erasmus' day the reader may consult the notes to J. G. Nichols' translation of this colloquy (second edition, London, 1875); C. E. Woodruff and W. Danks, *Memorials of the Cathedral and Priory of Christ in Canterbury* (London, 1912); and J. C. Dickinson, *The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham* (Cambridge, 1956).

MENEDEMUS, OGYGIUS

MENEDEMUS. What marvel is this? Don't I see my neighbor Ogygius, whom nobody's laid eyes on for six whole months? I heard he was dead. It's his very self, unless I'm losing my mind completely. I'll go up to him and say hello. —Greetings, Ogygius.

OGYGIUS. Same to you, Menedemus.

MEN. Where in the world do you return from, safe and sound? A sad rumor spread here that you'd sailed in Stygian waters.

OGYGIUS. No, thank heaven; I've seldom enjoyed better health.

MEN. I hope you'll always be able to refute silly rumors of that sort! But what's this fancy outfit? You're ringed with scallop shells, choked with tin and leaden images on every side, decked out with straw necklaces, and you've snake eggs on your arms.¹

OGYGIUS. I've been on a visit to St. James of Compostella and, on my way back, to the famous Virgin-by-the-Sea, in England; or rather I revisited her, since I had gone there three years earlier.

¹ Shells, traditional symbols of pilgrims, were connected especially with St. James and the pilgrimage to Compostella. The "snake eggs" are beads, i.e., a rosary.

- MEN. Out of curiosity, I dare say.
 OGYG. On the contrary, out of devotion.
 MEN. Greek letters, I suppose, taught you that devotion.
 OGYG. My wife's mother had bound herself by a vow that if her daughter gave birth to a boy and he lived, I would promptly pay my respects to St. James and thank him in person.
 MEN. Did you greet the saint only in your own name and your mother-in-law's?
 OGYG. Oh, no, in the whole family's.
 MEN. Well, I imagine your family would have been no less safe even if you had left James ungreeted. But do please tell me: what answer did he make when you thanked him?
 OGYG. None, but he seemed to smile as I offered my gift, nodded his head slightly, and at the same time held out these scallop shells.
 MEN. Why does he give these rather than something else?
 OGYG. Because he has plenty of them; the sea nearby supplies them.
 MEN. Generous saint, who both delivers those in labor and gives presents to callers! But what new kind of vowing is this, that some lazy person lays the work on others? If you bound yourself by a vow that should *your* affairs prosper, I would fast twice a week, do you think I'd do what you had vowed?
 OGYG. No, I don't, even if you'd sworn in your own name. For you enjoy mocking the saints. But she's my mother-in-law; custom had to be kept. You're acquainted with women's whims, and besides I had an interest in it too.
 MEN. If you hadn't kept her vow, what risk would there have been?
 OGYG. The saint couldn't have sued me at law, I admit, but he could have been deaf thereafter to my prayers or secretly have brought some disaster upon my family. You know the ways of the mighty.
 MEN. Tell me, how is the excellent James?
 OGYG. Much colder than usual.
 MEN. Why? Old age?
 OGYG. Joker! You know saints don't grow old. But this new-fangled notion that pervades the whole world results in his being greeted more seldom than usual. And if people do come, they merely greet him; they make no offering at all, or only a very slight one, declaring it would be better to contribute that money to the poor.
 MEN. A wicked notion!
 OGYG. And thus so great an apostle, accustomed to shine from

- head to foot in gold and jewels, now stands a wooden figure with hardly a tallow candle to his name.
 MEN. If what I hear is true, there's danger that other saints may come to the same pass.
 OGYG. More than that: a letter is going round which the Virgin Mary herself wrote on this very theme.
 MEN. Which Mary?
 OGYG. The one called Mary a Lapide.
 MEN. At Basel, unless I'm mistaken.
 OGYG. Yes.
 MEN. Then it's a stony saint you tell me of. But to whom did she write?
 OGYG. She herself gives the name in the letter.
 MEN. Who delivered the letter?
 OGYG. Undoubtedly an angel, who placed it on the pulpit from which the recipient preaches. And to prevent suspicion of fraud, you shall see the very autograph.
 MEN. So you recognize the hand of the angel who is the Virgin's secretary?
 OGYG. Why, of course.
 MEN. By what mark?
 OGYG. I've read Bede's epitaph,¹ which was engraved by an angel. The shape of the letters agrees entirely. Also I've read the manuscript message to St. Giles:² They agree. Aren't these facts proof enough?
 MEN. Is one allowed to see it?
 OGYG. Yes, if you'll promise to keep your mouth shut about it.
 MEN. Oh, to tell me is to tell a stone.
 OGYG. But some stones are notorious for giving secrets away.
 MEN. Then tell it to a deaf man if you don't trust a stone.
 OGYG. On that condition I'll read it. Lend me your ears.
 MEN. I've lent them.
 OGYG. "Mary, Mother of Jesus, to Glaucoplutus: greetings. Know that I am deeply grateful to you, a follower of Luther, for busily persuading people that the invocation of saints is useless. Up to this time I was all but exhausted by the shameless entreaties of mortals. They demanded everything from me alone, as if my Son were always a baby (because he is carved and painted as such at my bosom), still needing his mother's consent and not daring to deny a person's prayer;

¹ In the abbey church at Durham.

² When St. Giles interceded with God for the remission of a king's sins, an angel appeared and placed on the altar a scroll which announced that the sins were forgiven. See the *Legenda aurea* (Sept. 1).

fearful, that is, that if he did deny the petitioner something, I for my part would refuse him the breast when he was thirsty. And sometimes they ask of a Virgin what a modest youth would hardly dare ask of a bawd—things I'm ashamed to put into words. Sometimes a merchant, off for Spain to make a fortune, commits to me the chastity of his mistress. And a nun who has thrown off her veil and is preparing to run away entrusts me with her reputation for virtue—which she herself intends to sell. A profane soldier, hired to butcher people, cries upon me, 'Blessed Virgin, give me rich booty.' A gambler cries, 'Help me, blessed saint; I'll share my winnings with you!' And if they lose at dice, they abuse me outrageously and curse me because I wouldn't favor their wickedness. A woman who abandons herself to a life of shame cries, 'Give me a fat income!' If I refuse anything, they protest at once, 'Then you're no mother of mercy.'

"Some people's prayers are not so irreverent as absurd. An unmarried girl cries, 'Mary, give me a rich and handsome bridegroom.' A married one, 'Give me fine children.' A pregnant woman, 'Give me an easy delivery.' An old woman, 'Give me a long life without a cough or a thirst.' A doddering old man, 'Let me grow young again.' A philosopher, 'Give me power to contrive insoluble problems.' A priest, 'Give me a rich benefice.' A bishop, 'Preserve my church.' A sailor, 'Give me prosperous sailings.' A governor, 'Show me thy Son before I die.' A courtier, 'Grant that at the point of death I may confess sincerely.' A countryman, 'Send me a heavy rain.' A country woman, 'Save the flock and herd from harm.' If I deny anything, straightway I'm cruel. If I refer to my Son, I hear, 'He wills whatever you will.' So am I alone, a woman and a virgin, to assist those who are sailing, fighting, trading, dicing, marrying, bearing children; to assist governors, kings, and farmers?

"What I've described is very little in comparison with what I endure. But nowadays I'm troubled less by these matters. For this reason I would give you my heartiest thanks, did not this advantage bring a greater disadvantage along with it. I have more peace but less honor and wealth. Formerly I was hailed as 'Queen of Heaven, mistress of the world'; now I hear scarcely an 'Ave Maria' even from a few. Formerly I was clothed in gold and jewels; I had many changes of dress; I had golden and jeweled offerings made to me. Now I have hardly half a cloak to wear, and that one is mouse-eaten. My annual income is scarcely enough to keep the wretched sacristan who lights the little lamp or tallow candle. And yet all these hardships I could have borne if you weren't said to be plotting even greater ones. You're trying, they say, to remove from the churches whatever belongs to the saints. Now just consider what you're doing. Other saints have means of avenging

injuries. If Peter is ejected from a church, he can in turn shut the gate of heaven against you. Paul has a sword; Bartholomew is armed with a knife. Under his monk's robe William is completely armed, nor does he lack a heavy lance. And what could you do against George, with his horse and his coat of mail, his spear and his terrible sword? Antony's not defenseless either: he has his sacred fire. Others likewise have weapons or mischiefs they direct against anybody they please. But me, however defenseless, you shall not eject unless at the same time you eject my Son whom I hold in my arms. From him I will not be parted. Either you expel him along with me, or you leave us both here, unless you prefer to have a church without Christ. I wanted you to know this. Think carefully what to answer, for my mind is absolutely made up.

"From our stony house, on the Calends of August, in the year of my Son's passion 1524, I, the Virgin a Lapide, have signed this with my own hand."

MEN. A dreadful, threatening letter indeed! Glaucoptulus will take warning, I imagine.

OGYG. If he's wise.

MEN. Why didn't the excellent James write to him on this same subject?

OGYG. I don't know, except that he's rather far away, and all letters are intercepted nowadays.

MEN. But what fortune brought you back to England?

OGYG. An unexpectedly favorable breeze carried me there, and I had virtually promised the Virgin-by-the-Sea that I would pay her another visit in two years.

MEN. What were you going to ask of her?

OGYG. Nothing new, just the usual things: family safe and sound, a larger fortune, a long and happy life in this world, and eternal bliss in the next.

MEN. Couldn't the Virgin Mother here at home see to those matters? At Antwerp she has a church much grander than the one by the sea.

OGYG. I can't deny that, but different things are bestowed in different places, either because she prefers this or (since she is obliging) because she accommodates herself to our feelings in this respect.

MEN. I've often heard about James, but I beg you to describe for me the domain of the Virgin-by-the-Sea.

OGYG. Well, I'll do the best I can in brief. She has the greatest fame throughout England, and you would not readily find anyone in that island who hoped for prosperity unless he greeted her annually with a small gift, according to his means.

MEN. Where does she live?

OGYG. By the northwest coast of England, only about three miles from the sea. The village has scarcely any means of support apart from the tourist trade. There's a college of canons, to whom, however, the Latins add the title of Regulars: an order midway between monks and the canons called Seculars.

MEN. You tell me of amphibians, such as the beaver.

OGYG. Yes, and the crocodile. But details aside, I'll try to satisfy you in a few words. In unfavorable matters, they're canons; in favorable ones, monks.

MEN. So far you're telling me a riddle.

OGYG. But I'll add a precise illustration. If the Roman pontiff assailed all monks with a thunderbolt,¹ then they'd be canons, not monks. Yet if he permitted all monks to take wives, then they'd be monks.

MEN. Strange favors. I wish they'd take mine, too.

OGYG. But to get to the point. This college depends almost entirely on the Virgin's generosity for its support. The larger gifts are reserved, to be sure, but any small change, anything of trifling value, goes toward feeding the community and their head, whom they call the prior.

MEN. Do they live holy lives?

OGYG. They're not without praise. They're richer in piety than income. The church is fine and splendid, but the Virgin doesn't dwell there; in honor of her Son she yields that to him. She has her own church, that she may be on the right of her Son.

MEN. The right? Which direction does the Son face, then?

OGYG. I'm glad you remind me. When he faces west he has his mother on his right; when he turns to the east she's on his left. However, she doesn't dwell here, either, for the building is not yet finished, and the place is quite airy—windows and doors open, and Ocean, father of the winds, nearby.

MEN. Too bad. So where does she live?

OGYG. In that church, which as I said is unfinished, is a small chapel built on a wooden platform. Visitors are admitted through a narrow door on each side. There's very little light: only what comes from tapers, which have a most pleasing scent.

MEN. All this is appropriate to religion.

OGYG. Yes, and if you peered inside, Menedemus, you would say it was the abode of the saints, so dazzling is it with jewels, gold, and silver.

¹ A slip; Walsingham is in northern Norfolk.

² Excommunication.

MEN. You make me impatient to go there.

OGYG. You won't regret the trip.

MEN. Is there no holy oil there?

OGYG. Silly! That oil exudes only from the tombs of saints, such as Andrew and Catherine. Mary isn't buried.

MEN. My mistake, I admit. But finish your story.

OGYG. As the cult spreads more widely, different things are displayed in different places.

MEN. In order, perhaps, that the giving may be more generous; as it is said, "Loot quickly comes when sought by many hands."

OGYG. And custodians are always present.

MEN. Some of the canons?

OGYG. No, they're not used, lest on a favorable opportunity for religious devotion they might stray from devoutness, and while honoring the Virgin pay too little regard to their own virginity. Only in the interior chapel, which I said is the inner sanctum of the Holy Virgin, a canon stands by the altar.

MEN. What for?

OGYG. To receive and keep the offering.

MEN. Do people contribute whether they want to or not?

OGYG. Not at all, but a certain sense of duty impels some to give when a person's standing by; they wouldn't give if no one were present to watch them. Or sometimes they give more liberally than they would otherwise.

MEN. That's human nature. I'm no stranger to it.

OGYG. Nay, there are some so devoted to the Most Holy Virgin that while they pretend to lay an offering on the altar, they steal, with astonishing nimbleness, what somebody else had placed there.

MEN. Suppose there's no witness: would the Virgin strike them dead on the spot?

OGYG. Why would the Virgin do that, any more than does the heavenly Father himself, whom men aren't afraid to rob of treasures, even digging through the church wall for the purpose?

MEN. I can't tell which to be the more astonished at, their impious audacity or God's mildness.

OGYG. Then, on the north side—not of the church (don't mistake me) but of the wall enclosing the whole area adjacent to the church—is a certain gateway. It has a tiny door, the kind noblemen's gates have, so that whoever wants to enter must first expose his shins to danger and then stoop besides.

MEN. Certainly it wouldn't be safe to go at an enemy through such a door.

OGYG. Right. The custodian told me that once a knight on

horseback escaped through this door from the hands of an enemy who was on the point of overtaking him in his flight. In despair he commended himself then and there to the Holy Virgin, who was close by. For he had determined to take refuge at her altar if the door was open. And mark this wonder: suddenly the knight was entirely within the churchyard and the other man outside, furious.

MEN. And was this wondrous tale of his believed?

OGYG. Of course.

MEN. A rational chap like you wouldn't accept it so easily.

OGYG. He showed me on the door a copper plate, fastened by nails, containing a likeness of the knight who was saved, dressed in the English fashion of that period as we see it in old pictures—and if pictures don't lie, barbers had a hard time in those days, and so did weavers and dyers.

MEN. How so?

OGYG. Because the knight was bearded like a goat, and his clothing didn't have a single pleat and was so tight that it made the body itself thinner. There was another plate, too, showing the size and shape of the shrine.

MEN. You had no right to doubt after that!

OGYG. Beneath the little door was an iron grating, admitting you only on foot. It was not seemly that a horse should afterward trample the spot the horseman had consecrated to the Virgin.

MEN. And rightly consecrated.

OGYG. To the east is a small chapel, filled with marvels. I betake myself to it. Another custodian receives us. After we've prayed briefly, we're immediately shown the joint of a human finger (the largest of three). I kiss it and then ask whose relics these are. "Saint Peter's," he says. "Not the apostle Peter's?" "Yes." Then looking at the great size of the joint, which might have been a giant's, I said, "Peter must have been an extremely big man." At this one of my companions burst into a loud laugh, which annoyed me no end, for if he had been quiet the attendant would have kept none of the relics from our inspection. However, we appeased him with some coins.

In front of the little building was a structure that during the winter-time (he said), when everything was covered by snow, had been brought there suddenly from far away. Under this were two wells, filled to the top. They say the stream of water is sacred to the Holy Virgin. It's a wonderfully cold fluid, good for headache and stomach troubles.

MEN. If cold water cures headache and stomach troubles, oil will put out fire next.

OGYG. You're hearing about a miracle, my good friend—besides, what would be miraculous about cold water quenching thirst?

MEN. Clearly this is only one part of the story.

OGYG. That stream of water, they declared, suddenly shot up from the ground at the command of the Most Holy Virgin. Inspecting everything carefully, I inquired how many years it was since the little house had been brought there. "Some ages," he replied. "In any event," I said, "the walls don't look very old." He didn't dissent. "Even these wooden posts don't look old." He didn't deny they had been placed there recently, and the fact was self-evident. "Then," I said, "the roof and thatch of the house seem rather recent." He agreed. "Not even these crossbeams, nor the very rafters supporting the roof, appear to have been put here many years ago." He nodded. "But since no part of the building has survived, how is it known for certain," I asked, "that this is the cottage brought here from so far away?"

MEN. How did the attendant get out of that tangle, if you please?

OGYG. Why, he hurriedly showed us an old, worn-out bearskin fastened to posts and almost laughed at us for our dullness in being slow to see such a clear proof. So, being persuaded, and excusing our stupidity, we turned to the heavenly milk of the Blessed Virgin.

MEN. O Mother most like her Son! He left us so much of his blood on earth; she left so much of her milk that it's scarcely credible a woman with only one child could have so much, even if the child had drunk none of it.

OGYG. The same thing is said about the Lord's Cross, which is exhibited publicly and privately in so many places that if the fragments were joined together they'd seem a full load for a freighter. And yet the Lord carried his whole cross.

MEN. Doesn't it seem amazing to you, too?

OGYG. Unusual, perhaps, but by no means amazing, since the Lord, who multiplies these things as he wills, is omnipotent.

MEN. You explain it reverently, but for my part I'm afraid many such affairs are contrived for profit.

OGYG. I don't think God will stand for anybody mocking him in that way.

MEN. On the contrary, though Mother and Son and Father and Spirit are robbed by the sacrilegious, sometimes they don't even bestir themselves slightly enough to frighten off the criminals by a nod or a noise. So great is the mildness of divinity.

OGYG. That's true. But hear the rest. This milk is kept on the high altar, in the midst of which is Christ; on the right, for the sake of honor, is his Mother. For the milk represents his Mother.

MEN. So it's in plain sight.

OGYG. Enclosed in crystal, that is.

MEN. Therefore liquid.

OGYG. What do you mean, liquid, when it flowed fifteen hundred years ago? It's hard: you'd say powdered chalk, tempered with white of egg.

MEN. Why don't they display it exposed?

OGYG. To save the virginal milk from being defiled by the kisses of men.

MEN. Well said, for in my opinion there are those who would bring neither clean nor chaste mouths to it.

OGYG. When the custodian saw us, he rushed up, donned a linen vestment, threw a sacred stole round his neck, prostrated himself devoutly, and adored. Next he held out the sacred milk for us to kiss. We prostrated ourselves devoutly on the lowest step of the altar and, after first saluting Christ, uttered to the Virgin a short prayer I had prepared for this occasion: "Virgin Mother, who hast had the honor of suckling at thy maidenly breast the Lord of heaven and earth, thy Son Jesus, we pray that, cleansed by his blood, we may gain that blessed infancy of dove-like simplicity which, innocent of all malice, deceit, and guile, longs without ceasing for the milk of gospel doctrine until it attains to the perfect man, to the measure of the fulness of Christ, whose blessed company thou enjoyest forever, with the Father and Holy Spirit. Amen."

MEN. Certainly a devout intercession. What effect did it have?

OGYG. Mother and Son both seemed to nod approval, unless my eyes deceived me. For the sacred milk appeared to leap up, and the Eucharistic elements gleamed somewhat more brightly. Meanwhile the custodian approached us, quite silent, but holding out a board like those used in Germany by toll collectors on bridges.

MEN. Yes, I've often cursed those greedy boards when traveling through Germany.

OGYG. We gave him some coins, which he offered to the Virgin. Next, through an interpreter who understands the language well (a smooth-tongued young man named Robert Aldridge, I believe), I tried as civilly as I could to find out what proof he had that this was the Virgin's milk. I wanted to know this clearly for the pious purpose of stopping the mouths of certain unbelievers who are accustomed to laugh at all these matters. At first the custodian frowned and said nothing. I told the interpreter to press him, but even more politely. He did so with the utmost grace, such that if with words of that sort he had entreated the Mother herself, recently out of childbed, she would not have taken offense. But the custodian, as if possessed, gazed at us in astonishment, and as though horrified by such a blasphemous speech, said, "What need is there to inquire into that when you have an authentic record?" And it looked very much as if he would throw

us out for heretics, except that we calmed the fellow's wrath with money.

MEN. What did you do then?

OGYG. What do you suppose we did? As though beaten with a club, or struck by a thunderbolt, we took ourselves out of there, humbly begging pardon (as one should in sacred matters) for such outrageous presumption. Then on to the little chapel, the shrine of the Holy Virgin. At our approach a custodian turns up, a Minorite, and gazes at us as though studying us; after we go a little farther a second one turns up, likewise staring at us; then a third.

MEN. Perhaps they wanted to draw you.

OGYG. But I suspected something very different.

MEN. What was that?

OGYG. That a sacrilegious person had filched something from the Holy Virgin's ornaments, and that their suspicion was directed against me. So when I entered the chapel I greeted the Virgin Mother with a short prayer, like this: "O thou alone of all womankind Mother and Virgin, Mother most blessed, purest of maidens, we who are unclean come unto thee who art pure. We bless thee, we worship thee as best we can with our poor gifts. May thy Son grant us that, by emulating thy most blessed life, we too, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, may be made worthy to conceive the Lord Jesus spiritually in our inmost hearts, and never lose him once conceived. Amen." Kissing the altar at the same time, I laid some coins upon it and went away.

MEN. What did the Virgin do at this? Didn't she indicate by the slightest nod that your short prayer was heard?

OGYG. As I told you, there was a dim religious light, and she stood in the shadows, to the right of the altar. Finally, the first custodian's harangue had so squelched me that I didn't dare lift my eyes.

MEN. So this expedition didn't end very happily.

OGYG. On the contrary, quite happily.

MEN. You've brought me back to life, for "my heart had fallen to my knees," as your Homer says.

OGYG. After lunch we went back to the church.

MEN. You dared to, when you were suspected of sacrilege?

OGYG. That may be, but I was not suspected in my own eyes. A good conscience knows no fear. I wanted to see the "record" to which the guide had referred us. After searching for it a long time, we found it, but the board was hung so high nobody could possibly read it. I'm no Lynceus so far as eyes are concerned, nor am I totally blind, either. So as Aldridge read, I followed along, not trusting him completely in so vital a matter.

MEN. Were all your doubts cleared up?

OYG. I was ashamed of having doubted, so clearly was the whole thing set forth before my eyes—the name, the place, the story, told in order. In a word, nothing was omitted. There was said to be a certain William of Paris, a holy man, inasmuch as from time to time he was remarkably devoted to searching the world over for saints' relics. After traveling through many lands, visiting monasteries and churches everywhere, he came at length to Constantinople, where his brother was bishop. When William was preparing to return, his brother confided to him that a certain nun had the milk of the Virgin Mother and that he would be extremely blessed ever afterward if by prayer, purchase, or artifice he could get hold of a portion of it. All other relics he had collected to date were as nothing compared with this sacred milk. From that moment William could not rest until by his begging he won a little of the milk. With this treasure he thought himself richer than Croesus.

MEN. Why not? And beyond expectation, too.

OYG. He hurried straight home, but a fatal illness stopped him short.

MEN. How slight, brief, and limited is human happiness!

OYG. Aware of the danger, he summons a fellow pilgrim, a most reliable Frenchman. Swearing him to secrecy, he entrusts the milk to him on condition that if he reaches home safely he is to place this treasure on the altar of the Holy Virgin who dwells in the great church in Paris, overlooking the Seine that flows by on each side—the river itself seems to give way in honor of the Virgin's sanctity. To make a long story short, William is buried; the other hurries on; and disease takes him, too. In despair of his life, he gives the milk to an English companion but binds him by many oaths to do what he himself had intended to do. He dies; the other takes the milk and places it on the altar in the presence of the canons there (formerly called Regulars, as they are yet at St. Genevieve's). From them he begged a little of the milk. This he carried to England and finally brought to St. Mary-by-the-Sea, summoned to this place by divine inspiration.

MEN. Surely this story is very consistent.

OYG. More than that: lest any uncertainty remain, there were inscribed, above, the names of suffragan bishops who grant indulgences as extensive as their supply affords to those who come to see the milk and don't neglect to leave a small offering.

MEN. How much can they grant?

OYG. Forty days.

MEN. Are there days even in the underworld?

OYG. There's time, certainly.

MEN. When the whole supply's been granted, is there none left to give out?

OYG. On the contrary: what they grant is inexhaustible. And obviously this is different from what happens to the jar of the Danaïdes, since that, though continuously filled, is always empty; but as for this, if you always drain it, still the jar's no emptier.

MEN. If forty days apiece are granted to a hundred thousand men, each man has so much?

OYG. Yes.

MEN. And if those who received forty days before lunch were to ask for the same number again at dinnertime it would be at hand to bestow?

OYG. Oh, yes, even if they asked for it ten times an hour.

MEN. Wish I had such a money box at home! I'd ask merely for three drachmas if only they renewed themselves.

OYG. If the answer to your prayer is to be so large as that, you're hoping to turn into gold completely. But to resume the story. This "proof" was added, with pious simplicity: that although the Virgin's milk shown in a great many other places was of course to be revered, nevertheless this was to be venerated more than that elsewhere, because that was scraped from rocks whereas this flowed from the Virgin's own breasts.

MEN. How was this known?

OYG. Oh, the nun of Constantinople, who gave the milk, said so.

MEN. And perhaps St. Bernard informed her?

OYG. That's what I think.

MEN. The one who in old age was privileged to taste milk from that same breast which the child Jesus sucked. Hence I'm surprised he's called "the mellifluous" instead of "the lactifluous." But how can that be called the Virgin's milk which did not flow from her breasts?

OYG. It did flow, but falling on the rock where she happened to be sitting when giving suck, it hardened and then, by God's will, so increased.

MEN. Right. Continue.

OYG. After this, while we're strolling about, looking at sights of interest before departing, the custodians turn up again, glance at us, point with the finger, run up, go away, rush back, nod; they seemed to be on the point of accosting us if they could find courage enough.

MEN. Weren't you at all scared then?

OYG. Oh, no, I looked them straight in the eye, smiling and gazing at them as if inviting them to address me. At last one comes near and asks my name. I give it. He asks if I was the man who two years earlier had put up a votive tablet in Hebrew. I admit it.

MEN. Do you write Hebrew?

OGYG. Of course not, but anything they don't understand they call Hebrew. Soon the protos-hysteros of the college comes—having been sent for, I imagine.

MEN. What title is that? Haven't they an abbot?

OGYG. No.

MEN. Why?

OGYG. Because they don't know Hebrew.

MEN. Nor a bishop?

OGYG. No.

MEN. Why?

OGYG. Because the Virgin is still too hard up to buy an expensive staff and miter.

MEN. Haven't they at least a provost?

OGYG. Not even that.

MEN. Why not?

OGYG. Because "provost" is a title designating office, not sanctity. And that's why colleges of canons reject the name of "abbot." That of ["prior"] they accept willingly.¹

MEN. But "protos-hysteros" I never heard of before.

OGYG. Really, you're very ignorant of grammar.

MEN. I do know "hysteron proteron" in figures of speech.

OGYG. Exactly. The man next to the prior is posterior-prior.

MEN. You mean a *subprior*.

OGYG. This man greeted me decently enough. He tells me how hard many persons toil to read those lines and how often they wipe their spectacles in vain. Whenever some aged D.D. or J.D. came along he was marched off to the tablet. One would say the letters were Arabic; another, that they were fictitious characters. Finally one was found who could read the title. It was written in Roman words and letters, but in capitals. The Greek lines were written in Greek capitals, which at first glance look like Latin capitals. Upon request, I gave the meaning of the verses in Latin, translating word for word. I refused the small tip proffered for this bit of work, declaring there was nothing, however difficult, that I would not be very eager to do for the sake of the Most Holy Virgin, even if she bade me carry a letter from there to Jerusalem.

¹ The Latin text here is puzzling because Ogygius, immediately after saying that the canons have no provost (*praepositum*) apparently contradicts himself by adding that they do accept this title ("nomen . . . praepositi libenter amplexuntur"). The sense of the passage seems to require *prioris*: at any rate something other than *praepositi*. We can only conjecture a slip on the part of author or compositor.

MEN. Why would she need you as postman when she has so many angels to wait on her hand and foot?

OGYG. He offered from his bag a piece of wood, cut from a beam on which the Virgin Mother was seen to stand. A marvelous fragrance proved at once that the object was an extremely sacred one. After kissing so remarkable a gift three or four times with the utmost devotion, while prone and bareheaded, I put it in my purse.

MEN. May one see it?

OGYG. I'll let you see it. But if you aren't fasting, or if you had intercourse with your wife last night, I shouldn't advise you to look at it.

MEN. No danger. Show it to me.

OGYG. Here you are.

MEN. How lucky you are to have this present!

OGYG. In case you don't know, I wouldn't exchange this tiny fragment for all the gold in Tagus. I'll set it in gold, but so that it shines through crystal.

Then Hystero-protos, when he saw that I was so reverently delighted with this little gift and decided I was not undeserving of having greater matters entrusted to me as well, asked whether I had ever seen the secrets of the Virgin. This language startled me somewhat, but I didn't dare ask which secrets of the Virgin he meant, since in subjects so sacred even a slip of the tongue can be dangerous. I say I haven't seen them but that I want to very much. I'm led on now as though divinely inspired. One or two wax tapers are lighted and a small image displayed, unimpressive in size, material, and workmanship but of surpassing power.

MEN. Size has little to do with producing miracles. I've seen the Christopher at Paris, not merely a wagon-load or a colossus in size but fully as big as a mountain—yet he was distinguished for no miracles that I ever heard of.

OGYG. At the Virgin's feet is a jewel, as yet unnamed by Latins or Greeks. The French have named it from "toad,"¹ because it shows the figure of a toad in a way no art could achieve. What's more wonderful, the stone is very small; the image of the toad does not stick out but shines through in the jewel itself, as if inlaid.

MEN. Perhaps they imagine the toad's likeness, as we imagine an eagle in a stalk of fern. And similarly, what don't children see in clouds: dragons breathing fire, mountains burning, armed men clashing.

OGYG. For your information, no toad shows itself more obviously alive than that one did.

¹ The crapaud stone or bufonite. The toad is a symbol of evil, helpless before the purity of the Virgin.

MEN. So far I've put up with your stories. From now on, look for someone else to convince with your toad yarn.

OYCG. No wonder you feel like that, Menedemus. Nobody could have persuaded me either, even if the whole Faculty of Theology had maintained it, unless I had seen it, inspected it, and made certain of it with these eyes—these very eyes, I tell you. But you do strike me as rather lacking in curiosity about natural history.

MEN. Why? Because I don't believe asses fly?

OYCG. Don't you see how Nature the artist enjoys expressing herself in the colors and forms of everything, but especially in jewels? Then, how marvellous the powers she put into those jewels: well-nigh incredible, did not firsthand experience give us assurance of them. Tell me, would you have believed steel is pulled by a magnet without being touched, and repelled by it again without contact, unless you had seen it with your own eyes?

MEN. No, never, even if ten Aristotles had sworn it to me.

OYCG. Then don't cry "Incredible!" as soon as you hear about something not yet known by experience. In *ceramnia* we see the figure of a thunderbolt; in *pyropus*, living fire; in *chalaçias*, the appearance and hardness of hail, even if you throw it into the midst of the fire; in the emerald, deep, clear sea water. *Carcinias* resembles a sea crab; adderstone, a viper; *scarites*, the fish called scarus; *hieracites*, a falcon. *Geranites* has a neck like the crane's; *aegophthalmus*, a goat's eye (one kind shows a pig's eye, another three human eyes together); *lycophthalmus* paints the eye of a wolf in four colors: golden red, blood red, and in the middle black bordered by white. If you open *cyamea nigra*, you'll find a bean in the center. *Dryites* looks like a tree trunk and burns like wood. *Cissites* and *narcissites* depict ivy; *astrapias* throws out flashes of lightning from its white or lapis-lazuli center; *phlegontes* shows inside the color of flame, which does not die out; in the coal carbuncle you see certain sparks darting; *crocius* has the color of a crocus; *rhodites*, of a rose; *chalcites*, of brass. Eaglestone represents an eagle with a whitish tail; *taos* has the image of a peacock; swallowstone, that of an adder. *Myrmecites* contains the figure of a creeping ant; *cantharias* shows a complete beetle; *scorpites* illustrates a scorpion remarkably. But why pursue these examples; which are countless, since Nature has no part—in the elements, in living things, or in plants—that it does not illustrate, as if in sport, in precious stones. Do you wonder that a toad is imaged in this jewel?

MEN. I wonder that Nature has so much leisure to play thus at imitating everything.

¹ Borrowed from Pliny's *Natural History*, xxxvii, xi, 72-73.

OYCG. She wanted to arouse the curiosity of mankind, and so to shake us out of our idleness. And yet—as though we had no way of escaping boredom!—we go crazy over jesters, dice, and jugglers' tricks. MEN. Very true.

OYCG. Some sober people say that if stones of this kind are put in vinegar, the "roads" will move their legs and swim.

MEN. Why is a toad set before the Virgin?

OYCG. Because she overcame, stamped out, extinguished all impurity, infection, pride, avarice, and whatever earthly passions there are.

MEN. Woe to us who bear so great a toad in our breasts!

OYCG. We shall be pure if we worship the Virgin zealously.

MEN. How does she like to be worshipped?

OYCG. You will adore her most acceptably if you imitate her.

MEN. Precisely—but that's very hard to do.

OYCG. Yes, but most glorious.

MEN. Go on; continue what you began.

OYCG. Next he shows us gold and silver statues. "This one," says he, "is all gold; the other one, silver gilded." He adds the weight and worth of each, and the name of the donor. When, marveling at every one, I was congratulating the Virgin on such fortunate wealth, the guide said: "Since I notice you're a devout sightseer, I don't think it right to keep anything from you: you shall see the Virgin's very greatest secrets." At the same time he takes down from the altar itself a world of wonderful things. If I tried to enumerate them all, the day would not be long enough. Thus the pilgrimage ended very happily for me. I had my fill of sights, and I brought away with me this priceless gift, a pledge from the Virgin herself.

MEN. Didn't you test the power of your piece of wood?

OYCG. I did. Before three days passed, I found at a certain inn a man who had gone mad; they were ready to chain him. I slipped this wood under his pillow secretly. He fell into a long, deep sleep. In the morning he woke up as sound as ever.

MEN. Maybe it wasn't insanity but delirium tremens from drink. Sleep usually helps that malady.

OYCG. Joke as you please, Menedemus, but about something else. To make fun of the saints is neither reverent nor prudent. Why, the man himself said that a woman of marvelous beauty had appeared to him in a dream and held out a cup to him.

MEN. Hellebore, I dare say.

OYCG. I don't know about that, but I do know the man's in his right mind.

MEN. Did you overlook Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury?

OGYG. By no means. No pilgrimage is more devout.

MEN. I long to hear about it, if that's not too much trouble.

OGYG. Oh, no, I want you to hear. There's a part of England called Kent, facing France and Flanders; its chief city is Canterbury. In it are two monasteries, almost adjacent, both of them Benedictine houses. That named for St. Augustine is evidently the older; the one now called after St. Thomas appears to have been the Archbishop's see, where he used to live with a few chosen monks; just as today, too, bishops have residences adjoining the churches but separate from the houses of other canons. (In old times both bishops and canons were usually monks; evidence abounds to prove that.) The church sacred to St. Thomas rises to the sky so majestically that it inspires devotion even in those who see it from afar. Thus by its splendor it now dims the glory of the neighboring one and, so to speak, overshadows the spot that was anciently the most sacred. It has two huge towers, as though greeting visitors a long way off and making the region ring far and wide with the wonderful sound of its bronze bells. At the south entrance of the church are stone statues of three armed men, who with sacrilegious hands murdered the blessed saint. Their surnames are added: Tusci, Fusci, Berri.¹

MEN. Why is so much honor paid to impious men?

OGYG. Obviously they have the same honor as Judas, Pilate, and Caiaphas, that wicked band whom you see carefully carved on gilded altars. The surnames are added lest anybody in the future speak well of them. Attention is called to them in order that hereafter no courtier lift a hand against bishops or Church property. For those three conspirators went mad after committing their crime, and would not have recovered had they not begged help of the most holy Thomas.

MEN. O the everlasting mercy of martyrs!

OGYG. When you enter, the spacious grandeur of the building is disclosed. This part is open to the public.

MEN. Is there nothing to see there?

OGYG. Nothing but the mass of the structure and some books—among them the Gospel of Nicodemus—chained to pillars, and a tomb, I don't know whose.

MEN. Then what?

OGYG. Iron screens prevent you from going further, but they permit a view of the space between the end of the building and the choir, as it is called. This is ascended by many steps, under which a certain vault gives access to the north side. A wooden altar sacred to the

¹ De Tracy, Fitzurse, and Le Breton or Brito. Erasmus omits the name of the fourth, De Morville.

Holy Virgin is shown there; a very small one, not worth seeing except as a monument of antiquity, a rebuke to the luxury of our times. There the holy man is said to have spoken his last farewell to the Virgin when death was at hand. On the altar is the point of the sword with which the crown of the good bishop's head was cut off; and his brain, evidently smashed to make death come more quickly. Out of love for the martyr we reverently kissed the sacred rust of this sword.

Leaving this place, we went into the crypt. It has its own custodians. First is shown the martyr's skull, pierced through. The top of the cranium is bared for kissing, the rest covered with silver. Along with this is displayed a leaden plate with "Thomas of Acre" carved on it. The hair shirt, girdle, and drawers by which the bishop used to subdue his flesh hang in the gloom there—horrible even to look at and a reproach to our softness and delicacy.

MEN. Perhaps to the monks themselves, too.

OGYG. I can neither affirm nor deny that, nor is it any of my business.

MEN. Very true.

OGYG. From here we return to the choir. On the north side mysteries are laid open. It is wonderful how many bones were brought forth—skulls, jaws, teeth, hands, fingers, whole arms, all of which we adored and kissed. This would have gone on forever if my fellow pilgrim, an unobliging chap, had not cut short the enthusiasm of the guide.

MEN. Who was this?

OGYG. An Englishman named Gratian Pullus, a learned and upright man but less respectful toward this side of religion than I liked.

MEN. Some Wycliffite, I suppose.

OGYG. I don't think so, though he had read his books. Where he got hold of them isn't clear.

MEN. Did he offend the guide?

OGYG. An arm was brought forth, with the bloodstained flesh still on it. He shrank from kissing this, looking rather disgusted. The custodian soon put his things away. Next we viewed the altar table and ornaments; then the objects that were kept under the altar—all of them splendid; you'd say Midas and Croesus were beggars if you saw the quantity of gold and silver.

MEN. No kisses here?

OGYG. No, but a different sort of desire came to my mind.

MEN. What?

OGYG. I was sad because I had no such relics at home.

MEN. An impious thought!

OGYG. Admitted, and I begged the saint's forgiveness before I left the church. After this we were conducted to the sacristy. Good Lord,

what an array of silk vestments there, what an abundance of gold candelabra! There too we saw St. Thomas' staff. It looked like a cane plated with silver. It was not at all heavy, had no ornamentation, and was no more than waist-high.

MEN. No cross?¹

OGYG. None that I saw. We were shown a pallium, silk to be sure, but coarse, without gold or jewels, and there was a facecloth, soiled by sweat from his neck and preserving obvious spots of blood. These memorials of the plain living of olden times we gladly kissed.

MEN. They're not shown to everyone?

OGYG. Certainly not, my good friend.

MEN. How did you manage to make such an impression of devoutness that no secrets were kept from you?

OGYG. I had some acquaintance with the Reverend Father William Warham, the Archbishop. He gave me a note of recommendation.

MEN. I hear from many persons that he is a man of remarkable kindness.

OGYG. More than that: you would call him kindness itself if you knew him. His learning, integrity, and holiness of life are so great that you would find him lacking in no quality befitting a perfect prelate. Next we were led up above, for behind the high altar you ascend as though into a new church. There in a small chapel is shown the entire face of the saint, gilded and ornamented with many jewels. Here a certain unlooked-for accident almost upset all our good luck.

MEN. I'm waiting to hear what misfortune you mean.

OGYG. My friend Gratian was anything but ingratiating on this occasion. After a short prayer he asked the keeper, "I say, good father, is it true, as I've heard, that in his lifetime Thomas was most generous to the poor?" "Very true," the man replied, and began to rehearse the saint's many acts of kindness to them. Then Gratian: "I don't suppose his disposition changed in this matter, unless perhaps for the better." The custodian agreed. Gratian again: "Since, then, the saint was so liberal toward the needy, though he was still poor himself and lacked money to provide for the necessities of life, don't you think he'd gladly consent, now that he's so rich and needs nothing, if some poor wretched woman with hungry children at home, or daughters in danger of losing their virtue because they have no money for dowries,

¹ I.e., "No cross on the staff?" An archbishop's staff is surmounted by a cross.

² "Facies"; here a bust.

or a husband sick in bed and penniless—if, after begging the saint's forgiveness, she carried off a bit of all this wealth to rescue her family, as though taking from one who wanted her to have it, either as a gift or a loan?" When the keeper in charge of the gilded head made no reply to this, Gratian, who's impulsive, said, "For my part, I'm convinced the saint would even rejoice that in death, too, he could relieve the wants of the poor by his riches." At this the custodian frowned and pursed his lips, looking at us with Gorgon eyes, and I don't doubt he would have driven us from the church with insults and reproaches had he not been aware that we were recommended by the archbishop. I managed to placate the fellow by smooth talk, affirming that Gratian hadn't spoken seriously but liked to joke; and at the same time I gave him some coins.

MEN. I quite approve of your sense of duty. But seriously, I wonder sometimes what possible excuse there could be for those who spend so much money on building, decorating, and enriching churches that there's simply no limit to it. Granted that the sacred vestments and vessels of the church must have a dignity appropriate to their liturgical use; and I want the building to have grandeur. But what's the use of so many baptistries, candelabra, gold statues? What's the good of the vastly expensive organs, as they call them? (We're not content with a single pair, either.) What's the good of that costly musical neighing when meanwhile our brothers and sisters, Christ's living temples, waste away from hunger and thirst?

OGYG. Every decent, sensible man favors moderation in these matters, of course. But since the fault springs from excessive devotion, it merits applause; especially when one thinks of the opposite vice in those who rob churches of their wealth. These gifts are generally given by kings and potentates and would be worse spent on gambling and war. And if you divert anything, that, in the first place, is regarded as sacrilege; next, those who are regular contributors stop their giving; above all, men are incited to robbery. Hence churchmen are custodians of these things rather than owners of them. In short, I'd rather see a church abounding in sacred furnishings than bare and dirty, as some are, and more like stables than churches.

MEN. Yet we read that in former times bishops were praised for selling the sacred vessels and using the money to relieve the poor.

OGYG. They're praised today, too, but only praised. In my judgment, to imitate them is neither allowable nor agreeable.

MEN. I'm holding up your story. Let's have the conclusion.

OGYG. Hear it, then; I'll be brief. While this was going on, the chief official came forward.

MEN. Who? The abbot of the place?

OGYG. He has a miter and abbatial revenue; he lacks only the name of abbot and is called prior, because the archbishop serves instead of an abbot. In ancient times whoever was archbishop of this diocese was also a monk.

MEN. Well, I wouldn't mind being called camel if I had an abbot's income.

OGYG. He seemed to me a good, sensible man; something of a Scitist theologian, too. He opened for us the chest in which the rest of the holy man's body is said to lie.

MEN. You saw the bones?

OGYG. No, that's not permitted, nor would it be possible without the use of ladders. But within the wooden chest is a golden chest; when this is drawn up by ropes, it reveals inestimable treasure.

MEN. What do I hear?

OGYG. The cheapest part was gold. Everything shone and dazzled with rare and surpassingly large jewels, some bigger than a goose egg. Some monks stood about reverently. When the cover was removed, we all adored. The prior pointed out each jewel by touching it with a white rod, adding its French name, its worth, and the name of the donor. The principal ones were gifts from kings.

MEN. He must have a remarkable memory.

OGYG. Your guess is correct, though practice helps too, for he often does this. From here he leads the way back to the crypt. There the Virgin Mother has a residence, but a somewhat dark one, enclosed by a double row of iron rails.

MEN. What's she afraid of?

OGYG. Only robbers, I suppose, for I've never seen anything more loaded with riches.

MEN. You tell me of dark riches.

OGYG. When the lanterns were brought closer, we saw a more than regal sight.

MEN. More wealth than that of St. Mary-by-the-Sea?

OGYG. It looks like much more. She alone knows her secret wealth. It isn't shown to any but persons of the highest importance or to special friends. At last we were led back to the sacristy. There a chest with a black leather cover was brought out, placed on the table, and opened. Immediately everyone worshiped on bended knee.

MEN. What was inside?

OGYG. Some lincn rags, many of them still showing traces of snivel. With these, they say, the holy man wiped the sweat from his face or neck, the dirt from his nose, or whatever other kinds of filth human bodies have. At this point my friend Gratian again displayed

something less than graciousness. To him, since he was English and a well-known person of considerable standing, the prior kindly offered one of the rags as a gift, thinking he was making him a present that would please him very much. But Gratian was hardly grateful for it. He touched the piece with his fingers, not without a sign of disgust, and put it back scornfully, puckering his lips as though whistling. (This is what he ordinarily did if he came across anything he thought contemptible.) Shame and alarm together embarrassed me dreadfully. But the prior, no boor, pretended not to notice this incident, and after offering us a glass of wine dismissed us kindly, for we were returning to London.

MEN. Why did you have to do that when you were already fairly close to your own shore?

OGYG. Yes, I was, but I willingly avoided that shore as much as possible. It's more notorious for frauds and robberies than any Malcan rocks are for shipwrecks. I'll tell you what I saw on my last crossing. Many of us were ferried in a rowboat from the Calais shore to a larger vessel. Among the passengers was a poor ragged French youth. He was charged half a drachma; so large a sum do they wring from each passenger for the very short ride. He pleaded poverty. To amuse themselves they search him, and when they pull off his shoes they find ten or twelve drachmas between the soles. These they take, laughing in his face and jeering at the damned Frenchman.

MEN. What did the young fellow do?

OGYG. Mourned his loss. What else could he do?

MEN. They had no right to do such things, had they?

OGYG. Exactly the same right they have to rob passengers' luggage and to snatch purses whenever they get a chance.

MEN. It's extraordinary that they should dare to commit such a serious crime in the presence of so many witnesses.

OGYG. They're so used to doing it that they think it's quite all right. Many persons watched from the larger boat. In the rowboat were some English merchants, who protested in vain. Those fellows boasted about catching the damned Frenchman as if it were a practical joke.

MEN. I'd gladly crucify those pirates as a practical joke!

OGYG. But both shores are full of such men. Guess "what masters could do when knives dare do such deeds." So from now on I prefer roundabout routes to that short cut. In these respects, just as "the descent to hell is easy" but the return extremely difficult, so entry by this shore is not altogether easy, exit very hard. Some sailors from Antwerp were hanging about London; I decided to take my chances with them.

MEN. Does that place have such conscientious sailors?

OGYG. As an ape is always an ape, I confess, so a sailor's always a sailor. But if you compare them with professional thieves, they're angels.

MEN. I'll remember that if ever I, too, get the urge to visit that island. But go back to the road I took you away from.

OGYG. On the way to London, shortly after you leave Canterbury, you find a very deep and narrow road; moreover, it has such steep banks on each side that you can't get out of it. There's no other road you can take, either. On the left side of this road is a little almshouse for some old beggars. As soon as they see a rider coming one of them runs up, sprinkles him with holy water, and presently holds out the upper part of a shoe fastened to a brass rim. In it is a glass that looks like a jewel. People kiss it and make a small contribution.

MEN. On that sort of road I'd rather meet a house of old beggars than a gang of able-bodied thieves.

OGYG. Gratian was riding on my left, closer to the almshouse. He was sprinkled with water but he managed to put up with that. When the shoe was thrust at him, he asked the man what he meant by this. He said it was St. Thomas' shoe. Gratian turned to me and said heatedly, "What, do these brutes want us to kiss all good men's shoes? Why not, in the same fashion, hold out spittle and other excrements to be kissed?" I felt sorry for the old man and cheered him up with a tip, poor fellow.

MEN. In my opinion, Gratian's anger was not entirely unreasonable. If soles of shoes were kept as evidence of a simple life, I wouldn't object, but I consider it shameless to push soles, shoes, and girdles at one to be kissed. If one kissed them of his own accord, from some strong sense of duty, I'd think it pardonable.

OGYG. I won't pretend it wouldn't be better to leave those things undone, but from what can't be amended at a stroke I'm accustomed to take whatever good there is. —Meantime, I was pleasing myself with the reflection that a good man is like a sheep, a bad one like a beast of prey. When an adder's dead, it can't sting, true, but its stench and blood are injurious. A sheep, while alive, nourishes by its milk, provides clothing by its wool, enriches by its offspring; dead, it furnishes useful hide; and all of it can be eaten. So rapacious men, addicted to this world, are troublesome to everybody while alive; when dead, they're a nuisance to the living by reason of the tolling of bells, grandiose funerals, and sometimes by the consecration of their successors—because that means new exactions. Good men, truly, are in every respect useful to everyone: as this saint, during his lifetime, encouraged people to holiness by his example, teaching, and exhortations, comforted the

forsaken, and raised up the needy. In death his usefulness was almost greater. He built this very wealthy church; he strengthened considerably the influence of the clergy throughout England. Lastly, this piece of shoe supports a house of poor men.

MEN. A noble thought indeed, but since you're of that mind I'm surprised you've never visited St. Patrick's cave, of which marvelous tales are told. To me they're not entirely plausible.

OGYG. On the contrary, no story about it can be so marvelous that it is not surpassed by the fact itself.

MEN. And have you been in it, then?

OGYG. I sailed in Stygian waters, to be sure; I went down into the jaws of Avernus; I saw what goes on in hell.

MEN. You'll do me a favor if you'll be kind enough to tell me about it.

OGYG. Let this serve as prologue to our conversation—and it's long enough, in my opinion. I'm on my way home to order dinner, for I've had no lunch.

MEN. Why haven't you? Not because of religious observance?

OGYG. Oh, no, because of a grudge.

MEN. A grudge against your belly?

OGYG. No, against greedy tavern keepers who, though they won't serve a decent meal, don't hesitate to charge their guests outrageous prices. I get even with them in this way: if I expect a good dinner with an acquaintance, or at an innkeeper's who is a little less niggardly, my stomach won't stand much lunch, but if luck has provided the sort of lunch I like, I get a stomach-ache at dinnertime.

MEN. Aren't you ashamed to seem so stingy and mean?

OGYG. Menedemus, those who take shame into account in such matters, believe me, are bad accountants. I've learned to keep my shame for other purposes.

MEN. I long to hear the rest of the tale, so expect me as a guest for dinner. You'll tell it more comfortably there.

OGYG. Well, thanks very much for inviting yourself, since so many who are pressed to come decline. But my thanks will be doubled if you'll dine at home today, for my time will be taken up with greeting my family. Besides, I have a plan more convenient for us both. Have lunch at your home tomorrow for me and my wife. Then I'll talk until dinner—until you admit you're satisfied; and if you like, we won't desert you even at dinner. What are you scratching your head for? You get dinner ready; we'll be sure to come.

MEN. I'd prefer stories I wouldn't have to pay for. All right: I'll furnish a bit of lunch, only it will be tasteless unless you season it with good stories.

OGYG. But look here: don't you itch to go on these pilgrimages?

MEN. Maybe I'll itch after you've finished talking. As matters stand now, I have enough to do by going on my Roman stations.

OGYG. Roman? You, who've never seen Rome?

MEN. I'll tell you. Here's how I wander about at home. I go into the living room and see that my daughter's chastity is safe. Coming out of there into my shop, I watch what my servants, male and female, are doing. Then to the kitchen, to see if any instruction is needed. From here to one place and another, observing what my children and my wife are doing, careful that everything be in order. These are my Roman stations.

OGYG. But St. James will look after these affairs for you.

MEN. Sacred Scripture directs me to take care of them myself. I've never read any commandment to hand them over to saints.