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Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini

[Redactor's Note: This version of the Autobiography, one of the most famous of all
time, was translated by John Addington Symonds (1840-1893). Cellini lived from 1500-
1571. This version is in ISO Latin1 with 8 bit accents, and is also supplied in a single
file HTML version.]

The Autobiography of
Benvenuto Cellini

Translated By
John Addington Symonds

With Introduction and Notes
Volume 31

P. F. Collier and Son Company

New York (1910)

Introductory Sonnet

THIS tale of my sore-troubled life I write,
To thank the God of nature, who conveyed
My soul to me, and with such care hath stayed
That divers noble deeds I've brought to light.
'Twas He subdued my cruel fortune's spite:
Life glory virtue measureless hath made
Such grace worth beauty be through me displayed
That few can rival, none surpass me quite.
Only it grieves me when I understand
What precious time in vanity I've spent-
The wind it beareth man's frail thoughts away.
Yet, since remorse avails not, I'm content,
As erst I came, WELCOME to go one day,
Here in the Flower of this fair Tuscan land.

Introductory Note

AMONG the vast number of men who have thought fit to write down the history of their own lives, three or four have achieved masterpieces which stand out preeminently: Saint Augustine in his "Confessions," Samuel Pepys in his "Diary," Rousseau in his "Confessions." It is among these extraordinary documents, and unsurpassed by any of them, that the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini takes its place.

The "Life" of himself which Cellini wrote was due to other motives than those which produced its chief competitors for first place in its class. St. Augustine's aim was religious and didactic, Pepys noted down in his diary the daily events of his life for his sole satisfaction and with no intention that any one should read the cipher in which they were recorded. But Cellini wrote that the world might know, after he was dead, what a fellow he had been; what great things he had attempted, and against what odds he had carried them through. "All men," he held, "whatever be their condition, who have done anything of merit, or which verily has a semblance of merit, if so be they are men of truth and good repute, should write the tale of their life with their own hand." That he had done many things of merit, he had no manner of doubt. His repute was great in his day, and perhaps good in the sense in which he meant goodness; as to whether he was a man of truth, there is still dispute among scholars. Of some misrepresentations, some suppressions of damaging facts, there seems to be evidence only too good-a man with Cellini's passion for proving himself in the right could hardly have avoided being guilty of such-; but of the general trustworthiness of his record, of the kind of man he was and the kind of life he led, there is no reasonable doubt.

The period covered by the autobiography is from Cellini's birth in 1500 to 1562; the scene is mainly in Italy and France. Of the great events of the time, the time of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, of the strife of Pope and Emperor and King, we get only glimpses. The leaders in these events appear in the foreground of the picture only when they come into personal relations with the hero; and then not mainly as statesmen or warriors, but as connoisseurs and patrons of art. Such an event as the Sack of Rome is described because Benvenuto himself fought in it.

Much more complete is the view he gives of the artistic life of the time. It was the age of Michelangelo, and in the throng of great artists which then filled the Italian cities, Cellini was no inconsiderable figure. Michelangelo himself he knew and adored. Nowhere can we gain a better idea than in this book of the passionate enthusiasm for the creation of beauty which has bestowed upon the Italy of the Renaissance its greatest glory.

Very vivid, too, is the impression we receive of the social life of the sixteenth century; of its violence and licentiousness, of its zeal for fine craftsmanship, of its abounding vitality, its versatility and its idealism. For Cellini himself is an epitome of that century. This man who tells here the story of his life was a murderer and a braggart, insolent, sensual, inordinately proud and passionate; but he was also a worker in gold and silver, rejoicing in delicate chasing and subtle modelling of precious surfaces; a sculptor and a musician; and, as all who read his book must testify, a great master of narrative. Keen as was Benvenuto's interest in himself, and much as he loved to dwell on the splendor of his exploits and achievements, he had little idea that centuries after his death he would live again, less by his "Perseus" and his goldsmith's work than by the book which he dictated casually to a lad of fourteen, while he went about his work.

The autobiography was composed between 1558 and 1566, but it brings the record down only to 1562. The remainder of Cellini's life seems to have been somewhat more peaceful. In 1565 he married Piera de Salvadore Parigi, a servant who had nursed him when he was sick; and in the care of his children, as earlier of his sister and nieces, he showed more tenderness than might have been expected from a man of his boisterous nature. He died at Florence, May 13, 1571, and was buried in The Church of the Annunziata in that city.

Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini

I

ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe their life with their own hand; but they ought not to attempt so fine an enterprise till they have passed the age of forty. This duty occurs to my own mind now that I am travelling beyond the term of fifty-eight years, and am in Florence, the city of my birth. Many untoward things can I remember, such as happen to all who live upon our earth; and from those adversities I am now more free than at any previous period of my career-nay, it seems to me that I enjoy greater content of soul and health of body than ever I did in bygone years. I can also bring to mind some pleasant goods and some inestimable evils, which, when I turn my thoughts backward, strike terror in me, and astonishment that I should have reached this age of fifty-eight, wherein, thanks be to God, I am still travelling prosperously forward.

II

IT is true that men who have laboured with some show of excellence, have already given knowledge of themselves to the world; and this alone ought to suffice them; I mean the fact that they have proved their manhood and achieved renown. Yet one must needs live like others; and so in a work like this there will always be found occasion for natural bragging, which is of divers kinds, and the first is that a man should let others know he draws his lineage from persons of worth and most ancient origin.

I am called Benvenuto Cellini, son of Maestro Giovanni, son of Andrea, son of Cristofano Cellini; my mother was Madonna Elisabetta, daughter to Stefano Granacci; both parents citizens of Florence. It is found written in chronicles made by our ancestors of Florence, men of old time and of credibility, even as Giovanni Villani writes, that the city of Florence was evidently built in imitation of the fair city of Rome; and certain remnants of the Colosseum and the Baths can yet be traced. These things are near Santa Croce. The Capitol was where is now the Old Market. The Rotonda is entire, which was made for the temple of Mars, and is now dedicated to our Saint John. That thus is was, can very well be seen, and cannot be denied, but the said buildings are much smaller than those of Rome. He who caused them to be built, they say, was Julius Cæsar, in concert with some noble Romans, who, when Fiesole had been stormed and taken, raised a city in this place, and each of them took in hand to erect one of these notable edifices.

Julius Cæsar had among his captains a man of highest rank and valour, who was called Fiorino of Cellino, which is a village about two miles distant from Monte Fiascone. Now this Fiorino took up his quarters under the hill of Fiesole, on the ground where Florence now stands, in order to be near the river Arno, and for the convenience of the troops. All those soldiers and others who had to do with the said captain, used then to say: "Let us go to Fiorenze;" as well because the said captain was called Fiorino, as also because the place he had chosen for his quarters was by nature very rich in flowers. Upon the foundation of the city, therefore, since this name struck Julius Cæsar as being fair and apt, and given by circumstance, and seeing furthermore that flowers themselves bring good augury, he appointed the name of Florence for the town. He wished besides to pay his valiant captain this compliment; and he loved him all the more for having drawn him from a very humble place, and for the reason that so excellent a man was a creature of his own. The name that learned inventors and investigators of such etymologies adduce, as that Florence is flowing at the Arno, cannot hold; seeing that Rome is flowing at the Tiber, Ferrara is flowing at the Po, Lyons is flowing at the Saone, Paris is flowing at the Seine, and yet the names of all these towns are different, and have come to them by other ways. [1]

Thus then we find; and thus we believe that we are descended from a man of worth. Furthermore, we find that there are Cellinis of our stock in Ravenna, that most ancient town of Italy, where too are plenty of gentle folk. In Pisa also there are some, and I have discovered them in many parts of Christendom; and in this state also the breed exists, men devoted to the profession of arms; for not many years ago a young man, called Luca Cellini, a beardless youth, fought with a soldier of experience and a most valorous man, named Francesco da Vicorati, who had frequently fought before in single combat. This Luca, by his own valour, with sword in hand, overcame and slew him, with such

bravery and stoutness that he moved the folk to wonder, who were expecting quite the contrary issue; so that I glory in tracing my descent from men of valour.

As for the trifling honours which I have gained for my house, under the well-known conditions of our present ways of living, and by means of my art, albeit the same are matters of no great moment, I will relate these in their proper time and place, taking much more pride in having been born humble and having laid some honourable foundation for my family, than if I had been born of great lineage and had stained or overclouded that by my base qualities. So then I will make a beginning by saying how it pleased God I should be born.

Note 1. He is alluding to the name *Fluenzia*, which some antiquaries of his day thought to have been the earliest name of the city, derived from its being near *Arno Fluente*. I have translated the word *fluente* in the text literally, though of course it signifies “situated on a flowing river.” I need not call attention to the apocryphal nature of Cellini’s own derivation from the name of his supposed ancestor.

III

MY ancestors dwelt in Val d’ Ambra, where they owned large estates, and lived like little lords, in retirement, however, on account of the then contending factions. They were all men devoted to arms and of notable bravery. In that time one of their sons, the younger, who was called Cristofano, roused a great feud with certain of their friends and neighbours. Now the heads of the families on both sides took part in it, and the fire kindled seemed to them so threatening that their houses were like to perish utterly; the elders upon this consideration, in concert with my own ancestors, removed Cristofano; and the other youth with whom the quarrel began was also sent away. They sent their young man to Siena. Our folk sent Cristofano to Florence; and there they bought for him a little house in Via Chiara, close to the convent of S. Orsola, and they also purchased for him some very good property near the Ponte a Rifredi. The said Cristofano took wife in Florence, and had sons and daughters; and when all the daughters had been portioned off, the sons, after their father’s death, divided what remained. The house in Via Chiara with some other trifles fell to the share of one of the said sons, who had the name of Andrea. He also took wife, and had four male children. The first was called Girolamo, the second Bartolommeo, the third Giovanni, who was afterwards my father, and the fourth Francesco. This Andrea Cellini was very well versed in architecture, as it was then practised, and lived by it as his trade. Giovanni, who was my father, paid more attention to it than any of the other brothers. And since Vitruvius says, amongst other things, that one who wishes to practise that art well must have something of music and good drawing, Giovanni, when he had mastered drawing, began to turn his mind to music, and together with the theory learned to play most excellently on the viol and the flute; and being a person of studious habits, he left his home but seldom.

They had for neighbour in the next house a man called Stefano Granacci, who had several daughters, all of them of remarkable beauty. As it pleased God, Giovanni noticed one of these girls who was named Elisabetta; and she found such favour with him that he asked her in marriage. The fathers of both of them being well acquainted through their close neighbourhood, it was easy to make this match up; and each thought that he had very well arranged his affairs. First of all the two good old men agreed upon

the marriage; then they began to discuss the dowry, which led to a certain amount of friendly difference; for Andrea said to Stefano: "My son Giovanni is the stoutest youth of Florence, and of all Italy to boot, and if I had wanted earlier to have him married, I could have procured one of the largest dowries which folk of our rank get in Florence:" whereupon Stefano answered: "You have a thousand reasons on your side; but here am I with five daughters and as many sons, and when my reckoning is made, this is as much as I can possibly afford." Giovanni, who had been listening awhile unseen by them, suddenly broke in and said: "O my father, I have sought and loved that girl and not their money. Ill luck to those who seek to fill their pockets by the dowry of their wife! As you have boasted that I am a fellow of such parts, do you not think that I shall be able to provide for my wife and satisfy her needs, even if I receive something short of the portion you would like to get? Now I must make you understand that the woman is mine, and you may take the dowry for yourself." At this Andrea Cellini, who was a man of rather awkward temper, grew a trifle angry; but after a few days Giovanni took his wife, and never asked for other portion with her.

They enjoyed their youth and wedded love through eighteen years, always greatly desiring to be blessed with children. At the end of this time Giovanni's wife miscarried of two boys through the unskilfulness of the doctors. Later on she was again with child, and gave birth to a girl, whom they called Cosa, after the mother of my father. [1] At the end of two years she was once more with child; and inasmuch as those longings to which pregnant women are subject, and to which they pay much attention, were now exactly the same as those of her former pregnancy, they made their minds up that she would give birth to a female as before, and agreed to call the child Reparata, after the mother of my mother. It happened that she was delivered on a night of All Saints, following the feast-day, at half-past four precisely, in the year 1500. [2] The midwife, who knew that they were expecting a girl, after she had washed the baby and wrapped it in the fairest white linen, came softly to my father Giovanni and said: "I am bringing you a fine present, such as you did not anticipate." My father, who was a true philosopher, was walking up and down, and answered: "What God gives me is always dear to me;" and when he opened the swaddling clothes, he saw with his own eyes the unexpected male child. Joining together the palms of his old hands, he raised them with his eyes to God, and said "Lord, I thank Thee with my whole heart; this gift is very dear to me; let him be Welcome." All the persons who were there asked him joyfully what name the child should bear. Giovanni would make no other answer than "Let him be Welcome-Benvenuto;" [3] and so they resolved, and this name was given me at Holy Baptism, and by it I still am living with the grace of God.

Note 1. Cosa is Florentine for Niccolòsa.

Note 2. The hour is reckoned, according to the old Italian fashion, from sunset of one day to sunset of the next-twenty-four hours.

Note 3. Benvenuto means Welcome.

IV

ANDREA CELLINI was yet alive when I was about three years old, and he had passed his hundredth. One day they had been altering a certain conduit pertaining to a cistern, and there issued from it a great scorpion unperceived by them, which crept down from

the cistern to the ground, and slank away beneath a bench. I saw it, and ran up to it, and laid my hands upon it. It was so big that when I had it in my little hands, it put out its tail on one side, and on the other thrust forth both its mouths. [1] They relate that I ran in high joy to my grandfather, crying out: "Look, grandpapa, at my pretty little crab." When he recognised that the creature was a scorpion, he was on the point of falling dead for the great fear he had and anxiety about me. He coaxed and entreated me to give it him; but the more he begged, the tighter I clasped it, crying and saying I would not give it to any one. My father, who was also in the house, ran up when he heard my screams, and in his stupefaction could not think how to prevent the venomous animal from killing me. Just then his eyes chanced to fall upon a pair of scissors; and so, while soothing and caressing me, he cut its tail and mouths off. Afterwards, when the great peril had been thus averted, he took the occurrence for a good augury.

When I was about five years old my father happened to be in a basement-chamber of our house, where they had been washing, and where a good fire of oak-logs was still burning; he had a viol in his hand, and was playing and singing alone beside the fire. The weather was very cold. Happening to look into the fire, he spied in the middle of those most burning flames a little creature like a lizard, which was sporting in the core of the intensest coals. Becoming instantly aware of what the thing was, he had my sister and me called, and pointing it out to us children, gave me a great box on the ears, which caused me to howl and weep with all my might. Then he pacified me good-humouredly, and spoke as follows: "My dear little boy, I am not striking you for any wrong that you have done, but only to make you remember that that lizard which you see in the fire is a salamander, a creature which has never been seen before by any one of whom we have credible information." So saying, he kissed me and gave me some pieces of money.

Note 1. The word is *bocche*, so I have translated it by *mouths*. But Cellini clearly meant the gaping claws of the scorpion.

V

MY father began teaching me to play upon the flute and sing by note; by notwithstanding I was of that tender age when little children are wont to take pastime in whistles and such toys, I had an inexpressible dislike for it, and played and sang only to obey him. My father in those times fashioned wonderful organs with pipes of wood, spinets the fairest and most excellent which then could be seen, viols and lutes and harps of the most beautiful and perfect construction. He was an engineer, and had marvellous skill in making instruments for lowering bridges and for working mills, and other machines of that sort. In ivory he was the first who wrought really well. But after he had fallen in love with the woman who was destined to become my mother-perhaps what brought them together was that little flute, to which indeed he paid more attention than was proper-he was entreated by the fifers of the Signory to play in their company. Accordingly he did so for some time to amuse himself, until by constant importunity they induced him to become a member of their band. Lorenzo de' Medici and Pietro his son, who had a great liking for him, perceived later on that he was devoting himself wholly to the fife, and was neglecting his fine engineering talent and his beautiful art. [1] So they had him removed from that post. My father took this very ill, and it seemed to him that they had done him a great despite. Yet he immediately resumed his art, and fashioned a mirror, about a cubit in diameter, out of bone and ivory, with figures and foliage of great finish and grand design. The mirror was in the form of a wheel. In the

middle was the looking-glass; around it were seven circular pieces, on which were the Seven Virtues, carved and joined of ivory and black bone. The whole mirror, together with the Virtues, was placed in equilibrium, so that when the wheel turned, all the Virtues moved, and they had weights at their feet which kept them upright. Possessing some acquaintance with the Latin tongue, he put a legend in Latin round his looking-glass, to this effect—"Whithersoever the wheel of Fortune turns, Virtue stands firm upon her feet:"

Rota sum: semper, quoquo me verto, stat Virtus.

A little while after this he obtained his place again among the fifers. Although some of these things happened before I was born, my familiarity with them has moved me to set them down here. In those days the musicians of the Signory were all of them members of the most honourable trades, and some of them belonged to the greater guilds of silk and wool; [2] and that was the reason why my father did not disdain to follow this profession, and his chief desire with regard to me was always that I should become a great performer on the flute. I for my part felt never more discontented than when he chose to talk to me about this scheme, and to tell me that, if I liked, he discerned in me such aptitudes that I might become the best man in the world.

Note 1. The Medici here mentioned were Lorenzo the Magnificent, and his son Pietro, who was expelled from Florence in the year 1494. He never returned, but died in the river Garigliano in 1504.

Note 2. In the Middle Ages the burghers of Florence were divided into industrial guilds called the Greater and the Lesser Arts. The former took precedence of the latter, both in political importance and in social esteem.

VI

AS I have said, my father was the devoted servant and attached friend of the house of Medici; and when Piero was banished, he entrusted him with many affairs of the greatest possible importance. Afterwards, when the magnificent Piero Soderini was elected, and my father continued in his office of musician, Soderini, perceiving his wonderful talent, began to employ him in many matters of great importance as an engineer. [1] So long as Soderini remained in Florence, he showed the utmost good-will to my father; and in those days, I being still of tender age, my father had me carried, and made me perform upon the flute; I used to play treble in concert with the musicians of the palace before the Signory, following my notes: and a beadle used to carry me upon his shoulders. The Gonfalonier, that is, Soderini, whom I have already mentioned, took much pleasure in making me chatter, and gave me comfits, and was wont to say to my father: "Maestro Giovanni, besides music, teach the boy those other arts which do you so much honour." To which my father answered: "I do not wish him to practise any art but playing and composing; for in this profession I hope to make him the greatest man of the world, if God prolongs his life." To these words one of the old counsellors made answer: "Ah! Maestro Giovanni, do what the Gonfalonier tells you! for why should he never become anything more than a good musician?"

Thus some time passed, until the Medici returned. [2] When they arrived, the Cardinal, who afterwards became Pope Leo, received my father very kindly. During their exile

the scutcheons which were on the palace of the Medici had had their balls erased, and a great red cross painted over them, which was the bearing of the Commune. [3] Accordingly, as soon as they returned, the red cross was scratched out, and on the scutcheon the red balls and the golden field were painted in again, and finished with great beauty. My father, who possessed a simple vein of poetry, instilled in him by nature, together with a certain touch of prophecy, which was doubtless a divine gift in him, wrote these four verses under the said arms of the Medici, when they were uncovered to the view:-

These arms, which have so long from sight been laid
Beneath the holy cross, that symbol meek,
Now lift their glorious glad face, and seek
With Peter's sacred cloak to be arrayed.

This epigram was read by all Florence. A few days afterwards Pope Julius II. died. The Cardinal de' Medici went to Rome, and was elected Pope against the expectation of everybody. He reigned as Leo X, that generous and great soul. My father sent him his four prophetic verses. The Pope sent to tell him to come to Rome; for this would be to his advantage. But he had no will to go; and so, in lieu of reward, his place in the palace was taken from him by Jacopo Salviati, upon that man's election as Gonfalonier. [4] This was the reason why I commenced goldsmith; after which I spent part of my time in learning that art, and part in playing, much against my will.

Note 1. Piero Soderini was elected Gonfalonier of the Florentine Republic for life in the year 1502. After nine years of government, he was banished, and when he died, Machiavelli wrote the famous sneering epitaph upon him. See J. A. Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. i. p. 297.

Note 2. This was in 1512, when Lorenzo's two sons, Giuliano and Giovanni (afterwards Pope Leo X), came back through the aid of a Spanish army, after the great battle at Ravenna.

Note 3. The Medicean arms were "or, six pellets gules, three, two, and one." The Florentine Commune bore, "argent a cross gules."

Note 4. Cellini makes a mistake here. Salviati married a daughter of Lorenzo de' Medici, and obtained great influence in Florence; but we have no record of his appointment to the office of Gonfalonier.

VII

WHEN my father spoke to me in the way I have above described, I entreated him to let me draw a certain fixed number of hours in the day; all the rest of my time I would give to music, only with the view of satisfying his desire. Upon this he said to me: "So then, you take no pleasure in playing?" To which I answered, "No;" because that art seemed too base in comparison with what I had in my own mind. My good father, driven to despair by this fixed idea of mine, placed me in the workshop of Cavaliere Bandinello's father, who was called Michel Agnolo, a goldsmith from Pinzi di Monte, and a master excellent in that craft. [1] He had no distinction of birth whatever, but was the son of a charcoal-seller. This is no blame to Bandinello, who has founded the honour of the

family-if only he had done so honestly! However that may be, I have no cause now to talk about him. After I had stayed there some days, my father took me away from Michel Agnolo, finding himself unable to live without having me always under his eyes. Accordingly, much to my discontent, I remained at music till I reached the age of fifteen. If I were to describe all the wonderful things that happened to me up to that time, and all the great dangers to my own life which I ran, I should astound my readers; but, in order to avoid prolixity, and having very much to relate, I will omit these incidents.

When I reached the age of fifteen, I put myself, against my father's will, to the goldsmith's trade with a man called Antonio, son of Sandro, known commonly as Marcone the goldsmith. He was a most excellent craftsman and a very good fellow to boot, high-spirited and frank in all his ways. My father would not let him give me wages like the other apprentices; for having taken up the study of this art to please myself, he wished me to indulge my whim for drawing to the full. I did so willingly enough; and that honest master of mine took marvellous delight in my performances. He had an only son, a bastard, to whom he often gave his orders, in order to spare me. My liking for the art was so great, or, I may truly say, my natural bias, both one and the other, that in a few months I caught up the good, nay, the best young craftsmen in our business, and began to reap the fruits of my labours. I did not, however, neglect to gratify my good father from time to time by playing on the flute or cornet. Each time he heard me, I used to make his tears fall accompanied with deep-drawn sighs of satisfaction. My filial piety often made me give him that contentment, and induce me to pretend that I enjoyed the music too.

Note 1. Baccio Bandinello, the sculptor, and a great rival of Cellini's, as will appear in the ensuing pages, was born in 1487, and received the honour of knighthood from Clement VII and Charles V. Posterity has confirmed Cellini's opinion of Bandinello as an artist; for his works are coarse, pretentious, and incapable of giving pleasure to any person of refined intelligence.

VIII

AT that time I had a brother, younger by two years, a youth of extreme boldness and fierce temper. He afterwards became one of the great soldiers in the school of that marvellous general Giovannino de' Medici, father of Duke Cosimo. [1] The boy was about fourteen, and I two years older. One Sunday evening, just before nightfall, he happened to find himself between the gate San Gallo and the Porta a Pinti; in this quarter he came to duel with a young fellow of twenty or thereabouts. They both had swords; and my brother dealt so valiantly that, after having badly wounded him, he was upon the point of following up his advantage. There was a great crowd of people present, among whom were many of the adversary's kinsfolk. Seeing that the thing was going ill for their own man, they put hand to their slings, a stone from one of which hit my poor brother in the head. He fell to the ground at once in a dead faint. It so chanced that I had been upon the spot alone, and without arms; and I had done my best to get my brother out of the fray by calling to him: "Make off; you have done enough." Meanwhile, as luck would have it, he fell, as I have said, half dead to earth. I ran up at once, seized his sword, and stood in front of him, bearing the brunt of several rapiers and a shower of stones. I never left his side until some brave soldiers came from the

gate San Gallo and rescued me from the raging crowd; they marvelled much, the while, to find such valour in so young a boy.

Then I carried my brother home for dead, and it was only with great difficulty that he came to himself again. When he was cured, the Eight, who had already condemned out adversaries and banished them for a term of years, sent us also into exile for six months at a distance of ten miles from Florence. [2] I said to my brother: "Come along with me;" and so we took leave of our poor father; and instead of giving us money, for he had none, he bestowed on us his blessing. I went to Siena, wishing to look up a certain worthy man called Maestro Francesco Castoro. On another occasion, when I had run away from my father, I went to this good man, and stayed some time with him, working at the goldsmith's trade until my father sent for me back. Francesco, when I reached him, recognised me at once, and gave me work to do. While thus occupied, he placed a house at my disposal for the whole time of my sojourn in Siena. Into this I moved, together with my brother, and applied myself to labour for the space of several months. My brother had acquired the rudiments of Latin, but was still so young that he could not yet relish the taste of virtuous employment, but passed his time in dissipation,

Note 1. Cellini refers to the famous Giovanni delle Bande Nere, who was killed in an engagement in Lombardy in November 1526, by the Imperialist troops marching to the sack of Rome. His son Cosimo, after the murder of Duke Alessandro, established the second Medicean dynasty in Florence.

Note 2. The Eight, or Gli Otto, were a magistracy in Florence with cognizance of matters affecting the internal peace of the city.

IX

THE CARDINAL DE' MEDICI, who afterwards became Pope Clement VII., had us recalled to Florence at the entreaty of my father. [1] A certain pupil of my father's, moved by his own bad nature, suggested to the Cardinal that he ought to send me to Bologna, in order to learn to play well from a great master there. The name of this master was Antonio, and he was in truth a worthy man in the musician's art. The Cardinal said to my father that, if he sent me there he would give me letters of recommendation and support. My father, dying with joy at such an opportunity, sent me off; and I being eager to see the world, went with good grace.

When I reached Bologna, I put myself under a certain Maestro Ercole del Piffero, and began to earn something by my trade. In the meantime I used to go every day to take my music lesson, and in a few weeks made considerable progress in that accursed art. However I made still greater in my trade of goldsmith; for the Cardinal having given me no assistance, I went to live with a Bolognese illuminator who was called Scipione Cavalletti (his house was in the street of our Lady del Baraccan); and while there I devoted myself to drawing and working for one Graziadio, a Jew, with whom I earned considerably.

At the end of six months I returned to Florence, where that fellow Pierino, who had been my father's pupil, was greatly mortified by my return. To please my father, I went to his house and played the cornet and the flute with one of his brothers, who was named Girolamo, several years younger than the said Piero, a very worthy young man,

and quite the contrary of his brother. On one of those days my father came to Piero's house to hear us play, and in ecstasy at my performance exclaimed: "I shall yet make you a marvellous musician against the will of all or any one who may desire to prevent me." To this Piero answered, and spoke the truth: "Your Benvenuto will get much more honour and profit if he devotes himself to the goldsmiths trade than to this piping." These words made my father angry, seeing that I too had the same opinion as Piero, that he flew into a rage and cried out at him: "Well did I know that it was you, you who put obstacles in the way of my cherished wish; you are the man who had me ousted from my place at the palace, paying me back with that black ingratitude which is the usual recompense of great benefits. I got you promoted, and you have got me cashiered; I taught you to play with all the little art you have, and you are preventing my son from obeying me; but bear in mind these words of prophecy: not years or months, I say, but only a few weeks will pass before this dirty ingratitude of yours shall plunge you into ruin." To these words answered Pierino and said: "Maestro Giovanni, the majority of men, when they grow old, go mad at the same time; and this has happened to you. I am not astonished at it, because most liberally have you squandered all your property, without reflecting that your children had need of it. I mind to do just the opposite, and to leave my children so much that they shall be able to succour yours." To this my father answered: "No bad tree ever bore good fruit; quite the contrary; and I tell you further that you are bad, and that your children will be mad and paupers, and will cringe for alms to my virtuous and wealthy sons." Thereupon we left the house, muttering words of anger on both sides. I had taken my father's part; and when we stepped into the street together, I told him I was quite ready to take vengeance for the insults heaped on him by that scoundrel, provided he permit me to give myself up to the art of design. He answered: "My dear son, I too in my time was a good draughtsman; but for recreation, after such stupendous labours, and for the love of me who am your father, who begat you and brought you up and implanted so many honourable talents in you, for the sake of recreation, I say, will not you promise sometimes to take in hand your flute and that seductive cornet, and to play upon them to your heart's content, inviting the delight of music?" I promised I would do so, and very willingly for his love's sake. Then my good father said that such excellent parts as I possessed would be the greatest vengeance I could take for the insults of his enemies.

Not a whole month had been completed after this scene before the man Pierino happened to be building a vault in a house of his, which he had in the Via dello Studio; and being one day in a ground-floor room above the vault which he was making, together with much company around him, he fell to talking about his old master, my father. While repeating the words which he had said to him concerning his ruin, no sooner had they escaped his lips than the floor where he was standing (either because the vault had been badly built, or rather through the sheer mightiness of God, who does not always pay on Saturday) suddenly gave way. Some of the stones and bricks of the vault, which fell with him, broke both his legs. The friends who were with him, remaining on the border of the broken vault took no harm, but were astounded and full of wonder, especially because of the prophecy which he had just contemptuously repeated to them. When my father heard of this, he took his sword, and went to see the man. There, in the presence of his father, who was called Niccolao da Volterra, a trumpeter of the Signory, he said, "O Piero, my dear pupil, I am sorely grieved at your mischance; but if you remember it was only a short time ago that I warned you of it; and as much as I then said will come to happen between your children and mine." Shortly afterwards, the ungrateful Piero died of that illness. He left a wife of bad character and

one son, who after the lapse of some years came to me to beg for alms in Rome. I gave him something, as well because it is my nature to be charitable, as also because I recalled with tears the happy state which Pierino held when my father spake those words of prophecy, namely, that Pierino's children should live to crave succour from his own virtuous sons. Of this perhaps enough is now said; but let none ever laugh at the prognostications of any worthy man whom he has wrongfully insulted; because it is not he who speaks, nay, but the very voice of God through him.

Note 1. This Cardinal and Pope was Giulio, a natural son of Giuliano, Lorenzo de' Medici's brother, who had been killed in the Pazzi conspiracy, year 1478. Giulio lived to become Pope Clement VII., to suffer the sack of Rome in 1527, and to make the concordat with Charles V. at Bologna in 1529-30, which settled for three centuries the destiny of Italy. We shall hear much more of him from Cellini in the course of this narrative.

X

ALL this while I worked as a goldsmith, and was able to assist my good father. His other son, my brother Cecchino, had, as I said before, been instructed in the rudiments of Latin letters. It was our father's wish to make me, the elder, a great musician and composer, and him, the younger, a great and learned jurist. He could not, however, put force upon the inclinations of our nature, which directed me to the arts of design, and my brother, who had a fine and graceful person, to the profession of arms. Cecchino, being still quite a lad, was returning from his first lesson in the school of the stupendous Giovannino de' Medici. On the day when he reached home, I happened to be absent; and he, being in want of proper clothes, sought out our sisters, who, unknown to my father, gave him a cloak and doublet of mine, both new and of good quality. I ought to say that, beside the aid I gave my father and my excellent and honest sisters, I had bought those handsome clothes out of my own savings. When I found I had been cheated, and my clothes taken from me, and my brother from whom I should have recovered them was gone, I asked my father why he suffered so great a wrong to be done me, seeing that I was always ready to assist him. He replied that I was his good son, but that the other, whom he thought to have lost, had been found again; also that it was a duty, nay, a precept from God Himself, that he who hath should give to him who hath not; and that for his sake I ought to bear this injustice, for God would increase me in all good things. I, like a youth without experience, retorted on my poor afflicted parent; and taking the miserable remnants of my clothes and money, went toward a gate of the city. As I did not know which gate would start me on the road to Rome, I arrived at Lucca, and from Lucca reached Pisa.

When I came to Pisa (I was about sixteen years of age at the time), I stopped near the middle bridge, by what is called the Fish-stone, at the shop of a goldsmith, and began attentively to watch what the master was about. [1] He asked me who I was, and what was my profession. I told him that I worked a little in the same trade as his own. This worthy man bade me come into his shop, and at once gave me work to do, and spoke as follows: "Your good appearance makes me believe you are a decent honest youth." Then he told me out gold, silver, and gems; and when the first day's work was finished, he took me in the evening to his house, where he dwelt respectably with his handsome wife and children. Thinking of the grief which my good father might be feeling for me, I wrote him that I was sojourning with a very excellent and honest man, called Maestro

Ulivieri della Chiostra, and was working with him at many good things of beauty and importance. I bade him be of good cheer, for that I was bent on learning, and hoped by my acquirements to bring him back both profit and honour before long. My good father answered the letter at once in words like these: "My son, the love I bear you is so great, that if it were not for the honour of our family, which above all things I regard, I should immediately have set off for you; for indeed it seems like being without the light of my eyes, when I do not see you daily, as I used to do. I will make it my business to complete the training of my household up to virtuous honesty; do you make it yours to acquire excellence in your art; and I only wish you to remember these four simple words, obey them, and never let them escape your memory:

In whatever house you be,
Steal not, and live honestly."

Note 1. The Fish-stone, or Pietra del Pesce, was the market on the quay where the fish brought from the sea up the Arno to Pisa used to be sold.

XI

THIS letter fell into the hands of my master Ulivieri, and he read it unknown to me. Afterwards he avowed that he had read it, and added: "So then, my Benvenuto, your good looks did not deceive me, as a letter from your father which has come into my hands gives me assurance, which proves him to be a man of notable honesty and worth. Consider yourself then to be at home here, and as though in your own father's house."

While I stayed at Pisa, I went to see the Campo Santo, and there I found many beautiful fragments of antiquity, that is to say, marble sarcophagi. In other parts of Pisa also I saw many antique objects, which I diligently studied whenever I had days or hours free from the labour of the workshop. My master, who took pleasure in coming to visit me in the little room which he had allotted me, observing that I spent all my time in studious occupations, began to love me like a father. I made great progress in the one year that I stayed there, and completed several fine and valuable things in gold and silver, which inspired me with a resolute ambition to advance in my art.

My father, in the meanwhile, kept writing piteous entreaties that I should return to him; and in every letter bade me not to lose the music he had taught me with such trouble. On this, I suddenly gave up all wish to go back to him; so much did I hate that accursed music; and I felt as though of a truth I were in paradise the whole year I stayed at Pisa, where I never played the flute.

At the end of the year my master Ulivieri had occasion to go to Florence, in order to sell certain gold and silver sweepings which he had; [1] and inasmuch as the bad air of Pisa had given me a touch of fever, I went with the fever hanging still about me, in my master's company, back to Florence. There my father received him most affectionately, and lovingly prayed him, unknown by me, not to insist on taking me again to Pisa. I was ill about two months, during which time my father had me most kindly treated and cured, always repeating that it seemed to him a thousand years till I got well again, in order that he might hear me play a little. But when he talked to me of music, with his fingers on my pulse, seeing he had some acquaintance with medicine and Latin learning, he felt it change so much if he approached that topic, that he was often

dismayed and left my side in tears. When I perceived how greatly he was disappointed, I bade one of my sisters bring me a flute; for though the fever never left me, that instrument is so easy that it did not hurt me to play upon it; and I used it with such dexterity of hand and tongue that my father coming suddenly upon me, blessed me a thousand times, exclaiming that while I was away from him I had made great progress, as he thought; and he begged me to go forwards, and not to sacrifice so fine an accomplishment.

Note 1. I have translated *spazzature* by *sweepings*. It means all refuse of the precious metals left in goldsmith's trays.

XII

WHEN I had recovered my health, I returned to my old friend Marcone, the worthy goldsmith, who put me in the way of earning money, with which I helped my father and our household. About that time there came to Florence a sculptor named Piero Torrigiani; [1] he arrived from England, where he had resided many years; and being intimate with my master, he daily visited his house; and when he saw my drawings and the things which I was making, he said: "I have come to Florence to enlist as many young men as I can; for I have undertaken to execute a great work of my king, and want some of my own Florentines to help me. Now your method of working and your designs are worthy rather of a sculptor than a goldsmith; and since I have to turn out a great piece of bronze, I will at the same time turn you into a rich and able artist." This man had a splendid person and a most arrogant spirit, with the air of a great soldier more than a sculptor, especially in regard to his vehement gestures and his resonant voice, together with a habit he had of knitting his brows, enough to frighten any man of courage. He kept talking every day about his gallant feats among those beasts of Englishmen.

In course of conversation he happened to mention Michel Agnolo Buonarroti, led thereto by a drawing I had made from a cartoon of that divinest painter. [2] This cartoon was the first masterpiece which Michel Agnolo exhibited, in proof of his stupendous talents. He produced it in competition with another painter, Lionardo da Vinci, who also made a cartoon; and both were intended for the council-hall in the palace of the Signory. They represented the taking of Pisa by the Florentines; and our admirable Lionardo had chosen to depict a battle of horses, with the capture of some standards, in as divine a style as could possibly be imagined. Michel Agnolo in his cartoon portrayed a number of foot-soldiers, who, the season being summer, had gone to bathe in Arno. He drew them at the very moment the alarm is sounded, and the men all naked run to arms; so splendid in their action that nothing survives of ancient or of modern art which touches the same lofty point of excellence; and as I have already said, the design of the great Lionardo was itself most admirably beautiful. These two cartoons stood, one in the palace of the Medici, the other in the hall of the Pope. So long as they remained intact, they were the school of the world. Though the divine Michel Agnolo in later life finished that great chapel of Pope Julius, [3] he never rose half-way to the same pitch of power; his genius never afterwards attained to the force of those first studies.

Note 1. Torrigiani worked in fact for Henry VIII., and his monument to Henry VII. still exists in the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey. From England he went to Spain, where he modelled a statue of the Virgin for a great nobleman. Not receiving the pay he

expected, he broke his work to pieces; for which act of sacrilege the Inquisition sent him to prison, where he starved himself to death in 1522. Such at least is the legend of his end.

Note 2. The cartoons to which Cellini here alludes were made by Michel Angelo and Lionardo for the decoration of the Sala del Gran Consiglio in the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence. Only the shadows of them remain to this day; a part of Michel Angelo's, engraved by Schiavonetti, and a transcript by Rubens from Lionardo's, called the Battle of the Standard.

Note 3. The Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.

XIII

NOW let us return to Piero Torrigiani, who, with my drawing in his hand, spoke as follows: "This Buonarroti and I used, when we were boys, to go into the Church of the Carmine, to learn drawing from the chapel of Masaccio. [1] It was Buonarroti's habit to banter all who were drawing there; and one day, among others, when he was annoying me, I got more angry than usual, and clenching my fist, gave him such a blow on the nose, that I felt bone and cartilage go down like biscuit beneath my knuckles; and this mark of mine he will carry with him to the grave." [2] These words begat in me such hatred of the man, since I was always gazing at the masterpieces of the divine Michel Agnolo, that although I felt a wish to go with him to England, I now could never bear the sight of him.

All the while I was at Florence, I studied the noble manner of Michel Agnolo, and from this I have never deviated. About that time I contracted a close and familiar friendship with an amiable lad of my own age, who was also in the goldsmith's trade. He was called Francesco, son of Filippo, and grandson of Fra Lippo Lippi, that most excellent painter. [3] Through intercourse together, such love grew up between us that, day or night, we never stayed apart. The house where he lived was still full of the fine studies which his father had made, bound up in several books of drawings by his hand, and taken from the best antiquities of Rome. The sight of these things filled me with passionate enthusiasm; and for two years or thereabouts we lived in intimacy. At that time I fashioned a silver bas-relief of the size of a little child's hand. It was intended for the clasp to a man's belt; for they were then worn as large as that. I carved on it a knot of leaves in the antique style, with figures of children and other masks of great beauty. This piece I made in the workshop of one Francesco Salimbene; and on its being exhibited to the trade, the goldsmiths praised me as the best young craftsman of their art.