

**THE BOOK OF THE  
COURTYER: A POSSIBLE  
SOURCE OF BENEDICK AND  
BEATRICE; PP. 475-502**

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The Book of the Courtyer: A Possible Source of Benedick and Beatrice; pp. 475-502 by Mary Augusta Scott

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**MARY AUGUSTA SCOTT**

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To Leonard Eckstein Opdycke,  
from  
Mary Augusta Scott.

# THE BOOK OF THE COURTYER:

A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF BENEDICK AND BEATRICE.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSO-  
CIATION OF AMERICA, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
PENNSYLVANIA, DECEMBER 28, 1900.

BY

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## THE BOOK OF THE COURTYER:

### A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF BENEDICK AND BEATRICE.

"The best book that ever was written upon good breeding, *Il Cortegiano*, by Castiglione, grew up at the little Court of Urbino, and you should read it," says Dr. Johnson to Boswell, of all places in the world, in the Isle of Skye, "roving among the Hebrides at sixty." But when, in the *Life of Addison*, we find the *Courtyer* classed with *Galateo*, and compared with the social essays of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, it becomes clear that the Great Cham was so ignorant of the law he was laying down in this instance, that he took *Il Cortegiano* for a courtesy-book, a book of etiquette:—

"To teach the minuter decencies and inferior duties, to regulate the practice of daily conversation, to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal, to remove those grievances which, if they produce no lasting calamities, impress hourly vexation, was first attempted by Casa in his book of manners, and Castiglione in the *Courtyer*." (Works, vii, 428, *Addison*.)

William Michael Rossetti, writing of Italian Courtesy-Books for the Early English Text Society, enumerates ten or a dozen such books, ranging from the *Tesoretto* of Brunetto Latini, in 1265, the year of Dante's birth, to Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo*, of about 1550. He includes *Il Cortegiano*, but calls attention to the fact that it contains but one reference, and that an incidental one, to what Dr. Johnson calls "the minuter decencies" of life. It is among the facetiae, and recalls to some of those who had been present an incident that happened at the dinner-table of Federico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. It is precisely because *Il Cortegiano* is not a mere courtesy-book that it has borne so well the judg-

ment of time, and become the best book on manners that ever was written.

For several years I have carefully kept account of all the editions and reprints of *Il Cortegiano* that I have met with, and so far I have noted<sup>1</sup> 142 impressions, in six languages. Appearing at Venice, in 1528, *Il Cortegiano* was first translated into French nine years later by Jacques Colin, secretary to Francis I, with a commendatory epistle to Mellin de Saint-Gelais. It was turned into Spanish, in 1534, by Juan Boscán Almogaver at the instance of his fellow-poet, Garcilaso de la Vega, and into German, by Lorenz Kratzer, in 1565-6. It 'became an Englishman,' in 1561, at the hands of Thomas Hoby, who, as Sir Thomas Hoby, died Elizabeth's ambassador to France. An Elizabethan Latin translation, by Bartholomew Clerke, ran to seven editions, while two different English translations appeared in the eighteenth century. Sir Thomas Hoby's version has been far and away the most enduring Elizabethan translation from the Italian; a reprint of it, appropriately edited by Walter Raleigh, is one of the *Tudor Translations* of last year. Hoby's English limps behind the courtly grace of the Italian, and it is at times inaccurate, but it is throughout sympathetic, and is on the whole an excellent piece of work. In my own case, I find I get the feeling of Castiglione best, if I quote from Hoby who lacked but a few years of being his contemporary, than if I try to put the sixteenth century Italian into my nineteenth century English.

Somewhat of the unique excellence of *Il Cortegiano* is due to the fact that it is the work of a life, practically the sole 'heir of the author's invention.' Whatever Baldassare Castiglione had known, and experienced, and thought, and felt, he set down, refined and philosophised, in his book. Indeed, a criticism of his own time was that he had fashioned

<sup>1</sup>For the latest information on this point, Oct. 2, 1901, I am indebted to Mr. Leonard E. Opdycke, who will publish a complete bibliography of *Il Cortegiano*, in his new English translation, now going through the De Vinne Press, for Charles Scribner's Sons.



himself in his *Courtyer*, nor did he wholly deny the charge, replying with dignity,—

“Unto these men I will not cleane deny that I have attempted all that my mynde is the Courtier shoulde have knowlege in. And I thinke who so hath not the knowlege of the thinges intreated upon in this booke, how learned so ever he be, he can full il write them.” When Castiglione died, as Apostolic Nuncio of Pope Clement VII. to Charles V., the Emperor is reported to have said, “I tell you one of the finest gentlemen in the world is dead.” The biography of Castiglione has then a two-fold interest; it reveals *Il Cortegiano* in the making, and it shows the aesthetic temperament allowing the creature of its imagining to control the practical conduct of life.

Baldassare Castiglione was born at Casatico, in the Mantuan territory, in 1478. His father, Cristoforo, Count of Castiglione, was captain of a troop in the service of the Marquis of Mantua; his mother, Luigia Gonzaga, was cousin to the Marquis and to his sister, that Elizabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, whose praises are so devotedly chanted in *Il Cortegiano*. His early education was conducted by his mother, who was the intimate friend of Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, one of the most learned and brilliant women of the Renaissance. Later he was sent to the Court of Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, called Il Moro, whose wife, the beautiful Beatrice d'Este, was Isabella's sister, and it was here, with a diplomatic career in view, that he acquired his two-sided education. He became a learned soldier, and a cultivated man of the world. The Moro was a splendid patron of art, and we can fancy the clever boy, sensitive to the beauty of the arts, going of a morning to Santa Maria delle Grazie to talk with Leonardo while he was slowly painting the Last Supper, “for,” says Matteo Bandello, who was then a novice in the Dominican convent of Santa Maria, “this excellent painter always liked to hear people give their opinions freely on his pictures.” Doubtless the young

courtier was more interested in the artist's great equestrian statue of Duke Francesco Sforza, which he was modelling in the Corte Vecchia from drawings of the big jennet and Sicilian horse of Messer Galeazzo Sanseverino, mentioned in Book I. of the *Courtier* as master of horse to the French king. Messer Galeazzo's brother, Gaspare, known by his sobriquet of Captain Fracassa, was as famous for his rough manners as Galeazzo was the model of chivalric graces. He is supposed to be the nameless warrior of Book I, who rudely repulsed Caterina Sforza's invitation to join in dance and song, because war was his profession. Caterina wittily replied, that since no war was stirring, nor the Milanese Court a proper field for war, she thought Messer Capitano might well be besmeared and set up with other implements of war in an armory, lest, she adds, "you waxe more rustier than you are." At Milan Castiglione also met Bramante, who was building the matchless cupola over the apse of Santa Maria at the same time that Leonardo was painting the *Cenacolo* in the Refectory. Cristoforo Romano, one of the best artists whom the Duke of Milan had in his employ, was then working on the *Certosa*, the great Carthusian church and monastery at Pavia, which Il Moro called the jewel of his crown. Cristoforo is that artist of the *Courtier*, who in the First Book defends sculpture as superior to painting, not without a touch of human nature withal,—

"I beleave verelye," he says to the Count of Canossa, "you thynke not as ye speake, and all this do you for your Raphaelles sake."

With the entry of Louis XII. into Milan, in October, 1499, the bright youth of Baldassare Castiglione was over. The French king entered the city in a triumphal procession, the dukes of Ferrara and Savoy riding beside him, Cardinals della Rovere and d'Amboise in front, and a goodly array of princes, nobles, and ambassadors following in his train. Castiglione was one of these, in the suite of his kinsman, the Marquis of Mantua. When the pageant was all over, he sat

down and wrote a letter to his mother, describing with boyish enthusiasm the pomp and splendor of the scenes he had witnessed, and the coming man is felt in his regret for the change that had come to the Castello. Once those halls and courts had been the haunt of rare intellects and great artists; now they were occupied by the rude French soldiery who made a target of the great horse on which Leonardo had spent the best years of his life. In Book I. Castiglione tells us how the Frenchmen held learning in small esteem, in Hoby's racy Elizabethan, "all learned men they count verie rascelles, and they think it a great vilany whan any one of them is called a clarke."

The fall of Milan precipitated Castiglione into that turmoil of Italian politics, which, except for the brief respite of three and a half years at the Court of Urbino, he was to rise with and lie down with for the rest of his life. The Courtyer's academic education was ended; now he became an actor in a great and troubled drama, in which the Pope, the Emperor, the King of France, Venice, Florence, Naples, and the smaller Italian states in turn occupy the stage. Castiglione first entered the service of his kinsman, Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, and passed thence to the Court of Giudobaldo, Duke of Urbino, urged to the step in the first instance by the natural desire to be with his cousin and friend, Cesare Gonzaga, who is one of the young lords of the *Courtyer*. *Il Cortegiano* is the story of his calm and happy life at Urbino, which lasted from September, 1504, to the death of Duke Giudobaldo in April, 1508.

At Urbino Castiglione occupied himself partly with letters, partly with diplomacy. He wrote elegant verse in Latin elegiacs, and composed an eclogue, *Tirsi*, for the entertainment of the Court. He was frequently sent on diplomatic missions, once to King Louis XII., of France, at Milan, and once, in the autumn of 1506, to the English Court, whence he carried back from Henry VII. the Order of the Garter for his master, Duke Giudobaldo, and received for himself