

TALES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649491278

Tales by Agnolo Firenzuola

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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AGNOLO FIRENZUOLA

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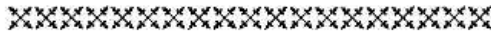
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TALES
OF
FIRENZUOLA
Benedictine Monk of Vallambrosa
(XVIII CENTURY)

--For the first time translated into English--



PARIS
ISIDORE LISEUX
1889



PREFACE

FIRENZUOLA is more than a pleasing storyteller: he is a masterly writer who adapts a nervous style to the service of a naturally voluptuous imagination, and the pictures of which are of a colouring sparkling with vivacity. He has been praised for his not having adhered to the language such as Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch had formed it, and for having enriched his own with a host of picturesque expressions gathered at the fountain head, namely, borrowed from the ordinary manner of speaking. We hear at Florence as in Paris more tropes on one market day, than during several hundred Academical sittings. His somewhat considerable work comprises

a collection of Oriental Apologues entitled : *Discorsi degli Animali; Ragionamenti d'amore*; two *Discourses on Women's Beauty*; two comedies, *La Triunzia* and *I Lucidi*; a translation of the *Golden Ass*, by Apuleius; poetry in which *Capitoli* slightly sketched and a few desultory pieces, appear. One of them, *Expulsion of new characters uselessly introduced into the Tuscan tongue*, is directed against the Trissino, who wanted to add to the alphabet certain parasitic letters, among others the omega. Two of these works at least were formerly turned into French and seem to have been in great vogue; the *Discorsi degli Animali* were translated for the first time by Gabriel Cottier, under this heading : *Pleasant and jocose discourses of Animals, with a story not less true than funny lutely taken place in the city of Florence*, Lyons, 1556, 16mo, and a second time by Pierre de Larivey; they form part of a treatise entitled : *Two Books of Fabulous Philosophy*, Lyons, 1579, 16mo. Brantôme was acquainted with the *Discorsi delle bellezze delle donne*, or with the French translation. *The Golden Ass* presents this striking feature that Firenzuola, in substituting himself for the Lucius of Apuleius,

appropriated to himself not only the author's inventions, but also the hero's mishaps which he takes on his own account, and this affords him the opportunity of recounting to us up to the end, a smattering of his own biography and a regular genealogy of his whole family. Paul Louis Courier, a shrewd judge of these matters, highly appreciated this translation owing to its slightly arch savour. 'Without reproducing obscure sentences,' says he, 'the forgotten terms of Fra Jacopone or of Cavalcanti, Firenzuola borrows from the old Tuscan a host of ingenuous and charming expressions, and his version, in which we may say all the flowers of this admirable language are concentrated, is, in many persons' opinion, what is most finished in Italian prose.'

The *Ragionamenti d'Amore* commend themselves by the same agreeableness of style and, moreover, the romances for which they serve as frame are so many short masterpieces of sprightly narrative and ingenious wit. This is evidently his most vivid creation, the one which assures him the greatest chance of being known outside of Italy. Yet they have never before been turned into English, perhaps

owing to their title, which does not promise much interest ; perhaps because of the too refined insipidness of the preliminaries, which but little lead us to suspect how much boldness and fantasy the author is about to display. In imitation of Boccaccio, Firenzuola supposes that a society of young ladies and gallant knights is united in a pleasant villa ; they spend the time in prolonged chattings which by their object recall the quintessenced abstractions of the Courts of Love, and, having, about night-fall, chosen a Queen, they relate one after another merry tales in which, by a satirical contrast, the heavenly Venus, so mystically exalted during the preliminaries, is sacrificed without the least hesitation to the earthly Venus. Perhaps this is a symbolical turning adopted by the author to make us comprehend that pure and ideal love, though excellent as a topic of conversation, is no longer current in real life.

However witty this frame may be, it does not possess originality enough to claim much of our attention ; we have therefore overlooked the metaphysical discussions at the beginning of the *Ragionamenti* and translated only the Romances which form

their conclusion. We shall give a sufficient idea of the whole in stating that the scene is laid at Pozzolatico, near Florence, within the prescribed decorations of this sort of semi-allegorical compositions: terraced gardens, plashing fountains, purling streams, shady groves, meadows decked with flowers, and that the interlocutors are six in number, three gentlemen: Celso, Folchetto, Selvagio, and three ladies: Costanza Amaretta, Fioretta, and Bianca. Celso is Firenzuola himself; he assumes this title in many other works of his; he appears to have designated, under the names of Fior-etta and Bianca, his sister and sister-in-law; under that of Folchetto, Bianca's husband, his own brother, Girolamo Firenzuola. As to Costanza Amaretta, who is taken as Queen, she was a Florentine of high descent and great wit whom Firenzuola loved with a tender love, and she died young, in the full splendour of her beauty. He conserved for her a kind of worship and, in his *Epistola in lode delle donne*, addressed to a learned Si- nese, Claudio Tolomei, after having placed her for her talents and beauty in the same rank as the most illustrious of whom ancient or modern history makes