

**STORIES FROM OLD
ITALIAN ROMANCE**

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Stories from old Italian romance by Susan Cunnington

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SUSAN CUNNINGTON

**STORIES FROM OLD
ITALIAN ROMANCE**

STORIES FROM OLD ITALIAN ROMANCE

SELECTED AND RETOLD BY
SUSAN CUNNINGTON

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AND "HOME AND STATE"

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THE HUNDRED ANCIENT TALES

THE oldest Italian stories belong to a wonderful collection of the thirteenth century known as the "Hundred Ancient Tales." The compiler had gathered them together from many sources and claimed for them an honourable antiquity, though some belonged to nearly his own times. Amongst them were many of the old favourites told by wandering minstrels in castle halls and around camp fires, stories belonging to the days of oral, not written literature. Alexander and Hector, Aristotle and Cato, Narcissus and Pythagoras, and Tristan and Lancelot were among the heroes, and the Lady of Shalott, known to British children in Tennyson's verse, was amongst the tragic heroines. There were stories, too, from Bible history: Balaam and Samson, David and Solomon, and the Three Kings who visited the manger at Bethlehem. But also there were tales of people of quite recent times, of Saladin and the Emperor Frederick II, of Ezzelino the Tyrant and King Conrad, of King Henry II of England and his gallant sons and their daring friend and companion, Count Bertrand de Born.

The first six stories in this book are taken from this old collection.

THE FIRST STORY

THE LEARNED GREEK PRISONER

A POWERFUL King of Greece in old time ruled over much territory and exacted instant obedience from all his subjects. He had imprisoned for some years a great scholar who had offended him, a man whose wisdom was reported as exceeding that of any other man in the realm. One day the King received a gift of a fine horse from a fellow-monarch, the King of Spain. It was magnificent to look upon ; handsome in form, distinguished in colour, and of rare breed.

His Majesty, desiring to be exactly informed as to its worth, sent for his smith and asked his opinion of the qualities of the steed. The smith declared himself unable to speak confidently, and advised the King to consult his Greek prisoner, who was reported to be a man learned in all forms of knowledge. So the King had the horse led into a meadow, and ordered the learned prisoner to be brought there to behold it. Then he said, "Master, your great knowledge has been favourably reported to me ; let me know your opinion of this horse." The Greek examined the animal carefully and replied, "Sire, this horse is a truly fine courser, but he has been nurtured on asses' milk."

Much struck with this observation, the King dispatched messengers to Spain to inquire exactly into the bringing-up of the horse. They returned, bearing word that its mother had died soon after it was born, and that it had been reared with a young ass. The King was greatly astonished to find the prisoner's opinion thus justified, and ordered that in future he should be given half a loaf of bread a day in his prison, at the royal expense.

Some time afterwards he was inspecting his treasures and the rare jewels belonging to him and desired to be