

**THE NEW DECAMERON,  
VOLUME THE  
SECOND, CONTAINING  
THE SECOND DAY**

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The New Decameron, Volume the Second, containing the second day by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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VOLUME THE SECOND, CONTAINING  
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## PRELUDE

OWING to a mishap to their private yacht, Hector Turpin and the strange company that formed his first Continental touring-party had reached their port of destination too late for the train which should, according to programme, have taken them on their way. As frequently occurs, the unexpected check had lulled the *Wanderlust* of some members of the group, so that they emerged from the comfortable bedrooms of their hotel desirous of spending "a quiet morning pottering about," and wholly unresponsive to time-tables and guide-books and the enthusiasm of their more restless fellow-tourists.

Chance brought Turpin to their side and, with the reinforcement of the Courier himself, the potterers won the day. With a view to economy, Turpin had borrowed from an impecunious but poetical acquaintance the steam-yacht that had carried the party from England. In return he had promised the lender gratuitous inclusion in the tour. The young man, cursed with a yacht he disliked and feared, and with a talent for verse to which the world had hitherto shown a cool indifference, was to have joined the party on

## PRELUDE ◀

their arrival at the French port. The prospect of some weeks' comfortable existence and the hope of congenial company had stifled his usual unpunctuality. He had been on the quay at the arranged hour. After waiting in vain for half the afternoon, he had conceived a lyric vision of a fishing fleet, and hastened to a quiet café to complete gestation. When at last the yacht arrived, he was nowhere to be found. The Courier had no address to guide him. Either his poet-friend was in the town or he was not. Each alternative necessitated waiting. Hence it was that he ranged himself with those who wished to idle their time away in the deep, grey-green passages between the old houses by the harbour, to dawdle about curiosity shops, to suck cool, vivid drinks through straws. He was careful that no one should suspect the real reason for his acceptance of delay. Obviously, the yacht transaction could not be made public. He hoped, a little despairingly, that the poet would be discreet.

After breakfast, when departure had been finally postponed, the party split into groups. Mrs. Dane-Vereker, as befitted a lady of fashion, was for *antiquaires* and old china and possible embroideries. Mr. Scott (of the Psychological Research Society), who collected snuff-boxes, and Mr. Vivian Spencer (of the Foreign Office), who collected prints, elected to accompany her. Miss Pogson, resentful of the delay and determined on her money's worth, set out to see churches, museums, and—if there were any—Roman remains. Her fervour kindled Mr. Buck, the retired

## PRELUDE ●

master-printer, who regarded architecture as his hobby since the first brick was laid of that astonishing villa-residence (now in the process of building) in which he hoped to end his days.

"If you will allow me, ma'am," he said with ceremony, "I will accompany you on your stroll. I have for long been parshul to the Rinacens style."

The Schoolmarm, unaware that Mr. Buck believed this to be the French for "baronial," consented graciously.

Mr. Peter Brown, æsthetic nondescript, favoured bookshops and queer corners and an occasional drink. Also he preferred to see churches without hearing their history read aloud, and the poise of Miss Pogson's guide-book promised much study of the past. Dr. Mary Pennock nodded agreement and looked inquiringly towards Father Anthony. The clergyman excused himself.

"I feel the heat," he said. "Perhaps I might join you later in the day? I shall read quietly at the hotel."

The remaining member of the party—Professor Barnabas MacWhirter-Smith—was nowhere to be found. His friend the Psychical Researcher remembered that the learned gentleman had made some reference to papyri in the library of the local University. It was decided to await his reappearance with composure.

The Courier smiled on his clients' plans.

"Excellent!" he cried. "And I have some correspondence and other business which will occupy me until after noon. May I suggest that