

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
Benvenuto Cellini

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE BULL



PENGUIN BOOKS

completely by a young man from Jesi called Lucagnolo. He was a countryman who had come to work for Santi when he was a young child. He was small but very well built, and he was a better craftsman than anyone I had so far come across. He worked very easily and skilfully, but he restricted himself to large things, like very beautiful vases and bowls.

After I had started work I undertook to make some candlesticks for the Bishop of Salamanca, a Spaniard. They were as richly ornamented as such objects can be. The next thing that happened was that a pupil of Raphael's called Gianfrancesco, and usually known as Il Fattore, who was a very fine painter, being a friend of the Bishop got me into his good books. The Bishop commissioned a great amount of work from me, and I earned a good deal of money.

At that time I used to go and draw, sometimes in Michelangelo's chapel and sometimes in the house of Agostino Chigi of Siena, where there were many beautiful paintings done by that splendid artist Raphael of Urbino. I used to go along there only when there was a feast day since Agostino's brother, Gismondo Chigi, was then living there. They became very proud of themselves when they saw young men of my sort coming along to study in their houses.

One day Messer Gismondo's wife, who had seen me around in her house very often, came up to me and began examining my drawings; then she asked me whether I was a sculptor or a painter. She was an extraordinarily beautiful and gracious woman. When I told her I was a goldsmith she said that I drew far too well for a goldsmith.

Then she sent one of her maids to bring a beautiful lily that she had, made of magnificent diamonds set in gold. She showed it to me and wanted me to say what I thought its value was. I reckoned it was worth eight hundred crowns. She said that I had valued it very rightly and then she asked me if I thought I had enough skill to set it really well. I answered that I would be only too happy to do so, and while she was still there I drew her a little design for it. It was all the better because of the pleasure I got from talking with such a very beautiful and gracious lady. After I had finished the sketch we were joined by another very beautiful Roman lady. She came down from upstairs and asked Madonna Porzia what she was doing there. With a smile, Madonna Porzia said: 'I'm enjoying myself watching this fine young man draw. He's good as well as handsome.'

Suddenly becoming bold, though my daring was mixed with a little honest modesty, I blushed and said: 'Such as I am, madam, I shall always be more than anxious to serve you.'

Then that gracious lady, blushing a little in turn, said: 'You can be sure that I want you to serve me.'

She gave me the lily and told me to take it away with me, and then, handing me twenty crowns that she took out of her purse, she said: 'Do it in the same way that you sketched the design, and save me the old gold that it's set in now.'

At this the other lady broke in: 'If I were that young man I shouldn't hesitate to make myself scarce.'

Madonna Porzia replied that virtues were very rarely found along with vices and that if I did such a thing I would strongly contradict my fine appearance, which was that of an honest young man. Then she turned away, taking the other lady's hand in hers, and laughing very prettily she said: 'Good-bye, Benvenuto.'

I spent some time on the drawing I was doing, which was copied from a figure of Jupiter by Raphael, and then when I had finished I went away and began to make a tiny wax model in order to show what the finished work would be like. When I brought it along for Madonna Porzia to see she was with the Roman lady that I had met before. They were both delighted with what I had done, praising me so much that rather daringly I promised that the actual work would be twice as good as the model.

I set to work, and at the end of twelve days I had finished the jewel, which as I said above was shaped like a lily, adorning it with little masks and cherubs and animals, all of them exquisitely enamelled, so that the diamonds forming the lily had their beauty immensely enhanced.

While I was working on it, that skilled craftsman Lucagnolo—I have already said what an able man he was—let me know that he thought it was a waste of time. He kept on saying that I would reap far more honour and profit if I carried on helping him make his large silver vases as I used to at first. My answer to this was that I could do that sort of work whenever I felt like it, but that what I was doing now did not fall into a man's lap every day, and that anyway there was just as much honour in it as in his large silver vases, and a great deal more profit.

Lucagnolo thought this was very funny. 'You'll realize the truth, Benvenuto,' he said, 'because I shall hurry up, and by the time you're

through with your work I shall finish this vase that I began at the same time as you started on the jewel. And then we shall find out clearly enough what I make out of the vase and what you make out of your jewel.'

I said that I was only too pleased to put it to the test with an expert like him, and when it was over we would see who was mistaken. So, smiling rather scornfully, the two of us bent our heads proudly over our work, with such eagerness that at the end of about ten days we had both produced very beautifully-made works of art. Lucagnolo's was a very large bowl, meant for Pope Clement's table as a receptacle for pieces of bone and rind. It was intended for show rather than use, and was adorned with two fine handles, a great many masks of various sizes, and clusters of beautiful leaves. The whole thing was so wonderfully done that I said it was the most perfect vase I had ever seen.

Thinking that he had convinced me, Lucagnolo answered: 'Your work looks just as beautiful to me, but it won't be long before we see the difference between them.'

Then he took his vase along to the Pope who was very pleased with it and had him paid on the spot at the usual rate. Meanwhile I went back with the jewel to Madonna Porzia. She was astonished when she set eyes on it, and she told me that I had by far and away surpassed what I had promised. Then she said that I must ask whatever I liked in return, since she thought that I deserved so much that even if she gave me a castle it still wouldn't be reward enough. 'However,' she added with a laugh, 'as I can't give you a castle, you must ask for something that I can give.'

My reply to this was that the greatest reward of all was to see how pleased she was with it. Then, laughing with her, I bowed and began to take my leave, repeating that that was the only reward I wanted. She turned to her companion and said: 'Now do you see what sort of company is kept by the virtues that we decided were in him? They have nothing to do with vice.'

They were both astonished at my attitude, and then Madonna Porzia said:

'Dear Benvenuto, have you ever heard the saying that when the poor give to the rich the devil has a good laugh?'

'Still,' I replied, 'he has a great deal of bad luck and this once I want to see him laugh.'

As I left, however, she told me that this time she had no intention of being so kind to him.

I went back to the workshop and I found Lucagnolo there, with the money he had got for his vase in a little packet. As I came in, he called out: 'Come over here and let's compare what you were paid for your little jewel with what I was paid for my vase.'

I told him that he should leave it as it was till the following day, and that as I believed my work was in its way no less beautiful than his, I expected to be paid just as well.

Next day Madonna Porzia sent one of her head servants round to my shop: he called me outside and then handed me a packet full of money, with a message from her to say that she did not mean the devil to have the laugh to himself. Among other compliments worthy of such a lady she suggested by this that my work deserved much more than she was sending me.

It seemed an eternity to Lucagnolo before he could compare his earnings with mine. He came rushing into the workshop, and then, in the presence of about a dozen workmen and neighbours who were already there, anxious to see the result of the contest, he took hold of his packet, and crying out: 'Phew! Phew!' three or four times, laughing contemptuously, he poured the money very noisily on to the counter. There were twenty-five *giulios*, and he reckoned that what I had would come to four or five large crowns. Completely unnerved by his shouting and by the looks and smiles of the onlookers, I peeped inside my packet and saw that it was filled with gold. Then keeping my eyes on the ground, from one side of the counter in complete silence I lifted my packet right up in the air and poured out the contents as if from a mill-hopper. There were twice as many coins as he had. As a result, all those eyes that had been staring scornfully at me suddenly switched to Lucagnolo, and everyone said: 'Benvenuto has been paid in gold, and there's twice as much, so it makes a much better show.'

I felt certain that Lucagnolo was going to fall down dead on the spot, he was so filled with shame and envy. In fact a third of my earnings went to him (that is the usual custom - two-thirds fall to the workman and a third to the master of the shop) but his furious envy got the better of his greed. It should have been altogether the other way round, seeing that he was the son of a peasant of *Jesi*. He started cursing his work and the people who taught him, saying that from now on he would stop

making large plate and give all his time to making my pimping little trash, since it was so well paid for. I grew as furious as him and retorted that every bird whistled its own tune and that he was talking after the fashion of the hovels-he came from, but that although I reckoned I would find it very easy to make his stuff, which was all balls anyway, he would never succeed in making my trash. Then I stamped away in a rage, saying that he would soon see what was what. Everyone there told him quite bluntly that he was in the wrong, accused him of being the lout that he was, and praised me for being the man I had shown myself.

Next day I went along to thank Madonna Porzia. I said that she had done the opposite of the proverb, for when I wanted to make the devil laugh she had made him deny God again. We both laughed happily, and then she commissioned some more beautiful work from me.

Meanwhile I managed, through one of Raphael's pupils, to get the Bishop of Salamanca to order a large water-bowl from me. It was the kind called an *acquereccia*, used as a sideboard ornament. As the Bishop wanted two of the same size he had Lucagnolo working on one and me on the other. The design for these was supplied us by the painter Gianfrancesco whom I mentioned before.

A Milanese called Giovanpiero della Tacca allowed me to use a corner of his workshop and I started on the vase with tremendous enthusiasm. I made my calculations, put by enough money for some of my own needs, and sent all the rest to help my poor father in Florence. It happened that when this was paid to him he ran into one of those madmen who were among the Eight when I stirred things up a little. It was the same man who had abused him and sworn that he was determined to have me marched out to execution.

As this fellow had several good-for-nothing sons, my father said very tellingly:

'Accidents can happen to anyone, especially to quick-tempered men who are in the right, as my son was. But his life since then proves how well I brought him up. I hope to God for your sake that your sons behave towards you neither better nor worse than mine do to me. God taught me how to bring them up, and then when my strength failed, despite what you expected, He himself rescued them from your violence.'

Then after he had left him he wrote telling me everything that had

happened. In his letter he begged me for the love of God to play a little music now and then, so that I would not lose the wonderful talent he had been at such pains to teach me. He wrote with such fatherly affection that like the loving son I was I burst into tears, determined that as far as music was concerned I would make him thoroughly happy before he died; so God does indeed grant men all the legitimate requests they honestly make to him.

While I was working hard on the Bishop's beautiful vase I had only one small boy helping me. I had taken him on as my assistant, giving in to the pressure of friends and half against my own will. His name was Paulino and he was about fourteen; he was the son of a Roman citizen who lived on a private income. This Paulino had the most perfect manners, the most honest character, and the prettiest face of any I have ever come across in all my life. His honest way of behaving and his incredible beauty and the great love he showed me made me love him in turn almost more than I could bear. I loved him so passionately that I was always playing music for him, in order to see his lovely face, which was normally rather sad and serious, brighten up when he heard it. Whenever I took up the cornet such a frank, beautiful smile came over his face that I am not at all surprised at those silly stories the Greeks wrote about their gods. In fact if Paulino had been alive in those days he might have unhinged them even more.

He had a sister called Faustina who was even more beautiful, I think, than the Faustina the ancient books are always babbling about. Sometimes I used to visit their vineyard and from what I could judge it appeared to me that Paulino's father, a thoroughly worthy man, would have liked me as a son-in-law. All this made me play a great deal more than usual.

It was about this time that a man called Gianiacomo, who was a fifer from Cesena in the service of the Pope, and a splendid musician, got in touch with me. He sent a message through Lorenzo, the trumpeter from Lucca who is now serving our Duke of Florence, asking me if I would help them at the Pope's August festival in some very beautiful motets they had chosen, by playing the soprano part on my cornet. Although I was burning to finish my wonderful vase, as music is a marvellous business anyway, and to give my father some satisfaction, I was quite ready to join them. We spent a week before the festival practising together two hours a day. On the day itself we went along to

Over a year before I had sent back some jewels and some gold ornaments made in France, which were worth more than two thousand ducats; and I had brought with me some more, worth about a thousand crowns. I discovered that although all the time I had been giving them four gold crowns a month, they also regularly made an income out of selling some of my jewellery day by day. But that brother-in-law of mine was such an upright man that for fear of arousing my anger – and seeing that the money I sent him by way of a free allowance was not enough – he had pawned nearly all he had in the world, letting himself be eaten up by interest rather than touch the money which was not really his. By this I recognized how honest he was, and I determined to do more for him and I also intended to make provision for all his daughters before I left Florence.

At that time our Duke of Florence was at Poggio a Cajano, a place ten miles distant from Florence: it was the month of August, 1545. I went there to find him, with the sole purpose of paying my proper respects, seeing that I too was a Florentine citizen and my forefathers had been great friends of the House of Medici, and I more than any of them loved Duke Cosimo.

As I said, I went to Poggio only to pay my respects and without the slightest intention of staying with him, as turned out to be God's will, who orders all things for the best. When I encountered the Duke he greeted me with tremendous affection, and then he and the Duchess asked me about the work I had done for the King: I was only too pleased to tell him the whole story. After I had finished he said that he had understood as much and that I had spoken the truth; then he added with a gesture of sympathy:

'What a small reward for all your great and wonderful toil! My dear Benvenuto, if you were to do something for me I would reward you in a way very different from the way that King, whom your good nature makes you praise so much, has done.'

At this I went on to mention the great obligations I was under to his Majesty, who had rescued me from such unjust imprisonment and then given me the chance to do more splendid work than any craftsman of my kind had ever been able to undertake. While I was talking in this fashion the Duke twisted and turned and looked as if he could not wait for me to finish. When I did finish he said: 'If you do some work for me, I'll treat you so generously that I imagine you'll be

astonished: provided your work pleases me, and of that I have no doubt at all.'

Then I, poor wretch, in my eagerness to show the splendid Florentine school that since my departure I had been engaged far more than it imagined on other branches of art, said in reply that I would be only too pleased to make him a great statue, either in marble or bronze, for that fine piazza of his. He answered that all he wanted as my first work for him was a Perseus; he had been wanting this for a long time, and he begged me to make him a little model of it.

I gladly set to work on the model and in a few weeks I had finished it. It was about a cubit in height, in yellow wax, properly finished, and beautifully made with great care and skill. The Duke came to Florence, but several days passed before I had an opportunity of showing him the model, and it seemed just as if he had never seen or known me. As a result I was beginning to feel very downcast about my relations with him. But then one day after dinner, when I had brought it with me into his wardrobe, he came to inspect it, along with the Duchess and a few other noblemen. It pleased him as soon as he had set eyes on it, and he began praising it extravagantly. This rather led me to hope that he knew something about the matter. After he had studied it a good while, becoming more and more delighted, he said:

'My dear Benvenuto, if you produce a large work which is as excellent as this little model it will be the finest work on the piazza.'

'Your Excellency,' I replied, 'there are works on the piazza by the great Donatello, and by the marvellous Michelangelo, and those two men have proved themselves the greatest artists since the time of the ancients. But as your most Illustrious Excellency is very enthusiastic about my model let me say that I have it in me to produce a work that will be three times better still.'

At this there was no little argument, because the Duke kept saying that he was quite expert on the matter and that he was perfectly aware of what could be done. So I told him that what I produced would settle both his doubts and the argument, and that I would certainly achieve for him something that would be far greater than I promised: but, I said, he must provide me with the means to do so, since I could not provide him with the great work I had promised unless he did. His Excellency answered that I should petition him for the amount I

needed, and that I should give in detail all I required; then, he said, he would see to it that my petition was granted in full. Certainly, if I had been astute enough to secure by contract all that I needed in my work I would not have had all the trouble that came to me through my own fault; for he was tremendously insistent on having the work done and on making the arrangements. But not realizing that this lord behaved more like a merchant than a duke, it was as with a duke rather than a merchant that I dealt with him.

I made my petitions, and his Excellency responded very liberally.

In them I said: 'Most rare patron, the real petition and the real agreement do not consist in these words or in these documents, they depend on how far I succeed in doing the work as I promised: and if I do succeed, then I am certain that your Most Illustrious Excellency will remember only too well all that you promised me.'

His Excellency was delighted with these words, and with the way I acted and expressed myself; and both he and the Duchess heaped favours on me to an unimaginable extent.

I was extremely anxious to start work, and so I told his Excellency that I was in need of a house where I could accommodate myself and my furnaces, some for the work to be done in clay or bronze and others, separate, for the work in gold and silver. I said that I knew he understood how eager I was to serve him in these branches of my art, and that I needed suitable rooms to do so. And in order that his Excellency might see how keen I was to serve him, I added, I had already found the house that suited my purpose, and it was in a locality that I found very attractive. And as I did not want to trouble his Excellency for money or anything else before he had seen my work, I begged him to buy me the house with two jewels that I had brought from France, and to keep them till I earned the house by the work of my own hands. These jewels had been beautifully set by my workmen, following my own designs. When he had examined them for some time he said to me encouragingly, in a way that filled me with false hope:

'Take your jewels, Benvenuto: I want you, not them, and you shall have your house for nothing.'

Then he wrote a rescript under my petition which I have always kept; the rescript read as follows: 'Let the house be seen, and let it be ascertained whose it is to sell, and the price that is asked, for we desire to please Benvenuto.'

I imagined that with this rescript I was sure of the house, seeing I was convinced that my work would be much more pleasing than I had promised. His Excellency had afterwards given express orders to a certain majordomo of his, who was called Ser Pier Francesco Riccio. He was from Prato and had acted as some sort of tutor for the Duke. I spoke to this beast and told him about what I needed, how there was a kitchen-garden by the house where I wanted to build a workshop. Straight away he handed my business over to a contractor, a lean, harsh man called Lattanzio Gorini. As the devil would have it, this little pipsqueak, with his spidery hands and tiny gnat's voice, had stones, and sand, and lime brought along: he was as quick about it as a snail and sufficient quantities were delivered to build a pigeon-house, though with some difficulty.

I began to despair at the crawling pace that things were going at, but I said to myself: 'Sometimes little beginnings lead to great ends.' And besides this I found cause for hope in the fact that the Duke had thrown away so many thousands of ducats on some abortive works of sculpture from the hand of that beast of a blockhead Bandinello. So I cheered up a little, and gave that Lattanzio Gorini a poke in the backside to make him get a move on; it was just like shouting at a collection of lame donkeys led by a blind boy.

In the face of all these difficulties, and then using my own money, I had marked out the site for the shop and cleared away the trees and vines. In my usual way I carried on with the project energetically and forcefully. In other matters I was in the hands of the carpenter Tasso, a very good friend of mine. I got him to construct some wooden frames in order to make a start on the great Perseus. This Tasso was a superb artist, in my opinion the best ever in his own craft. But besides this he was a pleasant, happy man, and every time I went to see him he used to greet me with a laugh and a snatch of song, in falsetto. I was already well on the road to despair, because there was news that in France my affairs were going badly, and at the same time I put little hope in my chances at Florence because of the tepid way they were proceeding; but he forced me into listening to at least half of his little song, and in the end I used to find myself cheering up in his company. I forced myself as much as possible to drive away some of my sombre thoughts.

I had made a start on all the projects I mentioned, and had begun to

make more energetic preparations for the building work (part of the lime was already used) when suddenly I was sent for by that majordomo. So I went along and, after his Excellency had had dinner, I found the majordomo in the Clock Hall. I greeted him very respectfully, but he replied very coldly, asked me who had installed me in the house, and demanded to know by what authority I had begun building on the site. He said he was astounded at my rash presumption. I replied to this that I had been installed by his Excellency, and that his lordship, in his Excellency's name, had passed the order on to Lattanzio Gorini, that this Lattanzio had brought the stone, and the sand, and the lime, and had seen to what I wanted, saying that he had been commissioned by his lordship to do so. At this the brute attacked me more sharply than before and said that neither I nor any of the people I had mentioned were telling the truth. So then I lost my temper.

'Majordomo,' I said, 'so long as your lordship talks in a way that is in keeping with your noble rank, I shall respect you and address you as submissively as I do the Duke; but if you do otherwise, I shall talk to you as to the ordinary Ser Pier Francesco Riccio.'

At this the fellow fell into such a rage that I thought he would go mad on the spot, and so make the process quicker than heaven had decided. He retorted, with a volley of insults, that he wondered why he had deigned to allow me to talk to a man of his sort. I was provoked by this into saying:

'Now listen to me, Ser Pier Francesco Riccio, while I tell you who are my sort and who are your sort – masters who teach children their letters.'

Then – with his face all contorted – he raised his voice and repeated even more insolently what he had said before. So I put on an aggressive expression, assumed some of his own arrogance, and told him that men like me were fit to talk with popes, and emperors, and a great king, and that likely as not there was only one man of my sort in the whole world; but you could find a dozen like him in any street doorway. At this he jumped up on to a window-seat that was in the hall, and then asked me to repeat over again the words I had just used. I did so, a little more heatedly, and I added that I no longer had any wish to serve the Duke and that I was going back to France, which I could do freely enough.

The brute remained where he was, stupefied, and with his face

the colour of clay; and I went off in a fury, determined to clear out – and would to God I had done so. His Excellency the Duke could not have learned of this devilish encounter straight away since I waited several days without anything happening. I was no longer concerned with Florence, except as regards my sister and my little nieces, and I made arrangements for them to be taken care of. With the little money I had brought I wanted to leave them settled as best I could, and then as quickly as possible after that wanted to go back to France, and I did not care whether I ever saw Italy again.

I had made up my mind to hurry off as quickly as I could, without asking permission from the Duke or anyone else; and then one morning that majordomo of his own accord sent for me very humbly and embarked on a pedantic oration in which I could find not the slightest order, or grace, or wit, and which had neither beginning nor end. All I could grasp was that he claimed to be a good Christian and that he did not want to be at enmity with anyone, and he asked me on behalf of the Duke what salary I wanted for my upkeep. At this I stood there, busy with my own thoughts, and, as I did not intend to remain, I made no reply. When he saw me standing there without saying a word he at all events had the wit to say:

'Benvenuto, dukes expect an answer; and I am talking to you on behalf of his Excellency.'

Then I said that if he was talking on behalf of his Excellency I was only too willing to give him an answer. He should tell his Excellency, I continued, that I had no intention of taking second place to any other artist in his service.

The majordomo replied: 'Bandinello is paid two hundred crowns as his allowance, so if you're content with that your salary is settled.'

I said that I was satisfied, that whatever more I deserved should be given me when my work was seen and that I left everything to the sound judgement of his Most Illustrious Excellency. So, against my will, I picked up the thread and set to work, with the Duke showing me every imaginable mark of favour.

I had been receiving frequent letters from France, from that very loyal friend of mine, Guido Guidi; up to then they had brought me nothing save good news. That Ascanio of mine also sent to say that I should only worry about enjoying myself, and that if anything happened he would let me know. The King was informed how I had

begun working for the Duke of Florence, but, seeing that he was the best man in the world, he kept saying: 'Why doesn't Benvenuto come back?' He questioned both of my young men in turn, and they both replied that I wrote to them saying that I was well off as I was and that I no longer wanted to return and serve the King. His Majesty was furious at this, and in response to those rash words, which never came from me, he said:

'Since he left us without any cause whatsoever I shall never ask for him again: let him stay where he is.'

Those treacherous criminals had arranged matters the way they wanted, since if once I returned to France they returned to being workmen under me, as they were before; whereas if I did not come back, they remained free as they were, in my place. As a result they directed all their efforts to prevent my coming back.

While I was having the workshop built, so that I could begin the Perseus, I worked in a ground-floor room where I modelled the Perseus in plaster, the same size that the finished work was to be, with the idea of casting it from this mould. Then, coming to the conclusion that this procedure would take me rather too long, I hit on another expedient, since there had already been built, brick by brick, a shanty of a workshop, so wretchedly constructed that it makes me wince to remember it. I began the figure of Medusa, making an iron framework which I then covered with clay, and when I had finished that I baked it.

I had only one or two little apprentice lads, one of whom was very pretty; he was the son of a prostitute called Gambetta. I used this boy as a model, seeing that nature is the only book from which we can learn art. I tried to hire some workmen in order to hurry the work on, but I was unsuccessful, and I could not do everything by myself. There were some workmen in Florence who would willingly have joined me, but Bandinello immediately prevented my having them; and then, after he had made me do without them for a while, he told the Duke that I was trying to get hold of his men since I myself lacked the skill to make a great statue without help. I complained to the Duke of the great annoyance that beast was giving me and begged him to obtain for me some of the workmen from the Opera.*

* The Opera del Duomo was established to maintain the fabric of the Cathedral at Florence.

This led to the Duke's believing what Bandinello said to him: and when I became aware of this I decided that I would do as much as I could by myself. I set about it with the most exhausting efforts, and then the husband of my sister fell ill, and died within a few days. My sister was still a young woman, and he left her on my hands with her six children of all ages. This was my first great trial in Florence: to be left father and guardian to those unfortunate creatures.

However, I was anxious that nothing should go wrong, and as my garden was littered with rubbish I sent for two labourers, who were brought from the Ponte Vecchio. One of these was an old man of sixty, the other a young fellow of eighteen. After they had been with me about three days the young one told me that the old man had no liking for work, and that I would do better to send him away, seeing that not only did he not want to work himself but he also prevented his companion from working. He added that the little there was to be done he could do himself, and that there was no need to throw money away on other people: this young man's name was Bernardino Mannellini of Mugello. Seeing his readiness to work hard I asked him if he would like to stay and be my servant; and we came to an agreement straight away. He used to look after my horse and work in the garden, and then he learned to help me in the workshop; and gradually he began to master the art with such a good grace that I've never had a better assistant. I was resolved to do everything with only his help, and I was beginning to show the Duke that Bandinello was a liar and that I could do very well without his workmen.

At that time my kidneys began to give me some pain and as I was unable to work I was only too glad to spend my time in the Duke's wardrobe, along with some young goldsmiths called Gianpagolo and Domenico Poggini. I got them to make a little gold vessel, decorated in low relief with figures and other beautiful adornments; this was for the Duchess and had been ordered by her Excellency for drinking water out of. Besides this I was asked to make a gold girdle, which was also to be very richly worked with jewels and a number of pretty decorations such as little masks and so forth; and I did so. The Duke used to visit the wardrobe nearly every minute, and he took great pleasure watching us at work and talking to me.

As my kidneys had begun to get a little better I had some clay brought to me, and while the Duke passed the time away with us I made

a model of his head, much larger than life-size. He was tremendously pleased with this work and grew so fond of me that he said it would make him very happy indeed if it could be arranged for me to work in the palace: he would find some spacious apartments there and I should move in with my furnaces and all that I needed, because he took great pleasure in those things. I told his Excellency that this was not possible, because it would mean my not finishing my work in under a hundred years.

The Duchess began to heap favours on me, and she would have liked me to give all my attention to working for her and not to worry about the Perseus or anything of that sort. But when I took note of these meaningless marks of favour I knew that my perverse, malignant destiny could not delay long in overwhelming me with some fresh misfortune: all the time I was aware of how badly I had acted in the belief that I was doing everything for the best – I refer to the business in France.

The King could not swallow the affront he had received from my leaving, and yet he would have liked me to return so long as he did not lose face. For my part I thought I was completely in the right, and I did not want to humiliate myself; I was convinced that if I had lowered myself to the extent of writing humbly, those men, like the Frenchmen they were, would have said that this proved the sins I had committed, and that certain despicable acts of which I was accused were true. So I stood on my dignity, and wrote with some amount of pride, like a man who is in the right. And nothing could have more pleased those two treacherous apprentices of mine.

When I wrote to them I used to boast of the great favour that was being shown me in my native town by a lord and lady who were absolute rulers of the city of Florence, where I was born: so whenever they received a letter of that kind they would go along to the King and beg his Majesty to give them my castle, in the same way as he had given it to me. The King, who was a remarkably fine man, would never consent to what those great thieves asked so boldly, since he had begun to realize their evil intentions: but to throw them a sop, and to encourage me to return at once, he had a rather angry letter written me by one of his treasurers, Messer Giuliano Buonaccorsi, a Florentine citizen. The letter was to this effect: that if I wanted to keep my reputation of being an upright man, in view of the fact that I had left

without cause I was certainly obliged to render an account of all that I had done and administered for his Majesty.

I was so gratified to receive this letter that I would not have altered it a jot, even if I could. I sat down to write and covered nine sheets of ordinary paper, giving in great detail an account of all the work I had done and everything that had happened while I was doing it; I described how much money I had spent and how I had always received it through two notaries and one of the King's treasurers, and had obtained receipts from the individuals I had paid for their goods or their labour. As for myself, I had not pocketed a single coin, and I had not been given anything at all for my finished work; all I had brought into Italy were some marks of favours and some royal promises, as befitted his Majesty.

I was unable to claim, I went on, that I had gained anything from my work except for the allowances his Majesty had made me for my upkeep – and as regards them I was still owed more than seven hundred gold crowns, which I had left behind on purpose so that they could be sent to me for my safe return. I knew that some evil-minded men had done me a bad turn out of envy, but, I said, the truth always prevailed: I found my glory in his Most Christian Majesty, and I was not motivated by avarice. I said that, although I realized I had done much more for his Majesty than I had undertaken and that although the reward I was promised had not been forthcoming, I had no want in the world other than to retain his Majesty's favour and be regarded as the upright and honourable man I had always been. If there was any doubt of this in his Majesty's mind, I continued, at the slightest sign I would return like a shot to give an account of myself, even at the risk of my life. But seeing so little account taken of me I had not wanted to return and offer my services, because I knew that I would always be able to earn my bread wherever I went: if I were sent for, however, I would never fail to respond.

My letter contained a host of other details fit for that splendid King to read, and in vindication of my honour. I carried the letter to the Duke before sending it, and he took pleasure in looking at it; then, without delay, I sent it to France, addressed to the Cardinal of Ferrara.

At that time Bernardo Baldini, who acted as his Excellency's agent in the purchase of precious stones, had a huge diamond weighing more than thirty-five carats brought from Venice: Antonio di Vittorio

Landi was also interested in getting the Duke to buy it. The diamond had already been cut to a point, but as it did not possess the limpidity and lustre that one expects from such a stone, its owners had shorn off the point, and in fact it was not much good, either for table-cutting or cut to a point. The Duke, who took a great pleasure in jewels but knew nothing about them, gave that rascal of a Bernardo every reason to believe that he would buy the diamond; and as Bernardo wanted to keep for himself the privilege of perpetrating this deceit on the Duke of Florence, he did not confide a word of what he was doing to that partner of his, Antonio Landi.

This Antonio had been a very close friend of mine since boyhood and, seeing that I was on such intimate terms with the Duke, one day he called me aside (it was near midday, in a corner of the New Market) and said:

'Benvenuto, I'm certain that the Duke is going to show you a diamond which it seems he wants to buy: it'll be a large diamond, and you must help sell it. I can tell you that I'll let it go for seventeen thousand crowns. I'm sure that the Duke will seek your advice, and if you see that he's keen to have it I shall arrange matters to make sure he does.'

He seemed to be very certain of his being able to dispose of the diamond. I promised him that if it were shown to me and my opinion asked, I would say just what I thought, without prejudice to the jewel. Now, as I said above, every day the Duke used to come into that goldsmith's workshop and stay there several hours. More than a week from the time when Antonio Landi had spoken to me, one day after dinner the Duke showed me the diamond, which I recognized from the indications Antonio had given me of its shape and weight. Since the stone was, as I said above, of a rather muddy water (that was why they had shorn off the point) on seeing it I would certainly have advised against its purchase. So when he showed it to me, I asked his Excellency what he wanted me to say, on the grounds that it was a very different matter if a jeweller had to value a stone after his lord had bought it, from his valuing it so that he could make up his mind as to buying it. So then his Excellency said that he had in fact bought it, and that I was only to give my opinion. I could not help giving him some slight indication of how little I thought of it. He told me that I should consider the beauty of the diamond's long edges. At this I said

that they were not as wonderfully beautiful as his Excellency imagined, and that what beauty there was as far as this was concerned was because of the point's being shorn off. The Duke, who realized that I was speaking the truth, frowned unpleasantly at this and told me to get on with my valuation and tell him what I thought it was worth.

Reflecting that as Antonio Landi had offered it to me for seventeen thousand crowns the Duke must have obtained it for at the most fifteen thousand, and seeing that he did not like it when I was honest with him, I thought I would not disillusion him, passed him the diamond, and said: 'You paid eighteen thousand crowns.'

At this he cried out, making an O! bigger than the mouth of a well, and said: 'Now I'm convinced you know nothing about these things.'

I said: 'In fact, my lord, you're convinced wrongly. You concern yourself with keeping your jewel's good name, and I'll concern myself with understanding these matters: tell me at least how much you spent on it, so that I may learn to understand things in your Excellency's light.'

He rose with rather a scornful sneer and said: 'It cost me twenty-five thousand crowns and more, Benvenuto . . .' and then he went away.

The goldsmiths Gianpagolo and Domenico Poggini were present while this was going on, and the embroiderer Bachiacca was working in a room next to ours: when he heard all the hubbub he ran in himself.

I said: 'I would never have advised him to buy it; but if he had wanted it all the same, a week ago Antonio Landi offered it to me for seventeen thousand crowns: I think I'd have got it for fifteen or less. But the Duke means to safeguard his jewel's reputation. After Antonio Landi offered it to me at such a price, how the devil can Bernardo have worked such a foul swindle!'

Refusing to believe that it could be possible, we passed off the Duke's naivety with a laugh.

As I said, I had already begun work on the figure of the large Medusa, and had constructed its iron framework. Then I covered it in clay, with anatomical correctness, half a finger thinner, and baked it thoroughly. Then I spread on the wax, and finished it as I wanted it to be. The Duke had come to see it very often and he was so worried

that I might not succeed with the bronze that he would have liked me to call in some expert to cast it for me.

Meanwhile his Excellency was always talking with great admiration of my artistic skill. And then his majordomo, who was for ever on the look out for some way to make me break my neck, hit on a way to do it. He had authority over the police officers and all the officials of that poor unfortunate city of Florence: to think that this incredibly ignorant man, an enemy of ours born in Prato and the son of a cooper, should have won such great authority by having been the miserable tutor to Cosimo de' Medici before he became Duke! Anyhow, as I was saying, he was always on the look out for some way of harming me, and after he had been unable to find any pretext for bringing an accusation against me he then thought up a way of achieving his end. He went along to the mother of my shopboy, Cencio, and the two of them – that dishonest whore Gambetta, and that villain of a pedagogue – plotted together to give me such a fright that I would pack my bags and go. Gambetta, using the methods of her own profession, followed in the wake of that mad, wicked schoolmaster of a majordomo, and they were also leagued with the chief constable (who was a certain Bolognese the Duke later on banished for this sort of behaviour).

Well, one Saturday evening, getting on for three hours after sunset, this Gambetta came to me with her son and told me that because of me she had kept him locked in for several days. I answered that she should not keep him shut up on my account; and, laughing at her prostitute's tricks, I turned to the boy in her presence and said:

'You know, Cencio, if I've done anything wrong with you.'

He said very tearfully, no.

Then the mother, shaking her head, said to the boy: 'Ah, you little villain, then I don't know what's been going on?'

Then she turned to me and said that I should keep him hidden in my house, since the chief constable was looking for him and was determined to seize him if he was found outside, but would not touch him if he were in the house. I replied that my widowed sister with six pure little girls was in the house with me, and that I wanted no one else there. At this she said that the majordomo had given orders to the chief constable and that they would arrest me no matter what happened: but since I refused to take her son into the house, if I gave

her a hundred crowns, she said, I needn't worry any more, because the majordomo was such a close friend of hers that I could rest assured she would be able to make him do whatever she liked, provided I gave her the hundred crowns.

By this time I had fallen into a tremendous rage and I shouted at her: 'Get out of here, you shameless bitch. If it weren't for my not wanting to cause a scandal and for the innocence of that unhappy boy you have there, I'd already have cut your throat with this dagger: I've put my hand to it two or three times already.'

With these words, and a good few nasty blows, I drove her and her son out of the house.

Then, after I had pondered on the wickedness and power of that evil pedagogue, I decided that the best thing would be to let that devilish business blow over; and so early next morning, having consigned to my sister some jewels and odd belongings worth nearly two thousand crowns, I mounted my horse and set off towards Venice, taking with me my friend Bernardino of Mugello.

When I reached Ferrara I wrote to his Excellency the Duke to say that although I had left without being sent away, I would return without being sent for. Then after arriving at Venice, I considered how ingeniously I was attacked by my cruel destiny but that I was all the same safe and sound, and so I determined to fight back as usual. I went along, reflecting on my affairs in this manner and finding distractions in that beautiful and wealthy city: then I went to pay my respects to that splendid painter, Titian, and our Florentine citizen, that expert sculptor and architect, Jacopo Sansovino, who was very well looked after by the Venetian Signory. We had known each other in our youth at Rome, and also in Florence, where he came from. These two great artists greeted me very affectionately.

The next day I ran into Messer Lorenzo de' Medici who at once took me by the hand and gave me the warmest of welcomes, for we had known each other in Florence, when I was making Duke Alessandro's coinage, and afterwards in Paris when I was serving the King. He had then been staying with Giuliano Buonaccorsi, and, as there was nowhere else he could spend his time without great risk, he used to spend most of his time in my house, watching me engaged on those great works of mine. As I said, because of this past acquaintance of ours he took me by the hand and led me to his house where I found the Lord

Prior degli Strozzi, Lord Piero's brother. While they were welcoming me joyfully they asked me how long I meant to remain at Venice, thinking that I was on my way back to France, I told these noblemen the reasons why I had left Florence – which I have given above – and said that in two or three days' time I meant to return there to serve the great Duke. When I said this, both the Prior and Lorenzo stared at me so sternly that I grew very afraid, and then they said:

'You would do better to return to France, where you're rich and famous: if you go back to Florence you'll lose all you've gained in France, and you will get nothing except trouble in return.'

I made no reply, and the following day, leaving as secretly as I could, I set off towards Florence. Meanwhile the devilish business had come to a head, since I had written telling the great Duke all the circumstances that had led to my moving to Venice. He received me with his usual reserve and severity when, without making any fuss, I went to visit him. He acted coldly for a while, and then he turned to me pleasantly and asked where I had been. I replied that my heart had never strayed a finger's breadth from his Most Illustrious Excellency although for certain understandable reasons I had been forced to let my body roam a little way. Then, unbending still more, he began to ask me about Venice, and so we chatted for a while. Then finally he said that I should get on with my work and that I should finish his Perseus. So I went happily back home, with a light heart, and brought comfort to my family, that is my sister and her six daughters. I took up my work again, and pushed it forward as energetically as possible.

The first work to be cast in bronze was that large bust of his Excellency that I had made in clay in the goldsmith's room, when I had those pains in my back. This was a very pleasing work, but my only reason for making it was to get experience of the clays for bronze-casting. I knew that the splendid Donatello had cast his works in bronze, and used clay from Florence, but I judged that he had only succeeded with the greatest difficulty; and as I imagined this must have been because of a defect in the clay, before casting my Perseus I wanted to make these first experiments. By doing so I discovered that the clay was good, though the splendid Donatello had not understood it very well and his works had only been completed with great difficulty. Anyhow, as I mentioned, I made up the clay to perfection and it served me admirably. As I have said, I cast the bust with it, but

as I had not yet made my own furnace I made use of the furnace belonging to Zanobi di Pagno, the bell-founder.

When my head came out beautifully clean, I immediately set to work on the construction of a little furnace in the shop that the Duke had let me have, it was after my own ideas and design and meant for the house I had been given. As soon as the furnace was finished, as diligently as I could I began to get ready to cast the statue of Medusa, the woman writhing under the feet of Perseus. As this casting was a very difficult operation I was determined to make use of all the skill and experience I had acquired, in order to avoid any error. As a result the first cast I made in my little furnace came out superlatively well and was so clean that my friends thought I would be wrong to retouch it at all. How to do this has been discovered by certain Germans and Frenchmen who maintain (and they claim some very fine secrets) that they can cast bronzes without retouching: a really foolish claim, seeing that after bronze has been cast it must be worked on with hammers and chisels, as the most expert ancients use to do, and the moderns as well – or at least those moderns with any knowledge.

This cast delighted his Most Illustrious Excellency and he came a good few times to see it, giving me great encouragement to work well. But Bandinello's mad envy was so effective (he was always pouring it into his Excellency's ears) that he made him think that although I had cast one or two of the statues I would never succeed with making the group, because it was an unknown art as far as I was concerned, and that his Excellency ought to take good care not to throw his money away. These words had so much effect when spoken in the Duke's noble hearing that some of the allowance for my workmen was taken from me; as a result I had to complain vigorously to his Excellency. So one morning I waited for him in the Via de' Servi and when he arrived I said:

'My lord, I am not assisted in my needs, so I fear your Excellency places no trust in me: let me repeat that as I promised I have it in me to bring this work off three times better than the model I showed you.'

After I had said this I realized, since he did not reply, that my words were bearing no fruit at all: suddenly I was seized with rage, almost choked with passion, and began saying to him:

'True enough, my lord, this city has always been a school for the highest genius; but when a man has won a reputation for himself and has learned a few things, then if he wants to add glory to his city and his glorious prince, he would do well to go and work elsewhere. And to prove the truth of this, my lord, I know that your Excellency remembers Donatello, and the great Leonardo da Vinci in the past, and the splendid Michelangelo Buonarroti in the present: by their genius these men add to your Excellency's glory. And I hope to play my part too; so, my lord, give me permission to leave. But let your Excellency take good care not to let Bandinello go; rather, always give him more than he asks for, because if he goes elsewhere he is so puffed up and so ignorant that he's likely to bring the noble school of Florence into disrepute. Now, give me permission to take my leave, my lord, and I won't ask anything for my labours up to now, except for your Most Illustrious Excellency's good favour.'

Seeing how determined I was, his Excellency turned to me rather angrily and said:

'Benvenuto, if you're willing to finish the work you'll want for nothing.'

So then I thanked him and said that my only desire was to show those who were envious of me that I had it in me to finish what I had promised. After I had left his Excellency, I was given a little assistance: so little that as I wanted the work to proceed at more than a crawl I had to dip into my own pocket.

In the evenings I always used to go and spend the time in his Excellency's wardrobe, where Domenico and his brother Gianpagolo Poggini were working. They were engaged on the gold vessel for the Duchess that I mentioned before, and on a gold girdle. His Excellency had also set me to work on the design for a pendant, in which was to be set the large diamond that Bernardo and Antonio Landi had made him buy. Although I did my best to get out of it, the Duke with persuasion and flattery had me working away every evening until four hours after nightfall. He also urged me as agreeably as possible to work there during the day as well; but I would never consent to such a thing, and I knew for certain that because of this his Excellency was angry with me. One evening I happened to arrive later than usual, and the Duke said: 'You are *malvenuto*.'

'My lord, that is not my name,' I replied, 'my name is Benvenuto,

but as I imagine your Excellency is having a joke with me I shall forget the matter.'

At this the Duke said that he was speaking in deadly earnest and was not joking, and that I should take care as to how I behaved since it had come to his ears that, relying on his favour, I was deceiving now one man and now another. When I begged his Most Illustrious Excellency to be good enough to tell me just one man I had ever cheated, he immediately turned to me in a temper and said:

'Go and give back what you have belonging to Bernardo - there's one man for you.'

At this I said: 'My lord, I thank you, and I beg you to be kind enough to listen while I say a couple of words: it's true enough that he lent me a pair of old scales, and two anvils, and three little hammers; and a fortnight ago today I told his Giorgio da Cortona that he should send for these things, and Giorgio came for them himself. And if ever your Excellency discovers that, since the day I was born, I ever filched anything from anyone either at Rome or in France, whether you learn of it from the men who have told you such things or from others, if you find such is the case then punish me without any half-measures.'

When he saw what a passion I was in, like the discreet and loving lord that he was, the Duke looked at me and said:

'Such a reproof isn't meant for those who aren't guilty: if things are as you say, I shall always receive you gladly, as I have done in the past.'

At this I said to him: 'Now, your Excellency, the villainous behaviour of Bernardo forces me to ask you what you paid for that large diamond with the point shorn off, because I hope to show you why that wicked great scoundrel is trying to bring about my disgrace.'

His Excellency replied: 'The diamond cost me twenty-five thousand ducats. Why do you ask?'

Then I told his Excellency that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, on the corner of the New Market, Antonio di Vittorio Landi had told me to try and arrange for his Excellency to purchase it: and the first price he asked was sixteen thousand ducats.

'Now your Excellency knows what you paid for it. And if you want proof of this, ask Domenico Poggini, or his brother Gianpagolo, both of whom are here. I told them immediately after it happened, but since then I haven't said a word, seeing that your Excellency said

I understood nothing about the matter. I thought from this that you wanted to keep the diamond's good name. I must say, my lord, that I do understand these matters, and, as for the rest, I claim to be as upright a man as any ever born, no matter who he is. I'm not the man to try and rob you of eight or ten thousand ducats at a blow; on the contrary I would try to earn them by my labours. I undertook to serve your Excellency as a sculptor, goldsmith, and master of the mint: but to carry tales about the affairs of others – never. What I'm telling you now is in my own defence, and I have no desire for an informer's reward. I'm telling you it in the presence of all these honest men standing around so that your Excellency will refuse to believe what Bernardo says.'

Straight away the Duke rose angrily to his feet and sent for Bernardo. Both of them – he and Antonio Landi – were forced to flee to Venice, and Antonio told me that he had meant a different diamond. They went to and came back from Venice: and I sought out the Duke and said:

'My lord, what I told you was true, and what Bernardo told you about the tools was a lie; you would be well advised to put it to the proof and let me go to see the chief constable.'

At this the Duke looked at me and said: 'Benvenuto, concern yourself with living honestly as you have done in the past: and never worry about anything else.'

The whole affair went up in smoke, and that was the last I heard of it. I worked hard to finish his jewel; and then one day when it was finished I carried it to the Duchess, who herself told me that she valued my craftsmanship as much as the diamond that fellow Bernardo had made them buy. She wanted me to attach it to her bosom with my own hand, and handed me a large pin with which I did so. Then, with many marks of favour from her, I went my way. Later I heard that they had had it reset by a German or some other foreigner – how true this was I don't know – because Bernardo said that the diamond would make a better show if it were set less elaborately.

As I believe I said before, Domenico and Gianpagolo Poggini, who were goldsmiths and brothers, used to work in his Most Illustrious Excellency's wardrobe, using my designs, on certain little gold vases chased with groups of figures in low relief, and on other objects of great worth. I was always saying to the Duke:

'My lord, if your Most Illustrious Excellency would hire some workmen for me, I'd make the coins for your mint, as well as medals engraved with your Most Illustrious Excellency's head: I would compete with the ancients and hope to improve on them, because since making Pope Clement's medals I have gained so much knowledge that I shall be able to do far better work. I shall surpass the coins I made for Duke Alessandro, which are still regarded as fine specimens. And I shall make you large gold and silver vases, like those I made so many of for that splendid King Francis of France, because of the many ways in which he assisted me – nor did I ever lose time in working on the great giants or the other statues.'

In answer to this the Duke said: 'Go on, and I shall see about it.'

But he never provided me with any facilities or any help whatsoever. Then one day his Most Illustrious Excellency had me given several pounds of silver, and he said:

'This comes from the silver from my mines: make me a beautiful vase.'

I did not want to neglect my Perseus, but at the same time I was very anxious to serve him, so I gave the work, along with my designs and little wax models, to a villain of a goldsmith called Picro di Martino to do. He began badly, and he made such poor progress that I wasted more time on the business than if I had done all of it myself. So after several months were lost with Picro neither working on it himself nor having any work done on it I made him return it to me. I had tremendous trouble in getting back the body of the vase, on which as I said he had made a crude beginning, and the rest of the silver that I had handed over to him. The Duke who had heard something of the dispute sent for the vase and the models without letting me know what he was after: anyhow the upshot was that he had it made by various hands, both in Venice and elsewhere, and he was very badly served.

The Duchess was always asking me to do some goldsmith's work for her: in response to this I told her more than once that everyone knew perfectly well, and the whole of Italy knew, that I was a good goldsmith, but Italy had never seen works of sculpture from my hand. There were in my profession a number of virulent sculptors who jeered at me and described me as the new sculptor, but I hoped to show them that I was an old hand at sculpture, if by the grace of God

I could finish my Perseus and exhibit it on his Excellency's noble piazza.

Then I went back home, spent all my time, day and night, at work, and never appeared at the palace. All the same, thinking I should keep in the good books of the Duchess, I made a few little vases for her. They were in silver, about the size of a cheap pot, and ornamented with beautiful masks in very unusual style, after the antique. When I took them to her she received me with extraordinary kindness and paid me for the silver and gold I had put into them: I commended myself to her Most Illustrious Excellency, and begged her to tell the Duke that I was receiving very little help for the great work I was engaged on and that he should not pay so much attention to that wicked tongue of Bandinello's, which was preventing me from finishing my Perseus. After this tearful complaint, the Duchess shrugged her shoulders and said:

'Certainly the Duke ought to know that: that this Bandinello of his is worthless.'

I remained at home, rarely showed myself at the palace, and worked very diligently in order to finish my statue. Then it fell to me to pay my workmen. What happened was that after the Duke had directed Lattanzio Gorini to pay me in respect of a number of workmen for eighteen months, he began to find it irksome and took the subsidy away from me. As a result I questioned Lattanzio as to why he did not pay me. In reply, gesticulating with his spidery hands and speaking in his tiny gnat's voice, he said:

'Why don't you finish your statue? It's believed that you'll never finish it.'

I immediately replied, very angrily: 'To hell with you and anyone else who thinks I won't finish it!'

Then in desperation I returned home to my unlucky Perseus - not without tears, as I remembered the fine position I had left in Paris, where I was serving that splendid King Francis who gave me an abundance of everything, whereas in Florence I went completely without. More than once I made up my mind to abandon everything in despair. On one occasion, when I was in that mood, I mounted my handsome little horse, and with a hundred crowns in my pocket rode off to Fiesole to see a natural son of mine, whom I was keeping at nurse with a crony of mine, the wife of one of my work-

men. When I arrived I found the boy in very good health: sad at heart, I kissed him; and then when I wanted to leave he refused to let me go, holding me fast with his little hands and breaking into a storm of crying and screaming. Seeing he was only somewhere around two years old, this was beyond belief.

As Bandinello used every evening to pay a visit to his farm above San Domenico, and in my desperation I had decided that if I came across him I would throw myself on him, I detached myself from my little boy and left him crying his eyes out. Just as I arrived at the Piazza di San Domenico on the way to Florence, Bandinello entered from the other end. I straight away resolved to carry out the murderous attack I had planned. I went up to him and then when I looked up I saw that he was unarmed and riding on a sorry-looking mule or donkey, along with a little boy of ten years old. As soon as he saw me he went white as death and began trembling from head to foot. Then, realizing what a vile action it would be on my part, I said: 'Don't be afraid, you miserable coward, I won't lower myself by hitting you.'

He looked at me timidly and said nothing. Then my better self won and I thanked God whose power and goodness had prevented me from committing such a crime. Having got free of my diabolical rage my spirits rose and I said to myself:

'If God gives me the grace to finish my work I hope by that means to vanquish all my perfidious enemies, and in that way I shall have a far greater and more glorious revenge than I would have had merely on one.'

And with this good resolution I went back home. Three days later I heard that my crony had smothered my only son. My grief was greater than any I had ever felt before. However I knelt down, and, not without tears, I thanked God in my usual fashion, saying:

'My Lord, You gave him to me, and now You have taken him away; and for all things, with all my heart, I thank You.'

Then, for all that my grief had nearly crushed me, in my usual way I made a virtue out of necessity, and as best I could tried to accustom myself to it.

It was at this time that a young man, called Francesco, the son of Matteo the blacksmith, left Bandinello. He asked me if I would give him work: I was agreeable and set him on cleaning the Medusa, which had already been cast. A fortnight later this young man told

me that he had been speaking with his master, that is with Bandinello, and that Bandinello sent to say that if I wanted to do a marble statue, he made the offer of a fine block of marble as a gift.

I immediately replied: 'Tell him I accept: and it may well be the marble for his epitaph, since he's always provoking me, and seems to have forgotten the great risk he ran when he met me on the piazza of San Domenico. Now tell him that I want it in any case. I never speak of him but the beast is always annoying me. In fact I believe that you came to work for me because he sent you to spy on my affairs. Anyhow go and tell him that I will have the marble in spite of him; and bring it back with you.'

After many days had passed without my putting in an appearance at the palace, on the spur of the moment I went along there one morning to find that the Duke had all but finished dinner. From what I heard his Excellency had been talking favourably about me that morning, and among other things had praised my skill in setting jewels. As a result, when the Duchess saw me, she sent for me through Messer Sforza, and when I presented myself her Most Illustrious Excellency begged me to set for her a small pointed diamond. She said that she would always wear the ring on her finger and gave me the measurements and the stone, which was worth about a hundred crowns, begging me to do the work quickly. Immediately the Duke began to discuss the matter with the Duchess.

'Certainly,' he said, 'Benvenuto used to be without rival in this art: but now that he's given it up I imagine that it will be too much trouble for him to make a small ring like the one you want. I beg you not to burden him with it; even though it's a small matter it will be troublesome for him, seeing that he's out of practice.'

At this I thanked the Duke and then begged him to let me render this small service to the Duchess. I began work on it without delay, and it was finished in a few days. It was for her little finger, and so I fashioned four little cherubs in relief and four little masks, to form the ring. I also fashioned some enamelled fruits and links so that together the jewel and the ring made a beautiful show. Straight away I took it to the Duchess who very graciously told me that I had made her a lovely object, and said that she would not forget me. She sent the ring as a gift to King Philip, and from then on she was always ordering something or other from me, but so charmingly that I

always forced myself to serve her, for all that I saw little money in return – and God knows I had great need of some, seeing that I wanted to finish my Perseus and had hired some young men to help me, paying them out of my own pocket. Once more I began to put in an appearance more often than I had been doing.

One feast day or other I went along to the palace, after dinner, and arriving at the Clock Hall I noticed that the door of the wardrobe was open. I approached nearer and then the Duke called out, greeting me pleasantly:

'You're welcome! Look at that little chest that the lord Stefano of Palestrina has sent me as a present: open it and let's see what it is.'

I opened it at once and said to the Duke: 'My lord, it's a statue in Greek marble, and it's a splendid piece of work: I don't remember ever having seen such a beautiful antique statue of a little boy, so beautifully fashioned. Let me make an offer to your Most Illustrious Excellency to restore it – the head and the arms and the feet. I'll add an eagle so that we can christen it Ganyমেদে. And although it's not for me to patch up statues – the sort of work done by botchers, who still make a bad job of it – the craftsmanship of this great artist calls me to serve him.'

The Duke was tremendously delighted that the statue was so beautiful, and he asked me a multitude of questions, saying:

'Tell me, my dear Benvenuto, exactly what is the achievement of this artist that makes you marvel so much?'

So then, as far as I could, I did my best to make the Duke appreciate such beauty, and the fine intelligence and rare style that it contained. I held forth on these things for a long time, all the more willingly as I knew how much his Excellency enjoyed my doing so.

While I was entertaining the Duke in this agreeable way a page happened to leave the wardrobe and, as he went out, Bandinello came in. When he saw him the Duke's face clouded over and he said with an unfriendly expression: 'What are you after?'

Bandinello, instead of replying at once, stared at the little chest where the statue was revealed and with his usual malignant laugh, shaking his head, he said, turning towards the Duke:

'My lord, here you have one of those things I have so often mentioned to you. You see, those ancients knew nothing about anatomy, and as a result their works are full of errors.'

I remained silent, taking no notice of anything he was saying; in fact I had turned my back on him. As soon as the beast had finished his disagreeable babbling, the Duke said:

'But Benvenuto, this completely contradicts what you have just been proving with so many beautiful arguments. Let's hear you defend the statue a little.'

In reply to this noble little speech of the Duke's, so pleasantly made, I said:

'My lord, your Most Illustrious Excellency must understand that Baccio Bandinello is thoroughly evil, and always has been. So no matter what he looks at, as soon as his disagreeable eyes catch sight of it, even though it's of superlative quality it is at once turned to absolute evil. But for myself, being only drawn to what is good, I see things in a more wholesome way. So what I told your Illustrious Excellency about this extremely beautiful statue is the unblemished truth; and what Bandinello said about it reflects only the badness of his own nature.'

The Duke stood there, listening with great enjoyment, and while I was talking Bandinello kept twisting and turning and making the most unimaginably ugly faces – and his face was ugly enough already. Suddenly the Duke moved off, making his way through some ground-floor rooms, and Bandinello followed him. The chamberlains took me by the cloak and led me after them. So we followed the Duke till his Most Illustrious Excellency reached an apartment where he sat down with Bandinello and me on either side of him. I stood there without saying anything, and the men standing round – several of his Excellency's servants – all stared hard at Bandinello, sniggering a little among themselves over what I had said in the room above. Then Bandinello began to gabble.

'My lord,' he said, 'when I uncovered my Hercules and Cacus I am sure that more than a hundred wretched sonnets were written about me, containing the worst abuse one could possibly imagine this rabble capable of.'

Replying to this, I said: 'My lord, when our Michelangelo Buonarroti revealed his Sacristy, where there are so many fine statues to be seen, our splendid, talented Florentine artists, the friends of truth and excellence, wrote more than a hundred sonnets, every man competing to give the highest praise. As Bandinello's work deserved all the

abuse that he says was thrown at it, so Buonarroti's deserved all the good that was said of it.'

Bandinello grew so angry that he nearly burst: he turned to me and said: 'And what faults can you point out?'

'I shall tell you if you've the patience to listen.'

'Go on then.'

The Duke and all the others who were there waited attentively, and I began.

First I said: 'I must say that it hurts me to point out the defects in your work: but I shall not do that, I shall tell you what the artists of Florence say about it.'

One moment the wretched fellow was muttering something unpleasant, the next shifting his feet and gesticulating; he made me so furious that I began in a much more insulting way than I would have done had he behaved otherwise.

'The expert school of Florence says that if Hercules' hair were shaven off there wouldn't be enough of his pate to hold in his brain; and that one can't be sure whether his face is that of a man or a cross between a lion and an ox; that it's not looking the right way; and that it's badly joined to the neck, so clumsily and unskilfully that nothing worse has ever been seen; and that his ugly shoulders are like the two pommels of an ass's pack-saddle; that his breasts and the rest of his muscles aren't based on a man's but are copied from a great sack full of melons, set upright against a wall. The loins look as if they are copied from a sack of long marrows. As for the legs, it's impossible to understand how they're attached to the sorry-looking trunk; it's impossible to see on which leg he's standing, or on which he's balancing, and he certainly doesn't seem to be resting his weight on both, as is the case with some of the work done by those artists who know something. What can be seen is that he's leaning forward more than a third of a cubit; and this by itself is the worst and the most intolerable error that useless, vulgar craftsmen can make. As for the arms, it's said that they both stick out awkwardly, that they're so inelegant that it seems you've never set eyes on a live nude; that the right leg of Hercules is joined to that of Cacus in the middle in such a way that if one of the two were removed both of them – not merely one – would be without a calf. And they say that one of the feet of the Hercules is buried, and the other looks as if someone has lit a fire under it.'

The fellow couldn't stay quiet patiently and let me carry on describing the great defects of the Cacus. First, because I was telling the truth, and second, because I was revealing it clearly to the Duke and the others standing around. They were expressing their amazement and showed that they realized I was justified up to the hilt.

Suddenly the fellow cried out: 'Oh, you wicked slanderer, what about my design?'

I replied that anyone who was good at designing would never make a bad statue, therefore I judged that his design was the same quality as his work. And then, seeing how the Duke and the others were looking, and outraged at their attitude and expressions, he let his insolence get the better of him, turned his foul, ugly face towards me and burst out: 'Oh, keep quiet, you dirty sodomite!'

At that word the Duke frowned angrily, and the others tightened their lips and stared hard at him. In the face of this wicked insult I choked with fury, but instantly found the right answer and said:

'You madman, you're going too far. But I wish to God I did know how to indulge in such a noble practice: after all, we read that Jove enjoyed it with Ganymede in paradise, and here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and the greatest kings of the world. I'm an insignificant, humble man, I haven't the means or the knowledge to meddle in such a marvellous matter.'

At this no one could restrain himself: the Duke and the others raised a great shout of laughter which shook the whole place. But for all that I took the incident jokingly, I can tell you, my kind readers, my heart was bursting at the thought that this man, the most filthy scoundrel ever born, was bold enough – in the presence of such a great prince – to hurl at me an insult of that kind. But, you know, it was the Duke, not me, whom he insulted. For if I had not been in such noble company I'd have struck him dead.

When the filthy, ruffianly blockhead saw that those noblemen couldn't stop laughing, in order to prevent their mocking him so much he began to change the subject.

'This Benvenuto,' he said, 'goes around boasting that I've promised him a block of marble.'

When he said this I immediately interrupted: 'What! Didn't you send Francesco, the son of Matteo the blacksmith and your own

apprentice, to tell me that if I wanted to work in marble you'd give me a block? And I've accepted your offer, and I want it.'

Then he replied: 'You can be sure you'll never have it.'

At this, still fuming at the lying insults he had hurled at me before, I lost control of myself and, forgetting the presence of the Duke, said in a great fury:

'I tell you plainly that if you don't send the marble to my house, you had better find yourself another world, since in this one I'll not rest till I've deflated you.'

Immediately, remembering that the great Duke was present, I turned humbly to his Excellency and said:

'My lord, one fool makes a hundred: this man's madness has made me lose sight of your Excellency's right to respect, and I forgot myself. Forgive me.'

Then the Duke said to Bandinello: 'Is it true? Did you promise him the marble?'

Bandinello said that it was true. The Duke said to me: 'Go to the Opera and choose a piece that suits your purpose.'

I told him that Bandinello had promised to send it to my house. There was a tremendous argument, but I would not have it any other way. The next morning a block of marble was brought to my house; I asked who sent it, and they told me that it was from Bandinello and that it was the one he had promised me.

I at once had it carried into the workshop, where I began to use a chisel on it. I made the model at the same time as I was working on the marble, but I was so eager to work in marble that I was too impatient to make a model with the care that is necessary. Then I heard the marble ring false, and more than once I regretted ever having begun. All the same I carved what I could from it – that is, the Apollo and Hyacinth, which can still be seen in its imperfect form in my shop. While I was working the Duke used to visit me, and he said very often: 'Leave the bronze for the time being and let me see you do some work on the marble.'

Straight away I would take the chisels and work away with confidence. The Duke questioned me about the model I had made for the marble and in reply I said:

'My lord, the marble is all cracked, but despite that I shall carve something out of it. I haven't therefore been able to decide

about the model, though I shall carry on with the statue as best I can.'

Acting very quickly, the Duke had a block of Greek marble sent to me from Rome, so that I might be able to restore his antique Ganymede, which had been the cause of my quarrel with Bandinello.

When it had arrived I decided that it was a shame to cut it up to make the head and arms and so forth for the Ganymede, and so I provided myself with some other marble. For the block of Greek marble I made a little wax model which I called Narcissus.

As there were in the marble two holes, more than a quarter of a cubit deep and a good two fingers wide, I gave my statue the attitude that can be seen, so as to avoid the holes and cut them out of the figure. But for tens of years the marble had been exposed to rain, and with the holes always full of water the rain had penetrated so deeply that the block was decayed; and how rotten the top hole was was proved later on, when the Arno was in flood and the water rose more than a cubit and a half in my shop. The Narcissus was on a wooden block, and as a result the water toppled it over and it broke across the breasts. I pieced it together, and in order to disguise the crack I added the garland of flowers which can be seen on its chest. I brought it to completion, working before dawn and even on feast days with the sole idea of not losing time from my work on the Perseus.

Then one morning when I was preparing some little chisels for my work a very fine steel splinter flew into my right eye and buried itself so deeply in the pupil that I found it impossible to get out. I thought for certain that I would lose the sight of that eye. After a few days I sent for the surgeon, Raffaello de' Pilli, who took two live pigeons, made me lie on my back on a table, and then holding the pigeons opened with a small knife one of the large veins they have in their wings. As a result the blood poured out into my eye: I felt immediate relief, and in under two days the steel splinter came out and my sight was unimpeded and improved.

As the feast of St Lucy fell three days later, I made a golden eye out of a French crown piece and had it offered to the saint by one of my six nieces, the daughter of my sister Liperata, who was about ten years old. I gave thanks with her to God and to St Lucy. For a while I was reluctant to work on the Narcissus. But, in the difficult circum-

stances I mentioned, I continued with the Perseus, with the idea of finishing it and then clearing off out of Florence.

I had cast the Medusa – and it came out very well – and then very hopefully I brought the Perseus towards completion. I had already covered it in wax, and I promised myself that it would succeed in bronze as well as the Medusa had. The wax Perseus made a very impressive sight, and the Duke thought it extremely beautiful. It may be that someone had given him to believe that it could not come out so well in bronze, or perhaps that was his own opinion, but anyhow he came along to my house more frequently than he used to, and on one of his visits he said:

'Benvenuto, this figure can't succeed in bronze, because the rules of art don't permit it.'

I strongly resented what his Excellency said.

'My lord,' I replied, 'I'm aware that your Most Illustrious Excellency has little faith in me, and I imagine this comes of your putting too much trust in those who say so much evil of me, or perhaps it's because you don't understand the matter.'

He hardly let me finish before exclaiming: 'I claim to understand and I do understand, only too well.'

'Yes,' I answered, 'like a patron, but not like an artist. If your Excellency understood the matter as you believe you do, you'd trust in me on the evidence of the fine bronze bust I made of you: that large bust of your Excellency that has been sent to Elba. And you'd trust me because of my having restored the beautiful Ganymede in marble; a thing I did with extreme difficulty and which called for much more exertion than if I had made it myself from scratch: and because of my having cast the Medusa, which is here now in your Excellency's presence; and casting that was extraordinarily difficult, seeing that I have done what no other master of this devilish art has ever done before. Look, my lord, I have rebuilt the furnace and made it very different from any other. Besides the many variations and clever refinements that it has, I've constructed two outlets for the bronze: that was the only possible way of ensuring the success of this difficult, twisted figure. It only succeeded so well because of my inventiveness and shrewdness, and no other artist ever thought it possible.'

'Be certain of this, my lord, that the only reason for my succeeding so well with all the important and difficult work I did in France for

that marvellous King Francis was because of the great encouragement I drew from his generous allowances and from the way that he met my request for workmen – there were times when I made use of more than forty, all of my own choice. That was why I made so much in so short a time. Now, my lord, believe what I say, and let me have the assistance I need, since I have every hope of finishing a work that will please you. But if your Excellency discourages me and refuses the assistance I need, I can't produce good results, and neither could anyone else no matter who.'

The Duke had to force himself to stay and listen to my arguments; he was turning now one way and now another, and, as for me, I was sunk in despair, and I was suffering agonies as I began to recall the fine circumstances I had been in in France.

All at once the Duke said: 'Now tell me, Benvenuto, how can you possibly succeed with this beautiful head of Medusa, way up there in the hand of the Perseus?'

Straight away I replied: 'Now see, my lord: if your Excellency understood this art as you claim to then you wouldn't be worried about that head not succeeding; but you'd be right to be anxious about the right foot, which is so far down.'

At this, half in anger, the Duke suddenly turned to some noblemen who were with him and said:

'I believe the man does it from self-conceit, contradicting everything.'

Then all at once he turned towards me with an almost mocking expression that was imitated by the others, and he said:

'I'm ready to wait patiently and listen to the arguments you can think up to convince me.'

'I shall give such convincing ones,' I said, 'that your Excellency will understand only too well.'

Then I began: 'You know, my lord, the nature of fire is such that it tends upwards, and because this is so I promise you that the head of Medusa will come out very well. But seeing that fire does not descend I shall have to force it down six cubits by artificial means: and for that very cogent reason I tell your Excellency that the foot can't possibly succeed, though it will be easy for me to do it again.'

'Well then,' said the Duke, 'why didn't you take precautions to make sure the foot comes out in the way you say the head will?'

'I would have had to make the furnace much bigger,' I replied, 'and build in it a conduit as wide as my leg, and then the weight of the hot metal would have enabled me to bring it down. As it is, the conduit now descends those six cubits I mentioned before down to the feet, but it's no thicker than two fingers. It was not worth the expense of changing it, because I can easily repair the fault. But when my mould has filled up more than half-way, as I hope it will, then the fire will mount upwards, according to its nature, and the head of the Perseus, as well as that of Medusa, will come out perfectly. You may be sure of that.'

After I had expounded these cogent arguments and endless others which it would take me too long to write down here, the Duke moved off shaking his head.

Left to myself in this way, I regained my self-confidence and rid myself of all those troublesome thoughts that used to torment me from time to time, often driving me to bitterly tearful regret that I had ever quit France, even though it had been to go on a charitable mission to Florence, my beloved birthplace, to help out my six nieces. I now fully realized that it was this that had been at the root of all my misfortunes, but all the same I told myself that when my Perseus that I had already begun was finished, all my hardships would give way to tremendous happiness and prosperity.

So with renewed strength and all the resources I had both in my limbs and my pocket (though I had very little money left) I made a start by ordering several loads of wood from the pine forest at Serristori, near Monte Lupo. While waiting for them to arrive I clothed my Perseus with the clays I had prepared some months previously in order to ensure that they would be properly seasoned. When I had made its clay tunic, as it is called, I carefully armed it, enclosed it with iron supports, and began to draw off the wax by means of a slow fire. It came out through the air vents I had made – the more of which there are, the better a mould fills. After I had finished drawing off the wax, I built round my Perseus a funnel-shaped furnace. It was built, that is, round the mould itself, and was made of bricks piled one on top of the other, with a great many gaps for the fire to escape more easily. Then I began to lay on wood, in fairly small amounts, keeping the fire going for two days and nights.

When all the wax was gone and the mould well baked, I at once began to dig the pit in which to bury it, observing all the rules that my art demands. That done, I took the mould and carefully raised it up by pulleys and strong ropes, finally suspending it an arm's length above the furnace, so that it hung down just as I wanted it above the middle of the pit. Very, very slowly I lowered it to the bottom of the furnace and set it in exact position with the utmost care: and then, having finished that delicate operation, I began to bank it up with the earth I had dug out. As I built this up, layer by layer, I left a number of air holes by means of little tubes of terracotta of the kind used for drawing off water and similar purposes. When I saw that it was perfectly set up, that all was well as far as covering it and putting those tubes in position was concerned, and that the workmen had grasped what my method was – very different from those used by all the others in my profession – I felt confident that I could rely on them, and I turned my attention to the furnace.

I had had it filled with a great many blocks of copper and other bronze scraps, which were placed according to the rules of our art, that is, so piled up that the flames would be able to play through them, heat the metal more quickly, and melt it down. Then, very excitedly, I ordered the furnace to be set alight.

The pine logs were heaped on, and what with the greasy resin from the wood and the excellence of my furnace, everything went so merrily that I was soon rushing from one side to another, exerting myself so much that I became worn out. But I forced myself to carry on.

To add to the difficulties, the workshop caught fire and we were terrified that the roof might fall in on us, and at the same time the furnace began to cool off because of the rain and wind that swept in at me from the garden.

I struggled against these infuriating accidents for several hours, but the strain was more than even my strong constitution could bear, and I was suddenly attacked by a bout of fever – the fiercest you can possibly imagine – and was forced to throw myself on to my bed.

Very upset, forcing myself away from the work, I gave instructions to my assistants, of whom there were ten or more, including bronze-founders, craftsmen, ordinary labourers, and the men from my own workshop. Among the last was Bernardino Mannellini of Mugello,

whom I had trained for a number of years; and I gave him special orders.

'Now look, my dear Bernardino,' I said, 'do exactly as I've shown you, and be very quick about it as the metal will soon be ready. You can't make any mistakes – these fine fellows will hurry up with the channels and you yourself will easily be able to drive in the two plugs with these iron hooks. Then the mould will certainly fill beautifully. As for myself, I've never felt so ill in my life. I'm sure it will make an end of me in a few hours.'

And then, very miserably, I left them and went to bed.

As soon as I was settled, I told my housemaids to bring into the workshop enough food and drink for everyone, and I added that I myself would certainly be dead by the next day. They tried to cheer me up, insisting that my grave illness would soon pass and was only the result of excessive tiredness. Then I spent two hours fighting off the fever, which all the time increased in violence, and I kept shouting out: 'I'm dying!'

Although my housekeeper, the best in the world, an extraordinarily worthy and lovable woman called Fiore of Castel del Rio, continually scolded me for being so miserable, she tended to all my wants with tremendous devotion. But when she realized how very ill I was, and how low my spirits had fallen, for all her unflagging courage she could not keep back her tears, though even then she did her best to prevent my noticing them.

In the middle of this dreadful suffering I caught sight of someone making his way into my room. His body was all twisted, just like a capital S, and he began to moan in a voice full of gloom, like a priest consoling a prisoner about to be executed.

'Poor Benvenuto! Your work is all ruined – there's no hope left!'

On hearing the wretch talk like that I let out a howl that could have been heard echoing from the farthest planet,* sprang out of bed, seized my clothes, and began to dress. My servants, my boy, and everyone else who rushed up to help me found themselves treated to kicks and blows, and I grumbled furiously at them:

'The jealous traitors! This is deliberate treachery – but I swear by

* The Italian is: 'dal cielo del fuoco' – i.e. 'from the sphere of flame', which, according to the Ptolemaic system, existed between the earth and the moon.

God I'll get to the root of it. Before I die I'll leave such an account of myself that the whole world will be dumbfounded!

As soon as I was dressed, I set out for the workshop in a very nasty frame of mind, and there I found the men I had left in such high spirits all standing round with an air of astonished dejection.

'Come along now,' I said, 'listen to me. As you either couldn't or wouldn't follow the instructions I left you, obey me now that I'm here with you to direct my work in person. I don't want any objections - we need work now, not advice.'

At this, a certain Alessandro Lastricati cried out:

'Look here, Benvenuto, what you want done is beyond the powers of art. It's simply impossible.'

When I heard him say that I turned on him so furiously and with such a murderous glint in my eye that he and all the others shouted out together:

'All right then, let's have your orders. We'll obey you in everything while there's still life in us.'

And I think they showed this devotion because they expected me to fall down dead at any minute.

I went at once to inspect the furnace, and I found that the metal had all curdled, had caked as they say. I ordered two of the hands to go over to Capretta, who kept a butcher's shop, for a load of young oak that had been dried out a year or more before and had been offered me by his wife, Ginevra. When they carried in the first armfuls I began to stuff them under the grate. The oak that I used, by the way, burns much more fiercely than any other kind of wood, and so alder or pinewood, which are slower burning, is generally preferred for work such as casting artillery. Then, when it was licked by those terrible flames, you should have seen how that curdled metal began to glow and sparkle!

Meanwhile I hurried on with the channels and also sent some men up to the roof to fight the fire that had begun to rage more fiercely because of the greater heat from the furnace down below. Finally I had some boards and carpets and other hangings set up to keep out the rain that was blowing in from the garden.

As soon as all that terrible confusion was straightened out, I began roaring: 'Bring it here! Take it there!' And when they saw

the metal beginning to melt my whole band of assistants were so keen to help that each one of them was as good as three men put together.

Then I had someone bring me a lump of pewter, weighing about sixty pounds, which I threw inside the furnace on to the caked metal. By this means, and by piling on the fuel and stirring with pokers and iron bars, the metal soon became molten. And when I saw that despite the despair of all my ignorant assistants I had brought a corpse back to life, I was so reinvigorated that I quite forgot the fever that had put the fear of death into me.

At this point there was a sudden explosion and a tremendous flash of fire, as if a thunderbolt had been hurled in our midst. Everyone, not least myself, was struck with unexpected terror. When the glare and noise had died away, we stared at each other, and then realized that the cover of the furnace had cracked open and that the bronze was pouring out. I hastily opened the mouths of the mould and at the same time drove in the two plugs.

Then, seeing that the metal was not running as easily as it should, I realized that the alloy must have been consumed in that terrific heat. So I sent for all my pewter plates, bowls, and salvers, which numbered about two hundred, and put them one by one in front of the channels, throwing some straight into the furnace. When they saw how beautifully the bronze was melting and the mould filling up, everyone grew excited. They all ran up smiling to help me, and fell over themselves to answer my calls, while I - now in one place, now another - issued instructions, gave a hand with the work, and cried out loud: 'O God, who by infinite power raised Yourself from the dead and ascended into heaven!' And then in an instant my mould was filled. So I knelt down and thanked God with all my heart.

Then I turned to a plate of salad that was there on some bench or other, and with a good appetite ate and drank with all my band of helpers. Afterwards I went to bed, healthy and happy, since it was two hours off dawn, and so sweetly did I sleep that it was as if I hadn't a thing wrong with me. Without a word from me that good servant of mine had prepared a fat capon, and so when I got up - near dinner time - she came to me smiling and said:

'Now then, is this the man who thought he was going to die? I believe the blows and kicks you gave us last night, with you so enraged

and in such a devilish temper, made your nasty fever frightened that it would come in for a beating as well, and so it ran away.'

Then all my poor servants, no longer burdened by anxiety and toil, immediately went out to replace those pewter vessels and plates with the same number of earthenware pots, and we all dined happily. I never remember in my life having dined in better spirits or with a keener appetite.

After dinner all those who had assisted came to visit me; they rejoiced with me, thanking God for what had happened and saying that they had learnt and seen how to do things that other masters held to be impossible. I was a little boastful and inclined to show off about it, and so I preened myself a little. Then I put my hand in my purse and paid them all to their satisfaction.

My mortal enemy, that bad man Pier Francesco Riccio, the Duke's majordomo, was very diligent in trying to find out how everything had gone: those two whom I strongly suspected of being responsible for the metal's curdling told him that I obviously wasn't human but rather some powerful fiend, since I had done the impossible, and some things which even a devil would have found baffling.

They greatly exaggerated what had happened – perhaps to excuse themselves – and without delay the majordomo wrote repeating it all to the Duke who was at Pisa, making the story even more dramatic and marvellous than he had heard it.

I left the cast to cool off for two days and then, very, very slowly, I began to uncover it. The first thing that I found was the head of Medusa, which had come out beautifully because of the air vents, just as I had said to the Duke that the nature of fire was to ascend. Then I began uncovering the rest, and came to the other head – that is the head of the Perseus – which had also succeeded beautifully. This came as much more of a surprise because, as can be seen, it's a good deal lower than the Medusa.

The mouths of the mould were placed above the head of the Perseus, and by the shoulders, and I found that all the bronze there was in my furnace had been used up in completing the head of the Perseus. It was astonishing to find that there was not the slightest trace of metal left in the channels, nor on the other hand was the statue incomplete. This was so amazing that it seemed a certain miracle, with everything controlled and arranged by God.

I carried on happily with the uncovering, and without exception I found everything perfect until I reached the foot of the right leg on which it rests. There I discovered that the heel was perfectly formed, and continuing farther I found it all complete: on the one hand, I rejoiced very much, but on the other I was half disgruntled if only because I had told the Duke that it could not come out. But then on finishing the uncovering I found that the toes of the foot had not come out: and not only the toes, because there was missing a small part above the toes as well, so that just under a half was missing. Although this meant a little more work I was very glad of it, merely because I could show the Duke that I knew my business. Although much more of the foot had come out than I had expected, the reason for this was that – with all that had taken place – the metal had been hotter than it should have been, and at the same time I had had to help it out with the alloy in the way I described, and with those pewter vessels – something no one else had ever done before.

Seeing that the work was so successful I immediately went to Pisa to find my Duke. He welcomed me as graciously as you can imagine, and the Duchess did the same. Although their majordomo had sent them news about everything, it seemed to their Excellencies far more of a stupendous and marvellous experience to hear me tell of it in person. When I came to the foot of the Perseus which had not come out – just as I had predicted to his Excellency – he was filled with astonishment and he described to the Duchess how I had told him this beforehand. Seeing how pleasantly my patrons were treating me I begged the Duke's permission to go to Rome. He gave me leave, with great kindness, and told me to return quickly and finish his Perseus; and he also gave me letters recommending me to his ambassador, who was Averardo Serristori: these were the first years of Pope Julius de' Monti.

Before I left I gave instructions to my workmen to continue the work using the methods I had shown them. The reason for my going was this. I had done a bronze bust of Bindo d'Antonio Altoviti, life-size, and had sent it to him in Rome, where he put it in his study, which was beautifully furnished with antiques and other fine objects. But the study was not suitable for works of sculpture, still less for paintings, because the windows were on a lower level than the works themselves, and so the light reached them

badly and this spoiled the effect they would have had in a proper light.

One day this Bindo happened to be standing at his door when Michelangelo Buonarroti the sculptor passed by, and he begged him to be kind enough to come in and see the study. He led him inside, and as soon as he was there Michelangelo said:

'Who was the artist who has portrayed you so well and in such a fine style? You know, that bust pleases me as much and rather more than the antiques, although there are some excellent ones among them. If these windows were above them instead of below they would make a far better impression, and your bust would hold the place of honour among all those beautiful works.'

As soon as Michelangelo had left the house he wrote me a very charming letter, which ran as follows:

'My dear Benvenuto, I have for many years recognized in you the best goldsmith we know of; but now I shall acknowledge that you are no less a sculptor. I must tell you that Messer Bindo Altoviti took me to see a bust of himself, done in bronze, and told me that it was your work. I took a great deal of pleasure in it, but I thought it very annoying that it should be placed in a poor light, since if it were shown in a reasonable light it would stand out as the fine work it is.'

This letter was full of friendly and flattering sentiments, and before leaving for Rome I showed it to the Duke who read it very attentively and said to me:

'Benvenuto, if you write to him and rouse in him the desire to come back to Florence I shall make him one of the Forty-Eight.*'

So I wrote him a very affectionate letter and in it I promised on the Duke's behalf more than a hundred times what I had been commissioned to. In order to avoid making any false steps I showed it to the Duke before sealing it, and I said to his Most Illustrious Excellency:

'Perhaps, my lord, I have promised him too much.'

'No,' he replied, 'he deserves more than you have promised, and I shall make sure he has it.'

Michelangelo never replied to this letter of mine and I knew that in consequence the Duke was very angry with him.

After arriving at Rome I went to stay at Bindo Altoviti's house, and he at once told me how he had shown his bronze bust to Michel-

* One of the three Councils created in 1532 for the government of Florence.

angelo and that he had praised it highly: we discussed this at great length. Now, he had belonging to me twelve hundred gold crowns, which were in his charge and formed part of five thousand crowns that he had lent the Duke – four thousand of them were his, my share of the loan was in his name, and I received the interest on my part as it fell due.* This was the reason for my beginning his bust. When Bindo saw the wax model he sent me fifty gold crowns through a Ser Giuliano Paccalli, one of his notaries who lived with him: but I did not want to accept the money and sent it back to him through the same man. Later I told him that I was satisfied with his keeping my money invested, so that it earned me something. But I realized that he was feeling hostile towards me because, instead of welcoming me affectionately as he usually did, he behaved very coldly; and although he put me up in his house he never treated me frankly but acted in a very surly way. All the same, we settled the matter very briefly: I sacrificed my work on the bust, and the bronze that went into it, and we arranged that he should retain my money at fifteen per cent for the rest of my natural life.

I went first thing to kiss the feet of the Pope; and while I was conversing with the Pope, Averardo Serristori, who was our Duke's ambassador, arrived on the scene. I had made certain proposals to the Pope which, I believe, would easily have resulted in an agreement, and I would have been only too glad to return to Rome, because of the great obstacles I had encountered in Florence: but I learnt that the ambassador had acted against my interests.

Then I went to find Michelangelo Buonarroti and repeated what I had written him from Florence on behalf of the Duke. He said in reply that he was employed on the fabric of St Peter's, and so for that reason was unable to leave. Then I answered that having decided on the model for the fabric he could leave his Urbino in charge, and he would carry out his instructions to the letter; and I added a host of other promises on behalf of the Duke. All at once he stared hard at me and said with a sly smile: 'And how satisfactory do you find him?'

Although I said that I was very satisfied and that he treated me very

* Cellini must have meant either that five thousand two hundred crowns were lent to the Duke, or that three thousand eight hundred of the five thousand crowns were Altoviti's. A page which has been struck out in the manuscript confirms that Cellini's share was twelve hundred.

well, he showed that he was informed of most of my reasons for being disgruntled; and then he said again that he would find difficulty in leaving. I retorted that he would do better to return to his homeland, which was governed by a very just prince, who was more fond of talent than any other prince ever born.

As I said before, he had with him a lad from Urbino who had served him for a good few years, more as a general helpmate than anything else: it was clear that he had learnt nothing about art. I had harassed Michelangelo with so many sound arguments that he was at a loss what to reply, and suddenly he turned to his Urbino as though to ask his opinion. This Urbino of his, in his uncouth way, suddenly shouted out loud: 'I shall never part from my Michelangelo till either he or I is under the ground.'

I couldn't help laughing at these silly words, and then, without saying anything and rather down in the mouth, I turned and left.

I had conducted my affairs so badly with Bindo Altoviti, what with losing my bronze bust and giving him my money for life, that I was left without any illusions as to what the faith of a merchant was worth: and it was in a very depressed mood that I went back to Florence. I straight away went to the palace to call on the Duke, but his Excellency was at Castello, beyond Ponte a Rifredi. I found Pier Francesco Riccio, the majordomo, in the palace, and as I approached to greet him in the usual way, he suddenly said with every sign of astonishment: 'Oh, you've come back!'

Then with the same air of astonishment, clapping his hands together, he added: 'The Duke is at Castello.' And then he turned his back on me and walked off. I did not know and could not imagine why the idiot had acted in that way. At once I made my way to Castello and there went into the garden where the Duke was. I saw him in the distance, and when he noticed me he made a gesture of amazement and gave me to understand that I should go away. I had been promising myself that his Excellency would treat me with the same and even greater kindness than he had shown when I left, so when I saw such extraordinary behaviour I went back to Florence very downcast. I resumed work, being anxious to finish the statue, but I could not imagine what could have caused the change. However when I observed how Messer Sforza and some other intimates of the Duke regarded me, I was impatient to ask Sforza what this meant:

when I did so he said with a smile: 'Benvenuto, pay attention to being an honest man, and don't worry about anything else.'

A few days later I was given the chance to talk with the Duke. He greeted me in rather a lukewarm way and asked what had happened at Rome. So I carried on the conversation as best I knew how and told him about the bronze bust I had made for Bindo Altoviti and all that had followed. I noticed he was listening very attentively, and I added all the details about Michelangelo Buonarroti. He appeared somewhat annoyed, and when I came to what his Urbino had said about their being under the ground, he roared with laughter; and then he said: 'It's his loss.' And I left.

Without any doubt that Ser Pier Francesco, the majordomo, had tried to do me a bad turn with the Duke, but it did not succeed because God, who loves the truth, defended me then as He has always protected me during my life from so many tremendous dangers. And I hope He will continue to protect me to the end of my life, however troubled it is. However, I make my way forward boldly relying only on His power; nor am I afraid of any rage of fortune or the perversity of the stars, provided I remain in His grace.

And now, my dear reader, I have to tell you of a most terrible misfortune. With the greatest possible diligence and application I was concentrating on finishing my work, and I used to spend my evenings in the Duke's wardrobe, helping those goldsmiths who were working there for his Most Illustrious Excellency. The greater part of their work was based on my own designs. I saw that the Duke derived great pleasure both from watching me work and from chatting with me, and so I thought it a good idea if I sometimes put in an appearance during the day as well. On one occasion I was in the wardrobe, and the Duke came in as usual – all the more gladly since he knew I was there – and as soon as he arrived he began discussing with me a variety of pleasant topics. I gave my answers and they proved so entertaining that he behaved with more charm than he had ever shown in the past.

Then all at once one of his secretaries came along and murmured something in his Excellency's ear: it must have been something very important, because straight away the Duke rose and accompanied the secretary into another room. Meanwhile, the Duchess had sent to see what his Excellency was doing, and her page reported to her that he

was talking and laughing with Benvenuto, and was in a very good mood. On hearing this the Duchess immediately came into the wardrobe and, on finding the Duke absent, sat down next to us. She watched us work for a while, and then very graciously turned to me and showed me a string of large and really very rare pearls. When she asked me for my opinion I said that it was very beautiful. At this her Most Illustrious Excellency said to me:

'I want the Duke to buy it for me, so, my dear Benvenuto, praise it to the Duke as highly as you are capable of doing.'

When I heard what she wanted, as respectfully as I could I spoke my mind to the Duchess.

'My lady,' I said, 'I was under the impression that this pearl necklace belonged to your Excellency, and so it would not have been right for me to say what now, knowing that it doesn't belong to you, I am bound to say. I must confess, your Excellency, that from my intimate knowledge of these things I can perceive very many defects in these pearls, and for that reason I would never advise your Excellency to buy them.'

At this she said: 'The merchant is offering them to me for six thousand crowns, and if it weren't for those little defects they'd be worth more than twelve thousand.'

In answer to this I said that even if the necklace were absolutely flawless I would never advise anyone to pay as much as five thousand crowns; for pearls were not jewels, they were fishes' bones, and they suffered with time, but diamonds and rubies and emeralds did not grow old, any more than sapphires: all those were jewels, I said, and it was advisable to buy them.

The Duchess was somewhat annoyed at this, and she went on: 'But I want these pearls, and so I beg you to take them to the Duke and praise them as highly as you possibly can, and although you may have to tell one or two little lies, do so for me and it will be well worth your while.'

I have always been a lover of the truth and a hater of lies, which were now being forced on me, but I was unwilling to lose the favour of so great a princess and so very miserably I took those damned pearls and went with them into the other apartment where the Duke had retired. As soon as he saw me he said: 'Ah, Benvenuto, what are you up to?'

I uncovered the pearls and said: 'My lord, I've come to show you a very beautiful string of pearls, they're very rare, and really worthy of your Excellency: there are eighty of them, and I don't believe that as many as that number could be found to make a better necklace. So do buy them, my lord, because the necklace really is a miracle.'

At once the Duke replied: 'I have no intention of buying them; they're not the pearls you claim them to be nor are they as excellent as you say. I've seen them, and they don't please me.'

'Pardon me, my lord,' I said, 'these pearls are infinitely finer than any pearls ever assembled on a necklace before.'

The Duchess, meanwhile, had got up and was standing behind the door, hearing all I was saying. And then, after I had said a thousand things more than I am writing here, the Duke looked at me with a friendly expression and remarked:

'My dear Benvenuto, I know that you know all about these things, and if these pearls possessed that rare excellence you attribute to them I wouldn't hesitate to buy them, whether to please the Duchess or merely to possess them: in fact I need such things, not so much for the Duchess as in connexion with my arrangements for my sons and daughters.'

Then having begun to tell lies I followed them up with others, even more boldly, and made them as plausible as I could to make the Duke believe me, relying on the Duchess to come to my help when I needed her. If the bargain were concluded more than two hundred crowns would fall to me – the Duchess had said as much – but, if only for safety's sake, I had made up my mind and was fully determined not to touch a single crown, so that the Duke would never imagine that I had done it from greed. The Duke – very graciously – began to address me again, saying:

'I know that you're expert on these matters, and so if you're the honest man I've always taken you for tell me the truth now.'

So then, blushing and with my eyes rather moist from tears, I said:

'My lord, if I tell your Excellency the truth the Duchess will become my deadliest enemy; and as a result I'll be forced to move away from Florence and my enemies will at once attack me on the score of my Perseus, which I've promised to your Excellency's noble school of artists: so I beg your Excellency to protect me.'

After the Duke had learnt that all I had been saying I had as it were been compelled to, he said to me:

'If you trust in me there's no need to worry about anything in the world.'

Again I said to him: 'But look, my lord, what can possibly stop the Duchess from finding out?'

Then, as a pledge of his good faith, the Duke raised his hand and said: 'Everything you say will be kept under lock and key.'

At these noble words I immediately told him the truth as to my opinion concerning the pearls and I said that they were not worth much more than two thousand crowns. The Duchess thought we had finished because as far as possible we were talking softly, and so she came forward and said:

'My lord, I hope your Excellency will be kind enough to buy me that string of pearls, because I am very anxious to have them, and your Benvenuto says that he has never seen any more beautiful.'

Then the Duke said: 'I don't want to buy them.'

'But, my lord, why does your Excellency not want to please me by buying the necklace?'

'Because it does not please me to throw money away.'

The Duchess insisted: 'But oh, what do you mean by "throw money away", when your Benvenuto, who so much deserves the trust you put in him, has told me it would be a good bargain even if it cost more than three thousand crowns?'

At this the Duke said: 'Madam, my Benvenuto has told me that I would be throwing my money away if I bought it, since the pearls are neither round nor even, and many of them are old. And to prove it, look at this one, and that, and look here and here . . . No, they're not for me.'

As he said this, the Duchess shot a malevolent look at me, and with a menacing nod of her head left us to ourselves. My immediate impulse was to run away and be rid of Italy; but as my Perseus was all but finished I was reluctant to go without having displayed it. But you can understand what a serious plight I found myself in.

In my presence, the Duke had ordered his porters to let me have access to him wherever he was; and the Duchess ordered the same men to chase me away whenever I showed myself at the palace. As a result whenever they caught sight of me they immediately left their

lodges and drove me away; but they took care not to be seen by the Duke, for if the Duke caught sight of me before those ruffians did he either called me or made me a sign that I was to come forward.

The Duchess meanwhile sent for the broker, Bernardo – the man of whose idleness and thorough good-for-nothingness she had so often complained to me – and pleaded for his help as she had done for mine.

'My lady,' he said, 'rely on me.'

Then this rogue went to the Duke with the necklace in his hand. As soon as the Duke saw him he ordered him to get out. So then the great rogue, braying down his ugly nose like a donkey, said:

'But my lord, please buy this necklace for that poor lady who is dying to have it and will pine away unless she does.'

He went on in this stupid, idiotic strain till the Duke lost patience and said: 'Get out or I'll give you a slap on the face.'

The great villain, who knew perfectly well what he was doing, because if by blowing out his cheeks or by singing 'La bella Francesca' he could persuade the Duke to make the purchase, he would gain the favour of the Duchess and his commission as well (a matter of several hundred crowns), puffed out his cheeks, and the Duke gave him several good slaps on his ugly face. And in order to be rid of him he hit him a little harder than usual. The blows were so violent that his cheeks reddened, and tears sprang to his eyes as well.

And for all that he began to say: 'Look, my lord, look at your faithful servant – he tries to do his best and he's ready to put up with any kind of bad treatment provided only that poor lady is happy.'

By now the oaf was really beginning to strain the Duke's patience, and so because of the blows he had given him and because of his love for the Duchess, whom his Most Illustrious Excellency always tried to please, he suddenly said:

'Get out of here and go to the devil: go and buy them, I'm ready to do all my lady wants.'

Now here one can see the way ill fortune rages against a poor man and the shameless way in which a villain is favoured. I completely lost the favour of the Duchess, and as a result nearly lost the Duke's, and he won a fat commission and their regard. So it is not enough merely to be an honest, virtuous man.

It was at that time that the war of Siena broke out: the Duke

intended to fortify the town, and so he distributed the duty of seeing to the gates among his sculptors and architects. I was consigned the Prato gate and the little gate leading to the Arno, which is by the meadow on the way to the mills. Cavaliere Bandinello was given the San Friano gate; Pasqualino d'Ancona, the San Pietro Gattolino gate; Giulianodi Baccio d'Agnolo, the wood-carver, the gate of San Giorgio; Particino, the wood-carver, the gate of Santo Niccolò; Francesco da Sangallo, the sculptor, known as Margolla, the gate of Santa Croce; and Giovanbatista, known as Tasso, the Pinti gate. Besides these, certain other bastions and gates were put under the charge of various engineers, whom I do not remember and whose names do not matter.

The Duke, who really had always been a very capable man, made a tour of inspection round the city, and when he had conducted a thorough examination and made up his mind he sent for Lattanzio Gorini, one of his paymasters. As Lattanzio Gorini also liked this sort of work his Most Illustrious Excellency made him produce designs of the various ways in which he wanted the gates fortified, and then he sent each of us the appropriate one. When I received mine I decided that the design was entirely incorrect, let alone unsuitable, and so straight away I went off, the plan in my hand, to find the Duke. My idea was to point out to his Excellency the defects in the plan that I had been given, but no sooner had I begun to speak than the Duke turned on me in a fury and said:

'Benvenuto, when it comes to making statues I bow to your knowledge, but in this business I want you to give way to me: so keep to the plan I've given you.'

When I heard these angry words I replied as gently as I knew how, saying:

'But my lord, even with regard to the sculptor's art I've learnt from your Most Illustrious Excellency, because we've always discussed it together to some extent. So in the same way, in this matter of the fortification of your city which is much more important, I beg your Excellency to condescend to listen to me. And as a result of the discussion it will be easier for your Excellency to show me the way I must serve you.'

After this courteous little speech of mine the Duke very kindly began discussing the matter with me. I pointed out to his Excellency,

as forcefully and clearly as possible, the reasons why the plan he had given me would be useless.

Then he said: 'You go and produce your own plan, and I shall see if I like it.'

I therefore drew up two plans, following the correct method for fortifying the two gates, and brought them back to his Excellency. He was able to distinguish the correct method from the false, and he said very agreeably:

'Go and follow your own method, I shall be content with that.'

And so, very diligently, I began work.

There was a Lombard captain on guard at the Prato gate: he was an extremely powerfully-built fellow, of very coarse speech, as well as being overbearing and extraordinarily ignorant. He immediately began to ask me what I was up to. In reply I very courteously showed him my plans, and took great pains to let him understand the procedure I was going to follow. But while I was doing so the vulgar brute kept shaking his head, and twisting and turning, balancing first on one leg and then on the other, tugging at his moustache, pulling the peak of his cap over his eyes, and muttering at the same time: 'What in hell's name is all this about!'

Beginning to lose patience with the idiot, I answered: 'Very well, then, leave it to me. I do know what it's about.'

Then I turned my back on him, intending to go about my own business. At this the fellow began tossing his head angrily, dropped his left hand to the pommel of his sword, and lifted the point a little.

'Wait a minute, my master,' he said, 'so you want to make a fight out of it?'

I spun round in a temper – he had so provoked me – and retorted: 'It would mean less effort on my part to have a battle with you than to make a bastion for this gate.'

In an instant both of us clapped hands on our swords, but before we could draw them we were suddenly surrounded by a crowd of honest fellows, some, Florentine citizens, and others, courtiers. Most of them abused him, telling him that he was in the wrong, that I was the sort of man who would give a good account of himself, and that if the Duke heard what had happened it would be worse for him. As a result he went off about his business and I began work on my bastion. When I had seen to all the arrangements I made my way to the other gate, the

little one by the Arno, where I found a captain from Cesena. He proved the most courteous warrior I ever came across, with the exquisite manners of a young girl, and yet, when necessary, showing himself incredibly bold and ruthless. The charming man watched what I was doing so attentively that several times it proved embarrassing; he was anxious to understand everything, and so I explained it all to him, very courteously. The upshot was that we so rivalled each other in kindness that I made this bastion much better than the first.

I had almost finished them when some of Piero Strozzi's men made a sudden incursion and so terrified the Prato district that all the inhabitants evacuated their homes; they poured into the city, with all their belongings laden on to their carts. There was tremendous confusion, with endless lines of carts, all touching, and I warned the guards to take care that the same mishap didn't happen here as had happened at the gates of Turin, because if it had proved necessary to use the portcullis the attempt would have been frustrated as it would have stuck on one of the carts.

When he heard what I was saying, that great brute of a captain turned round and began insulting me, and I gave as good as I got. We would have set to with more fury than before, but we were kept apart. When I had finished the bastions I was slipped several crowns which I had not expected, and so I went back to finish my Perseus in very high spirits.

It was at that time that certain antiquities were unearthed in the countryside of Arczzo, and among them was the Chimera, that bronze lion which is to be seen in the rooms near the great hall of the palace. Besides this a quantity of statuettes were found; they were also made of bronze, covered with earth and rust, and all missing a head or the hands or the feet. The Duke amused himself by cleaning them with goldsmith's chisels. Once when I happened to be talking with his Excellency he handed me a tiny hammer with which I struck the little chisels he was holding. In that way we cleaned away the earth and rust, and spent several evenings at it. Then the Duke set me to work, and I began to restore the parts of the statues that were missing. The Duke enjoyed this little business so much that he had me working during the day as well, and, if ever I was late in arriving, sent for me himself.

More than once I explained to him that if I spent the day without

working on my Perseus there would be several unfortunate consequences. The most worrying of these was that the inordinate length of time I was taking over the work might begin to irritate the Duke – and that in fact did afterwards happen. Besides this I was employing several workmen, and when I wasn't with them, there were two very grave consequences: first, they ruined my work, and then they worked as little as possible. Anyhow, the Duke agreed to my going to him only from sunset onwards. I had made myself so agreeable to him that every time I arrived his welcome was more affectionate than before.

In those days the new apartments near the Via dei Leoni were being built: his Excellency wanted more private quarters, and so he had furnished for his use a little room in the new apartments. He had told me that I was to make my way there through his wardrobe; so I used to pass secretly across the gallery of the great hall and through a number of little box-rooms, entering his room very privately. And then, inside the space of a few days, the Duchess deprived me of this convenience by having the passage barred to me. As a result, every evening I came to the palace I had to wait a long time, all because the Duchess was engaged in her affairs in the ante-rooms I had to pass through. And as her health was poor my arrival always upset her. Now for this and for other reasons she came to dislike me so much that she couldn't bear the sight of me; but for all the great unpleasantness and trouble involved I persisted in my visits.

The Duke's express orders were such that as soon as I knocked at the doors they were opened to me, and, without a word being said, I was allowed to go where I liked. In consequence it sometimes happened that on my coming quietly and unexpectedly through those private rooms I found the Duchess engaged in her affairs. On such occasions she would at once begin railing at me, with such rage and fury that I was terrified.

She was always saying: 'When will you ever finish restoring those little statues? This coming and going of yours is really getting to be too much of a good thing.'

I answered her gently: 'My lady, my only patron, I have no other wish than to serve you, with loyalty and absolute obedience. But this work that the Duke has given me will last a good few months, so please, your Most Illustrious Excellency, tell me frankly: if you don't

want me to come any more I shall certainly obey you, and even if the Duke sends for me I shall say that I'm ill, and I shall certainly never come again.'

At this she said: 'I do not say that you're not to come, and I do not say that you're to disobey the Duke: but all the same it strikes me that the work you're doing will never have an end.'

Whether it was that something of this came to his Excellency's ears, or whether it was for some other reason, he began sending for me again: he would send as it was getting near nightfall, and his messenger always said: 'Take care you don't fail, the Duke is expecting you.'

So for several evenings I carried on under these difficulties. On one occasion as I was entering as usual, the Duke, who must have been discussing what were probably private matters with the Duchess, turned on me with the greatest imaginable fury and all of a sudden, while I was standing there rather terrified, anxious to get away quickly, he said: 'Come in, Benvenuto, and get on with your work: I shall be with you shortly.'

As I was walking through, the lord Don Garzia seized me by the cloak: he was still quite a child, and he began playing with me in the most amusing way. The Duke was astonished and cried out: 'Look what a charming friendship my children have with you!'

Every evening while I was working on these unimportant trifles, the Prince, and Don Giovanni, and Don Arnando, and Don Garzia used to stand near and poke me playfully whenever their father's back was turned. I begged them to be kind enough to leave me alone, and all they answered was: 'We can't.'

'Very well,' I said, 'if you can't, you can't: so carry on.'

Then all at once the Duke and the Duchess burst out laughing.

Another evening, after I had finished those four little bronze figures, which are set into the base (the Jupiter, the Mercury, the Minerva, and Danae, the mother of Perseus, with her little son sitting at her feet) I had them carried into the room where I used to work in the evenings, and there I arranged them in line, a little above eye-level, so that they made a very beautiful spectacle. When the Duke was informed he came in rather sooner than he usually did: and because whoever told his Excellency about them must have used excessive praise - saying 'better than the ancients' and suchlike things - my

Duke came along with the Duchess, talking happily about my work. I immediately rose to my feet and went to meet them. He greeted me with princely courtesy, lifted up his right hand, in which he was holding a very large and fine pear-branch, and said:

'Take it, my dear Benvenuto: plant this pear in your own garden.'

I replied smilingly: 'My lord, does your Excellency in fact mean that I should plant it in my own garden - the garden of my house?'

The Duke repeated: 'In the garden of your house - your own house. Have you understood me?'

At this I thanked his Excellency and likewise the Duchess as best I knew how. Then both of them sat down, facing the statues, and all they talked about, for more than two hours, was those beautiful figures. The Duchess was so enraptured by them that she said to me:

'I don't want you to waste those statues by throwing them away on the pedestal down in the piazza, where they'll risk being spoilt: why not arrange them for me in one of my apartments where they'll be treated with the respect that their unique qualities deserve?'

I opposed this idea with a whole host of powerful arguments, but I realized that she was determined to prevent my placing them in the base, where they are now; so I waited till the next day and then went to the palace two hours before sunset. I discovered that the Duke and Duchess were out riding, and as the base was already prepared I had the little statues brought down and straight away soldered them in, each one in its right place. And then! Well, when the Duchess heard what I had done she was so furious that if it had not been for the Duke, who very nobly came to my help, I would have come a nasty cropper. Anyhow, what with her anger over the incident in connexion with the pearls, and now this, she so arranged matters that the Duke abandoned his little pastime, and as a result I had to give up going there: and whenever I entered the palace I had to endure the same bother as before.

I returned to the Loggia, where I had already brought my Perseus, and tried to finish it, working in the difficult circumstances I have already mentioned: what with being penniless and afflicted, I reckon that half my misfortunes would have wrecked a man of iron. However I carried on in my usual way.

Then, one morning or other, I had just heard Mass when the broker Bernardo, a shocking goldsmith and - because of the Duke's

kindness – the purveyor to the Mint, passed in front of me. This was in San Piero Scheraggio. He was hardly through the door of the church when the filthy pig let loose four cracks which could have been heard from San Miniato. I cried out: 'You whimpering pig, you beast! Is that what your filthy talents sound like?' And I ran for a stick. He made off into the Mint, and I stood just inside my own door, stationing one of my young boys outside to give me the word when the pig should come out of the Mint. After I had waited for some time I lost patience and my anger subsided; and then remembering that anything can happen in a fight and that this affair might lead somewhere unexpected, I decided to take my revenge some other way. All this took place within a day or so of the feast of St John, so I composed a verse and stuck it up in the corner of the church where one goes for a piss or a shit.

Here's Bernardo, pig and mule,
The thievish broker, and the spy:
From him Pandora's evils fly
Into booby-Baccio, the other fool.

The story and the verse circulated in the palace and gave the Duke and the Duchess a good laugh. And before he himself got to hear of it, scores of people stopped and saw the verse and roared with laughter; then they would look towards the Mint and stare at Bernardo. When his son Baccio noticed it he tore it down in a passion. Bernardo went round shaking his fist and breathing threats and defiance down his great bellowing nose.

When the Duke was informed that my Perseus was ready for exhibition one day he came along to see it. He showed very plainly how satisfied he was, but turning to some noblemen who were with him his Excellency said:

'For all that the work strikes us as being very beautiful it still has to please the people. So, my dear Benvenuto, before you give it the finishing touches I wonder if you would do me the favour of opening the screen, a little, for half a day, so that it can be seen from my piazza. Then we shall be able to hear what the people think of it. After all, there's surely a great difference between seeing it enclosed like this and seeing it fully revealed.'

In answer to this I said humbly: 'I must assure you, my lord, it will

look twice as fine. How can your Excellency forget that you have seen it in my garden, where it was displayed in a wide space and looked so impressive that Bandinello came to see it through the garden of the Innocenti, and for all his malicious, evil nature he was compelled to praise it, even he, who never spoke well of anyone in his life. I know that your Excellency trusts in him only too much.'

At this he twisted his lips rather irritably but all the same said in an agreeable voice:

'Do it, Benvenuto, just to give me a little satisfaction.'

Then he went away and I began to see about uncovering it. But there was still some gold nissing, and it needed varnishing here and there and a number of other things, so I could not help grumbling and complaining, cursing the wretched day that ever saw me come to Florence. By now I was well aware of the great loss I had ensured for myself by leaving France, and I could not see any grounds for hope as far as serving this prince of mine in Florence was concerned. All the way through, from beginning to end, everything I had done had turned out to my loss and disadvantage. It was with these misgivings that I revealed the statue the following day.

And then, as God would have it, as soon as it was shown, the people praised it with such unrestrained enthusiasm that I was given some consolation. They never left off attaching verses to the posts of the doors, where I had some curtaining so that I could give the finishing touches. I know that on that day, when it was on show for a few hours, more than twenty sonnets, all praising my statue to the skies, were attached to the posts. After I had covered it up again, every day a host of sonnets were attached there, and with them Latin and Greek verses as well, since it was vacation for the University of Pisa and all the celebrated professors and scholars rivalled each other in what they wrote.

But what pleased me more than anything else, and gave me hopes of establishing better relations with the Duke, was the fact that my fellow artists, that is the sculptors and painters, also rivalled each other in singing its praises. In this connexion I especially valued the opinion of the talented painter, Jacopo da Pontormo, and more than his, that of his excellent pupil, the painter Bronzino. Not content with having attached several sonnets to the posts, he also sent me some, through his lad Sandrino, to my house; these were so eloquently written,

in his incomparably beautiful style, that they helped to console me. So I covered the statue up again and bent all my energies to the task of finishing it.

The Duke knew about the compliments that had been showered on me by the excellent artists of Florence after they had glimpsed the statue, but all the same he remarked:

'I am very glad that Benvenuto has been given this little measure of satisfaction: it will be the cause of his finishing the work the way it's wanted with more diligence and speed. But he mustn't imagine that it will get the same reception when it has been completely revealed and can be seen from every side. More than likely this will emphasize all the defects that there are – and many that there aren't. So he must prepare to be patient.'

Now these were the words that Bandinello had spoken to the Duke, citing the works of Andrea del Verrocchio, who had made that fine bronze of Christ and St Thomas which is displayed on the façade of Orsammichele, and also a number of other works, even the divine Michelangelo Buonarroti's marvellous David which he said only looked impressive from the front. Then he mentioned the infinite number of scornful sonnets that had been written about his own Hercules and Cacus, and he began abusing the Florentines.

The Duke, who put too much trust in him, had been prompted by him to say what he did, and his Excellency was certain that what Bandinello said would come to pass, since the envious beast never left off speaking evil. On one occasion among many when that scoundrel of an agent Bernardo happened to be present, in an effort to back up what Bandinello was saying he remarked to the Duke:

'You know, my lord, making large statues is a very different kettle of fish from making small ones: I don't mean to say that he hasn't done a good job on the small statues, but you'll find that he hasn't succeeded with the other.'

He mixed this nasty abuse with a great deal more, behaving like the tale-bearer he was and telling a mountain of lies.

Then, as pleased my immortal and glorious Lord and God, I put the final touches to the statue: and one Thursday morning I completely uncovered it. It was not yet full day, but immediately such a vast crowd of people gathered round that it would have been impossible to number them. They all began praising it unanimously, and rival-

ling each other with their tributes. The Duke was standing at one of the lower windows of the palace, above the door, and so, half-hidden inside the window, he heard everything that was said about the statue. After listening there for several hours he rose to his feet with great animation and joy, and turning to his Messer Sforza he said:

'Sforza, go and find Benvenuto and tell him he has made me far happier than I expected, and tell him I'll reward him in a way that he'll find astonishing. He's not to worry about anything.'

Messer Sforza carried me this wonderful message and I was tremendously encouraged, both because of his good news and because all that day the people kept pointing out to me now this and now that detail of the statue as something splendid and new.

Among the others were two noblemen who had been sent by the Viceroy of Sicily on a mission to our Duke. These two agreeable men came up to me in the piazza (I was pointed out to them as I was passing, and so they ran up furiously) and straight away, with their hats in their hands, they made me a ceremonious oration which would have been excessive even for a pope. I was as modest as possible, but they so overwhelmed me that I began to implore them both to be good enough to leave the piazza, since the onlookers were stopping to stare at me more than at my Perseus. In the middle of their effusion they carried their enthusiasm so far that they asked me to go to Sicily, promising terms that would suit me very well: they told me how Friar Giovanagnolo de' Servi had made them a complete fountain, adorned with a number of little statues, and that they had made him a rich man, though his statues didn't compare with the Perseus.

I did not allow them to finish all they would have liked to say, but broke in with the remark:

'I'm more than astonished that you should try and persuade me to leave such a unique lover of the arts as my prince, especially as I'm in my native town, the school of all genius. Believe me, if ever I had an appetite for great gain I could have stayed in France, in the service of that great King Francis, who gave me a thousand gold crowns for my upkeep, and as well as that paid me for all the work I did, so that every year I was handed over more than four thousand gold crowns: and I left in Paris the fruits of the past four years' work.'

With these and other remarks I cut their demonstrations short and thanked them for the high praise they had given me, which was the

finest reward anyone who had created a fine work of art could ask for. I said that they had so increased in me the will to shine in my profession that I had every hope of exhibiting in a few years' time another work which would please the splendid artists of Florence much more than the Perseus had done. The two noblemen wanted to carry on with their praises from where they had left off, but I raised my hat, bowed politely, and said good-bye.

After I had let two days pass by, with praise for the Perseus mounting all the time, I made up my mind to go and show myself to my lord Duke. With tremendous good will he said to me:

'My dear Benvenuto, you have pleased and satisfied me; but I promise to satisfy you in such a way that will make you astonished, and what's more I assure you that I don't intend to wait beyond tomorrow.'

When I received these splendid promises I immediately gave my whole soul and body in a moment to God, thanking Him from my heart; and at the very same moment I approached the Duke, and half-crying with joy kissed his robe.

Then I said: 'My glorious lord, faithful and generous patron of the arts and of the men who labour on them, I beg your Most Illustrious Excellency to give me gracious permission to go off first of all for a week, so that I can give thanks to God: I know the tremendous toil it has cost me, and I know that my strong faith has moved God to help me. And in return for that, and for every other miracle He has performed to help me, I want to go on a week's pilgrimage, to spend all my time thanking the immortal God who always assists those who call on Him with true devotion.'

Then the Duke asked me where I wanted to go. I replied:

'I shall leave tomorrow, and I shall go to Vallombrosa, and then to Camaldoli and to the Eremo; and from there I shall go as far as the Baths of Santa Maria,* and perhaps Sestile, because I understand that there are some beautiful antiquities there. Afterwards I shall return by San Francesco della Vernia, and then - never ceasing to thank God - I shall return content to serve you.'

Straight away the Duke said to me in a happy voice: 'Go, and then come back to me, for I am really pleased with you: but leave me a couple of lines as a reminder, and then rely on me.'

* *'bagui di Santa Maria.'* Below, Cellini refers simply to '*Bagno*'.

I at once wrote a few lines, in which I thanked his Excellency, and gave them to Messer Sforza, who handed them for me to the Duke. The Duke took them, and then gave them back to Sforza, saying:

'Remember to show them to me every day, because if Benvenuto were to return and find that I had not fulfilled my promise I believe he'd kill me.'

And so, with a laugh, his Excellency said that he was not to be allowed to forget. The Duke's very words were reported to me that evening by Messer Sforza, who repeated them with a laugh and said that he was astonished at the great favour the Duke was showing me. Then he added very charmingly: 'Go, Benvenuto, but come back again, though I envy you.'

Invoking the name of God I left Florence, never ceasing to repeat psalms and prayers for the glory and honour of God during the entire journey, which proved extremely enjoyable since the summer weather was perfect and I was astonished and delighted at the beauty of the countryside I passed through, which I had never seen before. I had brought along as my guide one of my young workmen, called Cesare, who came from Bagno. So I was given a very affectionate welcome by his father and all his family, which included an old man of over seventy who was a really delightful person. He was Cesare's uncle, a surgeon by profession, but he dabbled a little in alchemy. This good fellow pointed out to me that Bagno had a gold and silver mine, and he showed me many very beautiful features of the countryside, so that I thoroughly enjoyed my stay. In his own way he became very intimate with me, and then one day he said:

'I mustn't fail to tell you something that's in my mind which would prove very useful if your Duke got wind of it. It's this: near to Camaldoli there's a pass so open that Piero Strozzi could not only make his way through but could also sack Poppi without any opposition.'

And then, not content with having told me, he took a sheet of paper from his pocket showing a map of the whole country which the good old man had drawn so clearly that his information could be seen as very reliable. I took it from him, and straight away left Bagno and went back to Florence as fast as I could, returning by Prato Magno and San Francesco della Vernia. Then, pausing only to take off my riding-boots, I hurried to the palace. I was just by the Badia when I ran into the Duke who was coming along by the palace of the Podestà. As

soon as he caught sight of me he welcomed me very graciously, though with an air of surprise, and said:

'But why are you back so soon? I didn't expect you for another week.'

'I've come back on your Excellency's service,' I replied. 'I myself would have been only too glad to have spent a few days' holiday in that lovely countryside.'

'And what's the good news?' asked the Duke.

'My lord,' I replied, 'I have matters of very grave importance to show and tell you about.'

Then I went with him to the palace. When we arrived he led me into a private room where we were by ourselves. So I told him everything and showed him the little sketch-map, which he seemed very pleased to have. When I said that the situation must be remedied without delay the Duke pondered a little while and then answered:

'I can tell you that we have made an agreement with the Duke of Urbino, and he is to look after that pass; but keep this to yourself.'

Then, after he had shown me every mark of favour, I returned home.

The next day I showed myself at the palace, and after we had conversed for a while the Duke said to me pleasantly: 'Tomorrow I shall see to you without fail; so don't worry.'

Feeling perfectly confident I waited eagerly for the following day, and when at last it came I made my way to the palace. But, as always happens, one is given bad news more quickly than good, and so Messer Jacopo Guidi, his Excellency's secretary, called me and, talking through his twisted mouth, said in a haughty voice: 'The Duke says that you are to let me know what you want for your Perseus.'

He held himself as stiff as a rod while saying this.

I stood there speechless with astonishment. And then suddenly I replied that I never set a price on my work, and that this was not what his Excellency had promised me two days ago. At once, in an even louder voice, the fellow said that he gave me express orders from the Duke to say what I wanted under pain of falling into complete disgrace with his Excellency.

The affectionate way his Illustrious Excellency had treated me had led me to expect something from him, and, what was more, I had been under the impression that I had won his favour entirely: especi-

ally since all I had ever asked had been to remain in his good books. And so this way of behaving – which was completely unexpected – made me furiously angry, above all because of the way the message was delivered to me by such a venomous toad. I said that even if the Duke were to give me ten thousand crowns it would not be enough; and if I had ever imagined that this was to be my reward, I added, I would never have stayed with him. At once the spiteful beast began to hurl insults at me, and I flung them back.

The following day, when I came to the court to pay my respects, his Excellency beckoned to me and when I approached said angrily: 'Cities and great palaces are built with tens of thousands of ducats.'

I immediately replied that his Excellency would find any number of men who knew how to build cities and palaces, but as for making statues like my Perseus, I doubted whether he would find a single one in the whole world. Then straight away, without adding another word or anything, I made off.

A few days later the Duchess sent for me and told me to leave her to settle the difference I had had with the Duke, since she thought she could arrange everything to my satisfaction. To these kind words I replied that the greatest reward I had ever asked for my labours had been the Duke's favour, and that this was what his Most Illustrious Excellency had promised me: and I added that there was no need for me to put into their Excellencies' hands what, from the first day I had begun to serve them, I had been only too glad to leave to them. And in addition I said that even if his Excellency gave me only an old Tuscan penny, worth about five farthings, I would reckon myself a happy and satisfied man, provided I remained in his good books. At this the Duchess, smiling a little, said to me: 'Benvenuto, you would be well advised to do what I tell you.'

Then she turned her back on me and went away. I had imagined that the best thing for me would be to speak in the humble way I did, but as it turned out it was the worst thing I could have done because, despite the fact that she had that small grudge against me, her nature often prompted her to act generously.

At that time I used to be very friendly with Girolimo degli Albizzi, who was commissary of his Excellency's troops. One day or other he said to me:

'By the way, Benvenuto, it would be wise to settle this quarrel of

yours with the Duke, and I assure you that if you put your trust in me I'll be able to arrange it, and I know what I'm talking about. With the Duke growing more and more annoyed you're going to come a cropper. That will do for now – I can't tell you everything.'

Now as it happened, after the Duchess had spoken to me, someone – probably a rogue – said to me that he had heard that, for some reason or other, the Duke had remarked: 'For two pins I'd throw the Perseus away, and then the whole dispute would be over and done with.'

So being anxious as a result of that, I told Girolimo degli Albizzi that I put everything in his hands and that provided I retained the Duke's favour I would agree to everything he did. Now this good-hearted fellow knew all about soldiering and he was especially skilled with the militia, who are all countrymen, but he didn't appreciate sculpture at all, and so knew nothing at all about it. When he spoke to the Duke he said:

'My lord, Benvenuto has put himself in my hands and has asked me to plead his cause with your Excellency.'

'And I put myself in your hands as well,' replied the Duke, 'and I shall abide by your decision.'

Then Girolimo wrote a very ingenious letter, greatly in my favour, in which he stated that the Duke should pay me three thousand five hundred crowns, in gold, and that this was not the price of my fine achievement but was to be a contribution towards my upkeep and a way of enabling me to say I was satisfied. I was to be satisfied first of all; and then he added a number of other considerations, all designed to settle the price.

The Duke agreed to this with an eagerness only matched by my dissatisfaction. When the Duchess heard what had happened she remarked:

'It would have been better for the poor man if he had relied on me. I would have got him five thousand gold crowns.'

And one day when I was at the palace she repeated those very words to me, in the presence of Alamanno Salviati, and she began mocking me, saying that I deserved all my bad luck.

The Duke made arrangements for me to be paid a hundred gold crowns every month until the total was reached, and for a few months I was paid in this way. Then Messer Antonio de' Nobili, whose duty it was, began to pay only fifty, and later it was sometimes twenty-five,

and sometimes nothing. When I saw how the payment was being delayed I spoke to Antonio very courteously and begged him to let me know the reason for his not finishing the payment. He answered me no less politely, but I rather think he gave himself away in what he said, because (and the reader may judge for himself) first he said that the reason he did not keep up the payments was because of the shortage of money at the palace but that he promised to pay me as soon as the money was available, and then he went on to remark: 'But what a villain I'll be if I don't pay you!'

I was surprised to hear him say that, but I assured myself that when he could do so he would pay me. But I was proved completely wrong. As a result, realizing how badly I was being treated, I lost my temper with him and in my anger reminded him heatedly what sort of man he had said he would be if he didn't pay me. However, as it happened, when he died the money still wasn't paid, and to this very day I'm still owed five hundred gold crowns: and here we are near the end of 1566.

I was also owed the remainder of my salary, which they appeared to have no intention of paying, since about three years had passed. But then the Duke fell dangerously ill – being unable to urinate for forty-eight hours – and knowing that the doctors could do nothing for him he very likely had recourse to God, and because of this he ordered that everyone should be paid what was owing to him; so I was paid my arrears though I was not given the balance still outstanding for the Perseus.

I had pretty well made up my mind not to say another word about my unfortunate Perseus, but I am compelled to because of something very extraordinary that happened: so I shall go back a little and pick up the thread. I imagined that I was doing it for the best when I told the Duchess that I was no longer able to come to an arrangement about something which was outside my control, since I had told the Duke that I would be satisfied with whatever his Excellency meant to give me. And I said this in order to make myself agreeable and I acted mildly because I wanted somehow or other to appease the Duke, who a few days before he had made the agreement with Albizzi had clearly shown that he was very incensed against me.

The cause of his annoyance had been my complaining to his Excellency about the brutal, treacherous behaviour of Messer Alfonso

Quistello, and Messer Jacopo Polverino, the chancellor, and especially Ser Giovanbatista Brandini, of Volterra: I was putting my case to him with some show of passion, when the Duke suddenly flew into an uncontrollable rage, and while he was still struggling with his temper his Excellency said to me:

'This is just the same as happened over your Perseus when you asked ten thousand crowns for it: you let your self-interest get the better of you. I shall have it valued and I'll give you whatever it's said to be worth.'

I replied to this rather boldly and angrily – an unwise thing to do with great lords – and cried out:

'But how on earth can the value of my work be estimated when there's not a man in Florence who's capable of doing it?'

Then the Duke became even angrier than before, and he made a number of bitter remarks including the comment that:

'In Florence today there certainly is a man who could make a work like it and who therefore will be able to judge it perfectly.'

He meant Bandinello, knight of St James.

'My lord,' I replied, 'your Most Illustrious Excellency has made it possible for me to produce, in the midst of the greatest artists in the world, an important and very elaborate work: it has been praised more than any other work ever displayed to the marvellous Florentine school; and what makes me most proud is that one of those great men who understand and practise the arts – the painter Bronzino – went out of his way to write four sonnets in a remarkably appropriate and noble style: and following him the whole city became tremendously excited. I assure you that if this splendid artist concentrated on sculpture as much as he does on painting he would be capable of doing it. And besides this, I assure your Excellency that when he was younger my master Michelangelo Buonarroti could have done it, though with no less effort than it took me. But now that he's a very old man he's probably not up to it. So I don't think there's anyone we know alive today who could match my Perseus. I couldn't ask for a greater reward for my work than the one it has already received: especially since your Most Illustrious Excellency not only said that you were delighted with it but praised it more than anyone else. What greater or more flattering reward could one want? I insist that your Excellency could not have paid me in more glorious coin, and no treasure whatsoever

could add to it. In fact I have been paid too much, and for this I thank your Excellency from the bottom of my heart.'

To this, the Duke replied: 'More likely you think I haven't the wherewithal to pay you; well, I tell you I shall pay you much more than it's worth.'

'I didn't expect to have any other reward from your Excellency,' I answered, 'and I count myself amply rewarded by what the artists of Florence first gave me, and with that I shall clear off this very minute, without ever going back to that house your Excellency gave me. Nor will I ever worry about setting eyes on Florence again.'

We were then just by Santa Felicità, and his Excellency was making his way back to the palace. After my outburst the Duke suddenly turned on me, very angrily, and said: 'You are not to leave – and take care you don't do so.'

So then, not a little afraid, I went with him to the palace. After he had arrived his Excellency sent for Bishop Bartolini, who was the archbishop of Pisa, and called in Messer Pandolfo della Stufa, and told them to tell Baccio Bandinello from him that he was to give my statue of Perseus a thorough examination, and value it, since the Duke wanted to pay me a just price for it. Those two honest men went at once in search of Bandinello, and carried out their orders: he said that he had studied the work thoroughly and knew only too well what it was worth, but that as he was at odds with me over some other past matters he had not the remotest intention of meddling in my affairs in any way whatsoever.

Then those two noblemen went on to say: 'The Duke has said that you are commanded, under pain of his displeasure, to fix a price for it; and if you want two or three days for a thorough study, then take them, and afterwards tell us what you reckon the work deserves.'

Bandinello replied that he had already considered it carefully, and that he could not but obey the Duke's commands: a very elaborate and beautiful work had been produced, and it seemed to him that it was worth sixteen thousand gold crowns, and more. Those two upright noblemen immediately reported back to the Duke, who was extremely annoyed; and they informed me in the same way. I told them that I had no intention of accepting Bandinello's praises, since that wicked man spoke evil of everyone. These words of mine were repeated to the Duke, and it was for that reason that the Duchess

wanted me to put the matter in her hands. All this is the unadulterated truth; and I shall only add that I would have done best to accept the judgement of the Duchess, for I would have been paid promptly and have had that much more reward.

The Duke gave me to understand through his auditor, Messer Lelio Torello, that he wanted me to execute a number of scenes in low relief and in bronze for the choir of Santa Maria del Fiore. But as this choir was Bandinello's work I did not want to enhance his clumsy efforts by my own labour, although he himself had not designed it as he had not the slightest knowledge of architecture. In fact the design was by the woodcarver Giuliano, the son of Baccio d'Agnolo who spoilt the cupola: I need only say that it was without any distinction whatsoever. So for one reason and another I was unwilling to do the work in any circumstances. All the same I was always telling the Duke politely that I would do whatever his Most Illustrious Excellency commanded. So he commissioned the vestry-board of Santa Maria del Fiore to cooperate with me: his Excellency would merely provide me with my allowance of two hundred crowns a year, and the committee were to supply everything else that was needed.

As a result I appeared before them and was informed of the instructions the Duke had given. As it seemed to me that I could explain my arguments to them far more safely, I got them to see how so many bronzes would mean a very great expense, which would be entirely thrown away: I stated all my reasons and they understood me perfectly.

First I said that the way the choir was constructed was all wrong: it was built without judgement, and it entirely lacked art, reason, grace, and design. Next, the bronze reliefs would have to be placed so low that they would be too far beneath eye level, and would provide a piss-house for dogs, and always be choked with filth. So, for those reasons, I refused to do it at any price. But I added that in order not to waste the remainder of the best years of my life, and in order to do something for his Excellency, whom I wanted so much to please and serve, if the Duke wanted to make use of my labour he should let me make the central door of Santa Maria del Fiore, which would be a work of art that everyone could see and which would bring his Excellency much more honour. I went on to say that I would bind myself by my written word that if I did not make it better than the

most beautiful door of San Giovanni I would take nothing for my pains. But if I made it as I promised I would be content to have it valued, and then they should give me a thousand crowns less than what it was judged worth by members of the guild.

What I had proposed to them pleased the committee very much, and they went to discuss it with the Duke. One of them was Piero Salviati, and he thought that what he had to say his Excellency would find very pleasing. But it was by no means so, and he said that I was always wanting him to do exactly the opposite to what he wanted done. So, without coming to any decision, Piero left him.

When I heard of this I immediately went to find the Duke myself. He appeared rather angry, but I begged him to be gracious enough to listen to what I had to say, and he consented. I began at the beginning and employing a whole host of skilful arguments tried to make him understand the truth of the matter, showing him that it would be a great expense, and all for nothing; and then I appeased him by saying that if he was not agreeable to my making the door, then there were two pulpits needed for the choir, and that they would be very important works and bring his Excellency great honour. I went on to say that I would make a large number of bronzes for them, in low relief and with elaborate decoration. In that way I calmed him down, and he commissioned me to produce some models.

I made several designs, and took great pains over them: amongst others I made one with eight panels, taking more care over it than over the rest, and it seemed to me that it was much more suitable for the purpose. I brought them along to the palace several times, and then his Excellency gave me to understand, through Messer Cesare, his keeper of the wardrobe, that I was to leave them there. Then he saw them, and I discovered afterwards that he had selected the least beautiful of them all. And then one day his Excellency sent for me and while we were discussing the designs I told him - backing up my opinion with a multitude of arguments - that the one with eight panels would have been far more appropriate for the purpose and much more beautiful to look at. The Duke said in reply that he wanted me to make it square, since he preferred that style: and then he carried on chatting with me for a long time, very pleasantly.

I did not fail to say all that came to me in the interests of good work. It may be that the Duke knew that I was in the right, but he