

## Summer Assignments for AP European History

### Assignment #1

**Read: “A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century” by Barbara Tuchman**

**Complete a paper based on the prompts below. Your paper should be 5-7 pages, typed and double spaced with one inch margins and twelve point font. Outside research is not required. Remember to support your argument with specifics from the text. You will need proper citation using the MLA format. THE FINAL COPY OF THE PAPER IS DUE ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS.**

One reason there seems to be such a break between the Middle Age and the Renaissance was that there was in fact a break. The 14th Century was a time of turmoil, diminished expectations, loss of confidence in institutions, and feelings of helplessness at forces beyond human control.

People in the 14th century were subjected to natural and man-made disasters, including:

- Climate Change- “The Little Ice Age”
- Famine
- Black Death
- The Hundred Years' War
- Incessant Violence (esp. ‘Free Companies’)
- Political Instability
- Peasant Uprisings
- The Babylonian Captivity
- The Great Schism

- 1. Discuss the importance of the various “disasters” of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and how they impacted the character of late Medieval Society. (Character would at least include societal, political, religious and economic factors)**
- 2. While the Renaissance was not an era that sprung forth in a reaction to the Middle Ages, discuss using societal, political, religious and economic examples the impact the late Middle Ages had on the character of the Renaissance and explain how the contemporaries of the Renaissance might have seen the Renaissance as a genuine “rebirth”.**

Historian Barbara Tuchman entitled her book on this period *A Distant Mirror* because many 20<sup>th</sup> Century problems had counterparts in the 14th Century.

- 3. Briefly discuss this idea and prepare a thesis for a future in-depth examination of the link between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.**

## **Assignment #2**

**Read: Excerpt from Francis Petrarch, *Familiar Letters*: “*To Posterity*”, “*To Marcus Tullius Cicero*”, “*The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*”**

In Paragraph form answer the questions at the end of each letter.

Using a minimum of two paragraphs for each, answer the questions in the “Summary Questions” section.

**Your answers should be typed and double spaced with one inch margins and twelve point font. In total your typed answers should be approximately 2 pages. Remember to support your argument with specifics from the text.**

**Due the first day of class**

## Background Notes

The humanist **Francis Petrarch**, or Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), was the son of a notary from Arezzo, in Italy. After a youth spent in Italy outside Florence, he went on to study law at the universities of Montpellier (southern France) and Bologna (Italy). Abandoning that profession, Petrarch entered the service of the pope while the papal court was based in Avignon (southern France, where it had been since 1307). Petrarch's literary influences were many, his love of humanistic disciplines immense. He was passionate about recovering and absorbing the learned writing of both the Roman classical and Christian past: he discovered and translated some lost letters of the Roman orator Cicero, he embraced the writings of Seneca, Lactantius, and the Christian thinker/philosopher Augustine of Hippo. His consummate skill was as a poet, orator, and writer, but he also served as a diplomat for the popes and traveled widely. His letters reflect Petrarch's own preoccupation with the literary and rhetorical works of Greco-Roman antiquity, chiefly that of the Greek poet Homer (fl. eighth century BCE) and his Roman imitator, Virgil (d. 27 BCE). For example, Petrarch's letter addressed to Homer, like others he wrote, is written as a direct correspondence to the long-dead poet, whose imagined complaint is that Virgil did not mention him in his work the *Aeneid*, which was modelled on Homer's *Odyssey*. Of course, Petrarch also wrote frequently to his contemporaries, notably Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375, author of the *Decameron*).

## Francis Petrarch *Familiar Letters*

From James Harvey Robinson, ed. and trans.  
*Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters*  
(New York: G.P. Putnam, 1898)

### To Posterity 59-76

[Page 59] Greeting.---It is possible that some word of me may have come to you, though even this is doubtful, since an insignificant and obscure name will scarcely penetrate far in either time or space. If, however, you should have heard of me, you may desire to know what manner of man I was, or what was the outcome of my labours, especially those of which some description or, at any rate, the bare titles may have reached you.

To begin with myself, then, the utterances of men concerning me will differ widely, since in passing judgment almost every one is influenced not so much by truth as by preference, and good and evil report alike know no bounds. I was, in truth, a poor mortal like yourself, neither very exalted in my origin, nor, on the other hand, of the most humble birth, but belonging, as Augustus Caesar says of himself, to an ancient family. As

to my disposition, I was not naturally perverse or wanting in modesty, however the contagion of evil associations may have corrupted me. My youth was gone before I realised it; I was carried away by the strength of manhood; but a riper age brought me to my senses and taught me by experience the truth I had long before read in books, that youth and pleasure are [Page 60] vanity---nay, that the Author of all ages and times permits us miserable mortals, puffed up with emptiness, thus to wander about, until finally, coming to a tardy consciousness of our sins, we shall learn to know ourselves. In my prime I was blessed with a quick and active body, although not exceptionally strong; and while I do not lay claim to remarkable personal beauty, I was comely enough in my best days. [1] I was possessed of a clear complexion, between light and dark, lively eyes, and for long years a keen vision, which however deserted me, contrary to my hopes, after I reached my sixtieth birthday, and forced me, to my great annoyance, to resort to glasses. [2] Although I had previously enjoyed perfect health, old age brought with it the usual array of discomforts.

My parents were honourable folk, Florentine in their origin, of medium fortune, or, I may as well admit it, in a condition verging upon poverty. They had been expelled from their native city, [3] and [Page 61] consequently I was born in exile, at Arezzo, in the year 1304 of this latter age which begins with Christ's birth, July the twentieth, on a Monday, at dawn. I have always possessed an extreme contempt for wealth; not that riches are not desirable in themselves, but because I hate the anxiety and care which are invariably associated with them. I certainly do not long to be able to give gorgeous banquets. I have, on the contrary, led a happier existence with plain living and ordinary fare than all the followers of Apicius, with their elaborate dainties. So-called *convivia*, which are but vulgar bouts, sinning against sobriety and good manners, have always been repugnant to me. I have ever felt that it was irksome and profitless to invite others to such affairs, and not less so to be bidden to them myself. On the other hand, the pleasure of dining with one's friends is so great that nothing has ever given me more delight than their unexpected arrival, nor have I ever willingly sat down to table without a companion. Nothing displeases me more than display, for not only is it bad in itself, and opposed to humility, but it is troublesome and distracting.

I struggled in my younger days with a keen but constant and pure attachment, and would have struggled with it longer had not the sinking flame been extinguished by death - premature and bitter, but salutary. [4] I should be glad to be able to say [Page 62] that I had always been entirely free from irregular desires, but I should lie if I did so. I can, however, conscientiously claim that, although I may have been carried away by the fire of youth or by my ardent temperament, I have always abhorred such sins from the depths of my soul. As I approached the age of forty, while my powers were unimpaired and my passions were still strong, I not only abruptly threw off my bad habits, but even the very recollection of them, as if I had never looked upon a woman. This I mention as among the greatest of my blessings, and I render thanks to God, who freed me, while still sound and vigorous, from a disgusting slavery which had always been hateful to me. [5] But let us turn to other matters. [Page 63] I have taken pride in others, never in myself, and however insignificant I may have been, I have always been still less important in my own judgment. My anger has very often injured myself, but never others. I have always been

most desirous of honourable friendships, and have faithfully cherished them. I make this boast without fear, since I am confident that I speak truly. While I am very prone to take offence, I am equally quick to forget injuries, and have a memory tenacious of benefits. In my familiar associations with kings and princes, and in my friendship with noble personages, my good fortune has been such as to excite envy. But it is the cruel fate of those who are growing old that they can commonly only weep for friends who have passed away. The greatest kings of this age have loved and courted me. They may know why; I certainly do not. With some of them I was on such terms that they seemed in a certain sense my guests rather than I theirs; their lofty position in no way embarrassing me, but, on the contrary, bringing with it many advantages. I fled, however, from many of those to whom I was greatly attached; and such was my innate longing for liberty, that I studiously [Page 64] avoided those whose very name seemed incompatible with the freedom that I loved.

I possessed a well-balanced rather than a keen intellect, one prone to all kinds of good and wholesome study, but especially inclined to moral philosophy and the art of poetry. The latter, indeed, I neglected as time went on, and took delight in sacred literature. Finding in that a hidden sweetness which I had once esteemed but lightly, I came to regard the works of the poets as only amenities. Among the many subjects which interested me, I dwelt especially upon antiquity, for our own age has always repelled me, so that, had it not been for the love of those dear to me, I should have preferred to have been born in any other period than our own. In order to forget my own time, I have constantly striven to place myself in spirit in other ages, and consequently I delighted in history; not that the conflicting statements did not offend me, but when in doubt I accepted what appeared to me most probable, or yielded to the authority of the writer.

My style, as many claimed, was clear and forcible; but to me it seemed weak and obscure. In ordinary conversation with friends, or with those about me, I never gave any thought to my language, and I have always wondered that Augustus Caesar should have taken such pains in this respect. When, however, the subject itself, or the place or listener, seemed to demand it, I gave some attention to style, with what success I cannot pretend to say; let them judge in whose presence I spoke. If only I have lived well, it matters little to me how [Page 65] I talked. Mere elegance of language can produce at best but an empty renown.

My life up to the present has, either through fate or my own choice, fallen into the following divisions. A part only of my first year was spent at Arezzo, where I first saw the light. The six following years were, owing to the recall of my mother from exile, spent upon my father's estate at Ancisa, about fourteen miles above Florence. I passed my eighth year at Pisa,[6] the ninth and following years in Farther Gaul, at Avignon, on the left bank of the Rhone, where the Roman Pontiff holds and has long held the Church of Christ in shameful exile. It seemed a few years ago as if Urban V. was on the point of restoring the Church to its ancient seat, but it is clear that nothing is coming of this effort, and, what is to me the worst of all, the Pope seems to have repented him of his good work, for failure came while he was still living. Had he lived but a little longer, he would certainly have learned how I regarded his retreat. [7] My pen was in my hand when he

abruptly surrendered at once his exalted office and his life. Unhappy man, who might have died before the altar of Saint Peter and in his own **[Page 66]** habitation! Had his successors remained in their capital he would have been looked upon as the cause of this benign change, while, had they left Rome, his virtue would have been all the more conspicuous in contrast with their fault.

But such laments are somewhat remote from my subject. On the windy banks of the river Rhone I spent my boyhood, guided by my parents, and then, guided by my own fancies, the whole of my youth. Yet there were long intervals spent elsewhere, for I first passed four years at the little town of Carpentras, somewhat to the east of Avignon: in these two places I learned as much of grammar, logic, and rhetoric as my age permitted, or rather, as much as it is customary to teach in school: how little that is, dear reader, thou knowest. I then set out for Montpellier to study law, and spent four years there, then three at Bologna. I heard the whole body of the civil law, and would, as many thought, have distinguished myself later, had I but continued my studies. I gave up the subject altogether, however, so soon as it was no longer necessary to consult the wishes of my parents. **[Page 67]** My reason was that, although the dignity of the law, which is doubtless very great, and especially the numerous references it contains to Roman antiquity, did not fail to delight me, I felt it to be habitually degraded by those who practise it. It went against me painfully to acquire an art which I would not practise dishonestly, and could hardly hope to exercise otherwise. Had I made the latter attempt, my scrupulousness would doubtless have been ascribed to simplicity.

So at the age of two and twenty [\[8\]](#) I returned home. I call my place of exile home, Avignon, where I had been since childhood; for habit has almost the potency of nature itself. I had already begun to be known there, and my friendship was sought by prominent men; wherefore I cannot say. I confess this is now a source of surprise to me, although it seemed natural enough at an age when we are used to regard ourselves as worthy of the highest respect. I was courted first and foremost by that very distinguished and noble family, the Colonnese, who, at that period, adorned the Roman Curia with their presence. However it might be now, I was at that time certainly quite unworthy of the esteem in which I was held by them. I was especially honoured by the incomparable Giacomo Colonna, **[Page 68]** then Bishop of Lombez, [\[9\]](#) whose peer I know not whether I have ever seen or ever shall see, and was taken by him to Gascony; there I spent such a divine summer among the foot-hills of the Pyrenees, in happy intercourse with my master and the members of our company, that I can never recall the experience without a sigh of regret. [\[10\]](#)

Returning thence, I passed many years in the house of Giacomo's brother, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, not as if he were my lord and master, but rather my father, or better, a most affectionate brother - nay, it was as if I were in my own home. [\[11\]](#) About this time, a youthful desire impelled me to visit France and Germany. While I invented certain reasons to satisfy my elders of the propriety of the journey, the real explanation was a great inclination and longing to see new sights. I first visited Paris, as I was anxious to discover what was true and what fabulous in the accounts I had heard of that city. [\[12\]](#) On my return from this journey I went to Rome, [\[13\]](#) which I had since my infancy ardently

desired to [Page 69] visit. There I soon came to venerate Stephano, the noble head of the family of the Colonnese, like some ancient hero, and was in turn treated by him in every respect like a son. The love and good-will of this excellent man toward me remained constant to the end of his life, and lives in me still, nor will it cease until I myself pass away.

On my return, since I experienced a deep-seated and innate repugnance to town life, especially in that disgusting city of Avignon which I heartily abhorred, I sought some means of escape. I fortunately discovered, about fifteen miles from Avignon, a delightful valley, narrow and secluded, called Vaucluse, where the Sorgue, the prince of streams, takes its rise. Captivated by the charms of the place, I transferred thither myself and my books. Were I to describe what I did there during many years, it would prove a long story. Indeed, almost every bit of writing which I have put forth was either accomplished or begun, or at least conceived, there, and my undertakings have been so numerous that they still continue to vex and weary me. My mind, like my body, is characterised by a certain versatility and readiness, rather than by strength, so that many tasks that were easy of conception have been given up by reason of the difficulty of their execution. The character of my surroundings suggested the composition of a sylvan or bucolic song. I also dedicated a work in two books upon *The Life of Solitude*, to Philip, now exalted to the Cardinal-bishopric [Page 70] of Sabina. Although always a great man, he was, at the time of which I speak, only the humble Bishop of Cavaillon. [14] He is the only one of my old friends who is still left to me, and he has always loved and treated me not as a bishop (as Ambrose did Augustine), but as a brother.

While I was wandering in those mountains upon a Friday in Holy Week, the strong desire seized me to write an epic in an heroic strain, taking as my theme Scipio Africanus the Great, who had, strange to say, been dear to me from my childhood. But although I began the execution of this project with enthusiasm, I straightway abandoned it, owing to a variety of distractions. The poem was, however, christened *Africa*, from the name of its hero, and, whether from his fortunes or mine, it did not fail to arouse the interest of many before they had seen it.

While leading a leisurely existence in this region, I received, remarkable as it may seem, upon one and the same day, [15] letters both from the Senate at Rome and the Chancellor of the University of Paris, pressing me to appear in Rome and Paris, respectively, to receive the poet's crown of laurel. In my youthful elation I convinced myself that I was quite worthy of this honour; the recognition came from eminent judges, and I accepted their verdict rather than that of my own better judgment. I hesitated for a time which I should give ear to, and sent a letter to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, of whom I have already [Page 71] spoken, asking his opinion. He was so near that, although I wrote late in the day, I received his reply before the third hour on the morrow. I followed his advice, and recognised the claims of Rome as superior to all others. My acceptance of his counsel is shown by my twofold letter to him on that occasion, which I still keep. I set off accordingly; but although, after the fashion of youth, I was a most indulgent judge of my own work, I still blushed to accept in my own case the verdict even of such men as those

who summoned me, despite the fact that they would certainly not have honoured me in this way, had they not believed me worthy. [16]

So I decided, first to visit Naples, and that celebrated king and philosopher, Robert, who was not more distinguished as a ruler than as a man of culture. [17] He was, indeed, the only monarch of our age who was the friend at once of learning and of virtue, and I trusted that he might correct such things as he found to criticise in my work. The way in which he received and welcomed me is a source of astonishment to me now, and, I doubt not, to the reader [Page 72] also, if he happens to know anything of the matter. Having learned the reason of my coming, the King seemed mightily pleased. He was gratified, doubtless, by my youthful faith in him, and felt, perhaps, that he shared in a way the glory of my coronation, since I had chosen him from all others as the only suitable critic. After talking over a great many things, I showed him my *Africa*, which so delighted him that he asked that it might be dedicated to him in consideration of a handsome reward. [18] This was a request that I could not well refuse, nor, indeed, would I have wished to refuse it, had it been in my power. He then fixed a day upon which we could consider the object of my visit. This occupied us from noon until evening, and the time proving too short, on account of the many matters which arose for discussion, we passed the two following days in the same manner. Having thus tested my poor attainments for three days, the King at last pronounced me worthy of the laurel. He offered to bestow that honour upon me at Naples, and urged me to consent to receive it there, but my veneration for Rome prevailed over the insistence of even so great a monarch as Robert. At length, seeing that I was inflexible in my purpose, he sent me on my way accompanied by royal messengers and letters to the Roman Senate, in which [Page 73] he gave enthusiastic expression to his flattering opinion of me. This royal estimate was, indeed, quite in accord with that of many others, and especially with my own, but to-day I cannot approve either his or my own verdict. In his case, affection and the natural partiality to youth were stronger than his devotion to truth.

On arriving at Rome, I continued, in spite of my unworthiness, to rely upon the judgment of so eminent a critic, and, to the great delight of the Romans who were present, I who had been hitherto a simple student received the laurel crown. [19] This occasion is described elsewhere in my letters, both in prose and verse. The laurel, however, in no way increased my wisdom, although it did arouse some jealousy - but this is too long a story to be told here.

On leaving Rome, I went to Parma, and spent some time with the members of the house of Correggio, who, while they were most kind and generous towards me, agreed but ill among themselves. They governed Parma, however, in a way unknown to that city within the memory of man, and the like of which it will hardly again enjoy in this present age.

I was conscious of the honour which I had but just received, and fearful lest it might seem to have been granted to one unworthy of the distinction; consequently, as I was walking one day in the [Page 74] mountains, and chanced to cross the river Enza to a place called Selva Piana, in the territory of Reggio, struck by the beauty of the spot, I began to write again upon the *Africa*, which I had laid aside. In my enthusiasm, which had seemed quite



dead, I wrote some lines that very day, and some each day until I returned to Parma. Here I happened upon a quiet and retired house, which I afterwards bought, and which still belongs to me. I continued my task with such ardour, and completed the work in so short a space of time, that I cannot but marvel now at my despatch. [20] I had already passed my thirty-fourth year when I returned thence to the Fountain of the Sorgue, and to my Transalpine solitude. I had made a long stay both in Parma and Verona, [21] and everywhere I had, I am thankful to say, been treated with much greater esteem than I merited.

Some time after this, my growing reputation procured for me the good-will of a most excellent man, Giacomo the Younger, of Carrara, whose equal I do not know among the rulers of his time. For years he wearied me with messengers and letters when I was beyond the Alps, and with his petitions whenever I happened to be in Italy, urging me to accept [Page 75] his friendship. At last, although I anticipated little satisfaction from the venture, I determined to go to him and see what this insistence on the part of a person so eminent, and at the same time a stranger to me, might really mean. I appeared, though tardily, at Padua, [22] where I was received by him of illustrious memory, not as a mortal, but as the blessed are greeted in heaven - with such delight and such unspeakable affection and esteem, that I cannot adequately describe my welcome in words, and must, therefore, be silent. Among other things, learning that I had led a clerical life from boyhood, he had me made a canon of Padua, in order to bind me the closer to himself and his city. In fine, had his life been spared, I should have found there an end to all my wanderings. But alas! nothing mortal is enduring, and there is nothing sweet which does not presently end in bitterness. Scarcely two years was he spared to me, to his country, and to the world. God, who had given him to us, took him again. [23] Without being blinded by my love for him, I feel that neither I, nor his country, nor the world was worthy of him. Although his son, who succeeded him, was in every way a prudent and distinguished man, who, following his father's example, always loved and honoured me, I could not remain after the death of him with whom, by reason especially of the similarity of our ages, I had been much more closely united.

I returned to Gaul, not so much from a desire to [Page 76] see again what I had already beheld a thousand times, as from the hope, common to the afflicted, of coming to terms with my misfortunes by a change of scene. [24]

#### Questions for *Letter to Posterity*

1. *What seems to be important to Petrarch in this letter?*
2. *What is Petrarch's opinion of himself?*

#### **Footnotes**

[1] None of the portraits of Petrarch, not even the well-known one in a codex of the Laurentian library, are authentic, unless it be the one reproduced at the beginning of this volume.

[2] Eye-glasses were a somewhat new invention when Petrarch resorted to them. Poggendorf cites the first reference to them (1299), which reads as follows: "I found myself so oppressed by age that without the so-called eye-glasses, which have recently been discovered as a godsend to poor old persons, I could neither read nor write." We know little of the construction of these first spectacles. An early German painting (15th century), in the National Gallery at London, shows a saint with a completely developed *pince-nez*.

[3] Petrarch's father and Dante were banished forever from Florence upon the same day, January 27, 1302.

[4] This is doubtless one of the two or three obscure references to Laura, in Petrarch's correspondences. His frigid statement of the case is characteristic of Petrarch the Humanist as contrasted with Petrarch the singer. Compare the fervour of the sonnets with the original of this passage:---*Amore acerrimo, sed unico et honesto, in adolescentia laboravi, et diutius laborassem, nisi iam tepescentem ignem mors acerba, sed utilis, extinxisset.*

[5] Petrarch, although a churchman, was the father of two illegitimate children, a son, Giovanni, born in 1337, and a daughter, Francesca, born, probably of the same mother, some six years later. The unfortunate mother was, according to Petrarch's own story, very harshly treated by him. The obscure *liaison* seems not to have afflicted him with the remorse which his purer attachment for Laura caused him. Only the latter is spoken of, and that at great length, in his imaginary confession to St. Augustine. The son proved an idle fellow who caused his father a world of trouble, even entering into collusion with a band of thievish servants to rob him. The plague cut short his unpromising career in his twenty-fourth year. Petrarch noted in his copy of Virgil, which he used as a family record: "Our Giovanni was born to be a trial and burden to me. While alive he tormented me with perpetual anxiety, and his death has wounded me deeply." The daughter was of a happier disposition. She married, and Petrarch rejoiced in two grandchildren. One of these, the little Francesco, was, when but a year old, a "perfect picture" of his illustrious grandfather, but the great hopes for the child's future were cut short by its early death. Petrarch comforts himself with the thought that the child "has gained eternal happiness with effort, and his departure has freed me from a continual source of solitude."

[6] Petrarch's father, being still an exile, could not return with the family to Ancisa, in Florentine territory, but joined them when they moved to Pisa, which did not in those days belong to Florence.

[7] Urban V. (1362-1370) had transferred the papal court back to Rome after it remained for sixty years in France and Avignon, but after a year or two the disorder in Italy, as well as his own longing and that of his cardinals for their native land, overcame his good intentions and he returned to Avignon, where he died almost immediately, in December, 1370.

[8] It seems strange that at twenty-two Petrarch should already have spent some seven years at the universities. It was not, however, unusual then. There were no entrance requirements, and the students were often mere boys. Rashdall places the age of freshmen at thirteen to sixteen years, but they might enter still younger. See *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, vol. ii., p. 604.

[9] Some thirty miles southwest of Toulouse.

[10] It was on this occasion that Petrarch formed his life-long friendship with "Socrates," who lived at Avignon, and with "Iaelius," a Roman, who also resided at Avignon until the death of Cardinal Colonna, in 1348. To these two a great many of his letters are addressed.

[11] Petrarch was a commensal chaplain in the house of the Cardinal, as we learn from the Papal document granting him his first benefice, *apud De Sade, Memoires sur la Vie de petarque*, "Pieces justificatives," vol. iii., No. 15.

[12] Petrarch's letters relating to Paris and Cologne are given below, Part IV.

[13] Probably some three years after the journey to the north.

[14] The castle of Cavaillon is close by the valley of the Sorgue.

[15] September 1, 1340, when Petrarch was thirty-six years old.

[16] The invitations to Rome and Paris to receive the laurel crown have a history, as the reader will easily infer.

[17] Robert (who died in 1343) was the grandson of that Charles of Anjou (the brother of St. Louis) who had been called in by the popes to succeed the house of Hohenstaufen in the kingdom of Naples and Sicily. He was Petrarch's sovereign (*Fam.*,iv.,3) for Avignon belonged to him as Court of Provence, until sold to the popes by Robert's successor in 1348. Robert had resided at Avignon, 1318-1324. A letter from Petrarch to Robert, dated December 26, 1338, is preserved as well as a second one (Pisa, April 21, 1341), describing his coronation at Rome: *Fam.*,iv.,3, 7.

[18] The Latin--ut eam (scil. Africam) sibi inscribi magno pro munere posceret--may perhaps mean that the king asked that the book be dedicated to him as a *great favour*. If, however, Petrarch was rewarded for the attention, he was only one of the first to enjoy a source of revenue which was well known to later Humanists.

[19] Upon Easter Sunday, April 8, 1341.

[20] The great epic was never really finished (cf.*Fam.*,xiii.,II), and the Petrarch came in his old age to dislike even the mention of it. Cordini's edition is the best we have of the poem. An analysis of the *Africa* may be found in Korting, *op.cit.*,654 *sqq.*

[21] Petrarch returned to Vaucluse in 1342. When he was toward *thirty-eight* years old. There is an air of *Wahrheit und Dichtung* noticeable elsewhere in the letter. It was, for example, probably later, in 1344, on a second visit to Parma, that he bought his house, and then went to Verona, where he found letters of Cicero.

[22] 1349.

[23] Giacomo was killed by his nephew, December, 1350.

[24] This autobiography breaks off abruptly here; we know not why.

## To Marcus Tullius Cicero [1 of 2]

239-242

[Page 239] Your letters I sought for long and diligently; and finally, where I least expected it, I found them. At once I read them, over and over, with the utmost [Page 240] eagerness. And as I read I seemed to hear your bodily voice, O Marcus Tullius, saying many things, uttering many lamentations, ranging through many phases of thought and feeling. I long had known how excellent a guide you have proved for others; at last I was to learn what sort of guidance you gave yourself.

Now it is your turn to be the listener. Hearken, wherever you are, to the words of advice, or rather of sorrow and regret, that fall, not unaccompanied by tears, from the lips of one of your successors, who loves you faithfully and cherishes your name. O spirit ever restless and perturbed! in old age---I am but using your own words---self-involved in calamities and ruin! what good could you think would come from your incessant wrangling, from all this wasteful strife and enmity? Where were the peace and quiet that befitted your years, your profession, your station in life? What will-o'-the-wisp tempted you away, with a delusive hope of glory; involved you, in your declining years, in the wars of younger men; and, after exposing you to every form of misfortune, hurled you down to a death that it was unseemly for a philosopher to die? Alas! the wise counsel that you gave your brother, and the salutary advice of your great masters, you [Page 241] forgot. You were like a traveller in the night, whose torch lights up for others the path where he himself has miserably fallen.

Of Dionysius I forbear to speak; of your brother and nephew, too; of Dolabella even, if you like. At one moment you praise them all to the skies; at the next fall upon them with sudden maledictions. This, however, could perhaps be pardoned. I will pass by Julius Caesar, too, whose well-approved clemency was a harbour of refuge for the very men who were warring against him. Great Pompey, likewise, I refrain from mentioning. His affection for you was such that you could do with him what you would. But what insanity led you to hurl yourself upon Antony? Love of the republic, you would probably say. But the republic had fallen before this into irretrievable ruin, as you had yourself admitted. Still, it is possible that a lofty sense of duty, and love of liberty, constrained you to do as you did, hopeless though the effort was. That we can easily believe of so great a man. But why, then, were you so friendly with Augustus? What answer can you give to Brutus? If you accept Octavius, said he, we must conclude that you are not so anxious to be rid of all tyrants as to find a tyrant who will be well-disposed toward yourself. Now, unhappy man, you were to take the last false step, the last and most deplorable. You began to speak ill of the very friend whom you had so lauded, although he was not doing any ill to you, but merely refusing to prevent others who were. I grieve, dear friend at such fickleness. These shortcomings fill [Page 242] me with pity and shame. Like Brutus, I feel no confidence in the arts in which you are so proficient. What, pray, does it profit a man to teach others, and to be prating always about virtue, in high-sounding words, if he fails to give heed to his own instructions? Ah! how much better it would have been, how

much more fitting for a philosopher, to have grown old peacefully in the country, meditating, as you yourself have somewhere said, upon the life that endures for ever, and not upon this poor fragment of life; to have known no fasces, yearned for no triumphs, found no Catilines to fill the soul with ambitious longings!---All this, however, is vain. Farewell, forever, my Cicero.

Written in the land of the living; on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of Transpadane Italy; on the 16th of June, and in the year of that God whom you never knew the 1345th.

## To Marcus Tullius Cicero [2 of 2]

249-252

[Page 249] If my earlier letter gave you offence,---for, as you often have remarked, the saying of your contemporary in the *Andria* is a faithful one, that compliance begets friends, truth only hatred,---you shall listen now to words that will soothe your wounded feelings and prove that the truth need not always be hateful. For, if censure that is true angers us, true praise, on the other hand, gives us delight.

You lived then, Cicero, if I may be permitted to say it, like a mere man, but spoke like an orator, wrote like a philosopher. It was your life that I criticised; not your mind, nor your tongue; for the one fills me with admiration, the other with amazement. And even in your life I feel the lack of nothing but stability, and the love of quiet that should go with your philosophic professions, and abstention from [Page 250] civil war, when liberty had been extinguished and the republic buried and its dirge sung.

See how different my treatment of you is from yours of Epicurus, in your works at large, and especially in the *De Finibus*. You are continually praising his life, but his talents you ridicule. I ridicule in you nothing at all. Your life does awaken my pity, as I have said; but your talents and your eloquence call for nothing but congratulation. O great father of Roman eloquence! not I alone but all who deck themselves with the flowers of Latin speech render thanks unto you. It is from your well-springs that we draw the streams that water our meads. You, we freely acknowledge, are the leader who marshals us; yours are the words of encouragement that sustain us; yours is the light that illumines the path before us. In a word, it is under your auspices that we have attained to such little skill in this art of writing as we may possess. . . .

You have heard what I think of your life and your genius. Are you hoping to hear of your books also; what fate has befallen them, how they are esteemed by the masses and among scholars? They still are in existence, glorious volumes, but we of today are too feeble a folk to read them, or even to be acquainted with their mere titles. Your fame extends far and wide; your name is mighty, and fills the ears of men; and yet those who really know you are very few, be it because the times are unfavourable, or because men's minds are slow and dull, or, as I am the more inclined to believe, because the love of [Page 251]

money forces our thoughts in other directions. Consequently right in our own day, unless I am much mistaken, some of your books have disappeared, I fear beyond recovery. It is a great grief to me, a great disgrace to this generation, a great wrong done to posterity. The shame of failing to cultivate our own talents, thereby depriving the future of the fruits that they might have yielded, is not enough for us; we must waste and spoil, through our cruel and insufferable neglect, the fruits of your labours too, and of those of your fellows as well, for the fate that I lament in the case of your own books has befallen the works of many another illustrious man.

It is of yours alone, though, that I would speak now. Here are the names of those among them whose loss is most to be deplored: the *Republic*, the *Praise of Philosophy*, the treatises on the *Care of Property*, on the *Art of War*, on *Consolation*, on *Glory*,--- although in the case of this last my feeling is rather one of hopeful uncertainty than of certain despair. And then there are huge gaps in the volumes that have survived. It is as if indolence and oblivion had been worsted, in a great battle, but we had to mourn noble leaders slain, and others lost or maimed. This last indignity very many of your books have suffered, but more particularly the *Orator*, the *Academics*, and the *Laws*. They have come forth from the fray so mutilated and disfigured that it would have been better if they had perished outright.

Now, in conclusion, you will wish me to tell you something about the condition of Rome and the [Page 252] Roman republic: the present appearance of the city and whole country, the degree of harmony that prevails, what classes of citizens possess political power, by whose hands and with what wisdom the reins of empire are swayed, and whether the Danube, the Ganges, the Ebro, the Nile, the Don, are our boundaries now, or in very truth the man has arisen who 'bounds our empire by the ocean-stream, our fame by the stars of heaven,' or 'extends our rule beyond Garama and Ind,' as your friend the Mantuan has said. Of these and other matters of like nature I doubt not you would very gladly hear. Your filial piety tells me so, your well-known love of country, which you cherished even to your own destruction. But indeed it were better that I refrained. Trust me, Cicero, if you were to hear of our condition to-day you would be moved to tears, in whatever circle of heaven above, or Erebus below, you may be dwelling. Farewell, forever.

Written in the world of the living; on the left bank of the Rhone, in Transalpine Gaul; in the same year, but in the month of December, the 19th day.

Questions for *Letters to Cicero*

1. In the first letter, what does Petrarch criticize about Cicero's behavior?
2. What talents of Cicero does Petrarch praise?
3. What does Petrarch say about the fate of Cicero's works?

## The Ascent of Mount Ventoux

### To Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro

307-320

[Page 307] To-day I made the ascent of the highest mountain in this region, which is not improperly called [Page 308] Ventosum. My only motive was the wish to see what so great an elevation had to offer. I have had the expedition in mind for many years; for, as you know, I have lived in this region from infancy, having been cast here by that fate which determines the affairs of men. Consequently the mountain, which is visible from a great distance, was ever before my eyes, and I conceived the plan of some time doing what I have at last accomplished to-day. The idea took hold upon me with especial force when, in re-reading Livy's *History of Rome*, yesterday, I happened upon the place where Philip of Macedon, the same who waged war against the Romans, ascended Mount Haemus in Thessaly, from whose summit he was able, it is said, to see two seas, the Adriatic and the Euxine. Whether this be true or false I have not been able to determine, for the mountain is too far away, and writers disagree. Pomponius Mela, the cosmographer - not to mention others who have spoken of this occurrence - admits its truth without hesitation; Titus Livius, on the other hand, considers it false. [Page 309] I, assuredly, should not have left the question long in doubt, had that mountain been as easy to explore as this one. Let us leave this matter one side, however, and return to my mountain here, - it seems to me that a young man in private life may well be excused for attempting what an aged king could undertake without arousing criticism.

When I came to look about for a companion I found, strangely enough, that hardly one among my friends seemed suitable, so rarely do we meet with just the right combination of personal tastes and characteristics, even among those who are dearest to us. This one was too apathetic, that one over-anxious; this one too slow, that one too hasty; one was too sad, another over-cheerful; one more simple, another more sagacious, than I desired. I feared this one's taciturnity and that one's loquacity. The heavy deliberation of some repelled me as much as the lean incapacity of others. I rejected those who were likely to irritate me by a cold want of interest, as well as those who might weary me by their excessive enthusiasm. Such defects, however grave, could be borne with at home, for charity suffereth all things, and friendship accepts any burden; but it is quite otherwise on a journey, where every weakness becomes much more serious. So, as I was bent upon pleasure and anxious that my enjoyment should be unalloyed, I looked about me with unusual care, balanced against one another the various characteristics of my friends, and without committing any breach of friendship I silently condemned every trait which might prove disagreeable [Page 310] on the way. And - would you believe it? - I finally turned homeward for aid, and proposed the ascent to my only brother, who is younger than I, and with whom you are well acquainted. He was delighted and gratified beyond measure by the thought of holding the place of a friend as well as of a brother.

At the time fixed we left the house, and by evening reached Malaucene, which lies at the foot of the mountain, to the north. Having rested there a day, we finally made the ascent this morning, with no companions except two servants; and a most difficult task it was. The mountain is a very steep and almost inaccessible mass of stony soil. But, as the poet has well said, "Remorseless toil conquers all." It was a long day, the air fine. We enjoyed the advantages of vigour of mind and strength and agility of body, and everything else essential to those engaged in such an undertaking and so had no other difficulties to face than those of the region itself. We found an old shepherd in one of the mountain dales, who tried, at great length, to dissuade us from the ascent, saying that some fifty years before he had, in the same ardour of youth, reached the summit, but had gotten for his pains nothing except fatigue and regret, and clothes and body torn by the rocks and briars. No one, so far as he or his companions knew, had ever tried the ascent before or after him. But his counsels increased rather than diminished our desire to proceed, since youth is suspicious of warnings. So the old man, finding that his efforts were in vain, went a [Page 311] little way with us, and pointed out a rough path among the rocks, uttering many admonitions, which he continued to send after us even after we had left him behind. Surrendering to him all such garments or other possessions as might prove burdensome to us, we made ready for the ascent, and started off at a good pace. But, as usually happens, fatigue quickly followed upon our excessive exertion, and we soon came to a halt at the top of a certain cliff. Upon starting on again we went more slowly, and I especially advanced along the rocky way with a more deliberate step. While my brother chose a direct path straight up the ridge, I weakly took an easier one which really descended. When I was called back, and the right road was shown me, I replied that I hoped to find a better way round on the other side, and that I did not mind going farther if the path were only less steep. This was just an excuse for my laziness; and when the others had already reached a considerable height I was still wandering in the valleys. I had failed to find an easier path, and had only increased the distance and difficulty of the ascent. At last I became disgusted with the intricate way I had chosen, and resolved to ascend without more ado. When I reached my brother, who, while waiting for me, had had ample opportunity for rest, I was tired and irritated. We walked along together for a time, but hardly had we passed the first spur when I forgot about the circuitous route which I had just tried, and took a lower one again. Once more I followed an easy, roundabout path through winding valleys, only to [Page 312] find myself soon in my old difficulty. I was simply trying to avoid the exertion of the ascent; but no human ingenuity can alter the nature of things, or cause anything to reach a height by going down. Suffice it to say that, much to my vexation and my brother's amusement, I made this same mistake three times or more during a few hours.

After being frequently misled in this way, I finally sat down in a valley and transferred my winged thoughts from things corporeal to the immaterial, addressing myself as follows: - "What thou hast repeatedly experienced to-day in the ascent of this mountain, happens to thee, as to many, in the journey toward the blessed life. But this is not so readily perceived by men, since the motions of the body are obvious and external while those of the soul are invisible and hidden. Yes, the life which we call blessed is to be sought for on a high eminence, and strait is the way that leads to it. Many, also, are the hills that lie between, and we must ascend, by a glorious stairway, from strength to



strength. At the top is at once the end of our struggles and the goal for which we are bound. All wish to reach this goal, but, as Ovid says, 'To wish is little; we must long with the utmost eagerness to gain our end.' Thou certainly dost ardently desire, as well as simply wish, unless thou deceivest thyself in this matter, as in so many others. What, then, doth hold thee back? Nothing, assuredly, except that thou wouldst take a path which seems, at first thought, more easy, leading through low and worldly pleasures. But nevertheless in the end, after long **[Page 313]** wanderings, thou must perforce either climb the steeper path, under the burden of tasks foolishly deferred, to its blessed culmination, or lie down in the valley of thy sins, and (I shudder to think of it!), if the shadow of death overtake thee, spend an eternal night amid constant torments." These thoughts stimulated both body and mind in a wonderful degree for facing the difficulties which yet remained. Oh, that I might traverse in spirit that other road for which I long day and night, even as to-day I overcame material obstacles by my bodily exertions! And I know not why it should not be far easier, since the swift immortal soul can reach its goal in the twinkling of an eye, without passing through space, while my progress to-day was necessarily slow, dependent as I was upon a failing body weighed down by heavy members.

One peak of the mountain, the highest of all, the country people call "Sonny," why, I do not know, unless by antiphrasis, as I have sometimes suspected in other instances; for the peak in question would seem to be the father of all the surrounding ones. On its top is a little level place, and here we could at last rest our tired bodies.

Now, my father, since you have followed the thoughts that spurred me on in my ascent, listen to the rest of the story, and devote one hour, I pray you, to reviewing the experiences of my entire day. At first, owing to the unaccustomed quality of the air and the effect of the great sweep of view spread out before me, I stood like one dazed. I beheld the clouds under our feet, and what I had read **[Page 314]** of Athos and Olympus seemed less incredible as I myself witnessed the same things from a mountain of less fame. I turned my eyes toward Italy, whither my heart most inclined. The Alps, rugged and snow-capped, seemed to rise close by, although they were really at a great distance; the very same Alps through which that fierce enemy of the Roman name once made his way, bursting the rocks, if we may believe the report, by the application of vinegar. I sighed, I must confess, for the skies of Italy, which I beheld rather with my mind than with my eyes. An inexpressible longing came over me to see once more my friend and my country. At the same time I reproached myself for this double weakness, springing, as it did, from a soul not yet steeled to manly resistance. And yet there were excuses for both of these cravings, and a number of distinguished writers might be summoned to support me.

Then a new idea took possession of me, and I shifted my thoughts to a consideration of time rather than place. "To-day it is ten years since, having completed thy youthful studies, thou didst leave Bologna. Eternal God! In the name of immutable wisdom, think what alterations in thy character this intervening period has beheld! I pass over a thousand instances. I am not yet in a safe harbour where I can calmly recall past storms. The time may come when I can review in due order all the experiences of the past, saying

with St. Augustine, 'I desire to recall my foul actions and the carnal corruption of [Page 315] my soul, not because I love them, but that I may the more love thee, O my God.' Much that is doubtful and evil still clings to me, but what I once loved, that I have no longer. And yet what am I saying? I still love it, but with shame, but with heaviness of heart. Now, at last, I have confessed the truth. So it is. I love, but love what I would not love, what I would that I might hate. Though loath to do so, though constrained, though sad and sorrowing, still I do love, and I feel in my miserable self the truth of the well known words, 'I will hate if I can; if not, I will love against my will.' Three years have not yet passed since that perverse and wicked passion which had a firm grasp upon me and held undisputed sway in my heart began to discover a rebellious opponent, who was unwilling longer to yield obedience. These two adversaries have joined in close combat for the supremacy, and for a long time now a harassing and doubtful war has been waged in the field of my thoughts."

Thus I turned over the last ten years in my mind, and then, fixing my anxious gaze on the future, I asked myself, "If, perchance, thou shouldst prolong this uncertain life of thine for yet two lustres, and shouldst make an advance toward virtue proportionate to the distance to which thou hast departed from thine original infatuation during the past two years, since the new longing first encountered the old, couldst thou, on reaching thy fortieth year, face death, if not with complete assurance, at least with [Page 316] hopefulness, calmly dismissing from thy thoughts the residuum of life as it faded into old age?"

These and similar reflections occurred to me, my father. I rejoiced in my progress, mourned my weaknesses, and commiserated the universal instability of human conduct. I had well-nigh forgotten where I was and our object in coming; but at last I dismissed my anxieties, which were better suited to other surroundings, and resolved to look about me and see what we had come to see. The sinking sun and the lengthening shadows of the mountain were already warning us that the time was near at hand when we must go. As if suddenly awakened from sleep, I turned about and gazed toward the west. I was unable to discern the summits of the Pyrenees, which form the barrier between France and Spain; not because of any intervening obstacle that I know of but owing simply to the insufficiency of our mortal vision. But I could see with the utmost clearness, off to the right, the mountains of the region about Lyons, and to the left the bay of Marseilles and the waters that lash the shores of Aigues Mortes, altho' all these places were so distant that it would require a journey of several days to reach them. Under our very eyes flowed the Rhone.

While I was thus dividing my thoughts, now turning my attention to some terrestrial object that lay before me, now raising my soul, as I had done my body, to higher planes, it occurred to me to look into my copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, a gift that I owe to your love, and that I always have about me, in memory of both the author and the giver. I [Page 317] opened the compact little volume, small indeed in size, but of infinite charm, with the intention of reading whatever came to hand, for I could happen upon nothing that would be otherwise than edifying and devout. Now it chanced that the tenth book presented itself. My brother, waiting to hear something of St. Augustine's from my lips,

stood attentively by. I call him, and God too, to witness that where I first fixed my eyes it was written: "And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not." I was abashed, and, asking my brother (who was anxious to hear more), not to annoy me, I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things who might long ago have learned from even the pagan philosophers that nothing is wonderful but the soul, which, when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself. Then, in truth, I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again. Those words had given me occupation enough, for I could not believe that it was by a mere accident that I happened upon them. What I had there read I believed to be addressed to me and to no other, remembering that St. Augustine had once suspected the same thing in his own case, when, on opening the book of the Apostle, as he himself tells us, the first words that he saw there were, "Not in rioting [**Page 318**] and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

The same thing happened earlier to St. Anthony, when he was listening to the Gospel where it is written, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." Believing this scripture to have been read for his especial benefit, as his biographer Athanasius says, he guided himself by its aid to the Kingdom of Heaven. And as Anthony on hearing these words waited for nothing more, and as Augustine upon reading the Apostle's admonition sought no farther, so I concluded my reading in the few words which I have given. I thought in silence of the lack of good counsel in us mortals, who neglect what is noblest in ourselves, scatter our energies in all directions, and waste ourselves in a vain show, because we look about us for what is to be found only within. I wondered at the natural nobility of our soul, save when it debases itself of its own free will, and deserts its original estate, turning what God has given it for its honour into dishonour. How many times, think you, did I turn back that day, to glance at the summit of the mountain which seemed scarcely a cubit high compared with the range of human contemplation, - when it is not immersed in the foul mire of earth? With every downward step I asked myself this: If we are ready to endure so much sweat and labour in order that we [**Page 319**] may bring our bodies a little nearer heaven, how can a soul struggling toward God, up the steepes of human pride and human destiny, fear any cross or prison or sting of fortune? How few, I thought, but are diverted from their path by the fear of difficulties or the love of ease! How happy the lot of those few, if any such there be! It is of them, assuredly, that the poet was thinking, when he wrote:

Happy the man who is skilled to understand  
Nature's hid causes; who beneath his feet  
All terrors casts, and death's relentless doom,  
And the loud roar of greedy Acheron.

How earnestly should we strive, not to stand on mountain-tops, but to trample beneath us those appetites which spring from earthly impulses.

With no consciousness of the difficulties of the way, amidst these preoccupations which I have so frankly revealed, we came, long after dark, but with the full moon lending us its friendly light, to the little inn which we had left that morning before dawn. The time during which the servants have been occupied in preparing our supper, I have spent in a secluded part of the house, hurriedly jotting down these experiences on the spur of the moment, lest, in case my task were postponed, my mood should change on leaving the place, and so my interest in writing flag.

**[Page 320]** You will see, my dearest father, that I wish nothing to be concealed from you, for I am careful to describe to you not only my life in general but even my individual reflections. And I beseech you, in turn, to pray that these vague and wandering thoughts of mine may some time become firmly fixed, and, after having been vainly tossed about from one interest to another, may direct themselves at last toward the single, true, certain, and everlasting good.

Malaucene, April 26.

Questions for *The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*

1. *What sorts of meanings does Petrarch's climb up "Windy Mountain" (Mount Ventoux) hold for him?*
2. *What metaphors does he use?*
3. *How should we understand the meaning of those metaphors?*

### Summary Questions

*1) Humanism has been characterized as "not the revival of antiquity, but rather a new way of looking at antiquity." In what way does Petrarch's "Letter to Cicero" illustrate this "new way of looking at antiquity?"*

*2) Take any two letters of Petrarch and describe what they reveal about Petrarch as an individual and/or his intellectual convictions.*

*3) What can we discern about Petrarch's views on education and learning from his letters? Why does he write to long dead authors, such as Cicero?*

*4) What, for Petrarch, is man's highest calling?*