

1. HERE BEGINS THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES,
WHOSE FIRST CHAPTER TELLS WHY AND FOR WHAT
PURPOSE THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN.

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded I.1.1
by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself
to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at
length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I
had studied for a long time. I looked up from my book,
having decided to leave such subtle questions in peace and
to relax by reading some light poetry. With this in mind, I
searched for some small book. By chance a strange
volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one
which had been given to me along with some others.
When I held it open and saw from its title page that it
was by Mathéolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen
it before, I had often heard that like other books it dis-
cussed respect for women. I thought I would browse
through it to amuse myself. I had not been reading for
very long when my good mother called me to refresh
myself with some supper, for it was evening. Intending
to look at it the next day, I put it down. The next
morning, again seated in my study as was my habit, I
remembered wanting to examine this book by Mathéolus.
I started to read it and went on for a little while. Because
the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people
who do not enjoy lies, and of no use in developing virtue
or manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and
theme, and after browsing here and there and reading
the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to
more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this
book, even though it was of no authority, made me
wonder how it happened that so many different men—
and learned men among them—have been and are so
inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises

and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior. Not only one or two and not even just this Mathéolus (for this book had a bad name anyway and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators—it would take too long to mention their names—it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was. This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults and, likewise, those of other women because of its simpleness and ignorance, it was however truly fitting that such was the case. And so I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew. I was so transfixed in this line of thinking for such a long time that it seemed as if I were in a stupor. Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities, whom I recalled one after

another, came to mind, along with their opinions on this topic. And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have deigned to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. And in my lament I spoke these words:

“Oh, God, how can this be? For unless I stray from my faith, I must never doubt that Your infinite wisdom and most perfect goodness ever created anything which was not good. Did You yourself not create woman in a very special way and since that time did You not give her all those inclinations which it pleased You for her to have? And how could it be that You could go wrong in anything? Yet look at all these accusations which have been judged, decided, and concluded against women. I do not know how to understand this repugnance. If it is so, fair Lord God, that in fact so many abominations abound in the female sex, for You Yourself say that the testimony of two or three witnesses lends credence, why shall I not doubt that this is true? Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man, so that all my inclinations would be to serve You better, and so that I would not stray in anything and would be as perfect as a man is said to be? But since Your kindness has not been extended to me, then forgive my negligence in Your service, most fair Lord God, and may it not displease You, for the servant who receives fewer gifts from his lord is less obliged in his service.” I spoke these words to God in my lament and a great deal more for a very long time in sad reflection, and in my folly I considered myself most unfortunate because God had made me inhabit a female body in this world.

I.1.2

2. HERE CHRISTINE DESCRIBES HOW THREE LADIES APPEARED TO HER AND HOW THE ONE WHO WAS IN FRONT SPOKE FIRST AND COMFORTED HER IN HER PAIN.

I.2.1 So occupied with these painful thoughts, my head bowed in shame, my eyes filled with tears, leaning on the pommel of my chair's armrest, I suddenly saw a ray of light fall on my lap, as though it were the sun. I shuddered then, as if wakened from sleep, for I was sitting in a shadow where the sun could not have shone at that hour. And as I lifted my head to see where this light was coming from, I saw three crowned ladies standing before me, and the splendor of their bright faces shone on me and throughout the entire room. Now no one would ask whether I was surprised, for my doors were shut and they had still entered. Fearing that some phantom had come to tempt me and filled with great fright, I made the Sign of the Cross on my forehead.

I.2.2 Then she who was the first of the three smiled and began to speak, "Dear daughter, do not be afraid, for we have not come here to harm or trouble you but to console you, for we have taken pity on your distress, and we have come to bring you out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect that you shun what you know for a certainty and believe what you do not know or see or recognize except by virtue of many strange opinions. You resemble the fool in the prank who was dressed in women's clothes while he slept; because those who were making fun of him repeatedly told him he was a woman, he believed their false testimony more readily than the certainty of his own identity. Fair daughter, have you lost all sense? Have you forgotten that when fine gold is tested in the furnace, it does not change or vary in strength but becomes purer the more it is hammered and handled in different ways? Do you not know that the best things are the most debated and the most discussed? If you wish to consider the question of the highest form of reality, which consists in ideas or celestial substances, consider whether the greatest philosophers who have

lived and whom you support against your own sex have ever resolved whether ideas are false and contrary to the truth. Notice how these same philosophers contradict and criticize one another, just as you have seen in the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle takes their opinions to task and speaks similarly of Plato and other philosophers. And note, moreover, how even Saint Augustine and the Doctors of the Church have criticized Aristotle in certain passages, although he is known as the prince of philosophers in whom both natural and moral philosophy attained their highest level. It also seems that you think that all the words of the philosophers are articles of faith, that they could never be wrong. As far as the poets of whom you speak are concerned, do you not know that they spoke on many subjects in a fictional way and that often they mean the contrary of what their words openly say? One can interpret them according to the grammatical figure of *antiphrasis*, which means, as you know, that if you call something bad, in fact, it is good, and also vice versa. Thus I advise you to profit from their works and to interpret them in the manner in which they are intended in those passages where they attack women. Perhaps this man, who called himself Mathéolus in his own book, intended it in such a way, for there are many things which, if taken literally, would be pure heresy. As for the attack against the estate of marriage—which is a holy estate, worthy and ordained by God—made not only by Mathéolus but also by others and even by the *Romance of the Rose* where greater credibility is averred because of the authority of its author, it is evident and proven by experience that the contrary of the evil which they posit and claim to be found in this estate through the obligation and fault of women is true. For where has the husband ever been found who would allow his wife to have authority to abuse and insult him as a matter of course, as these authorities maintain? I believe that, regardless of what you might have read, you will never see such a husband with your own eyes, so badly colored

are these lies. Thus, in conclusion, I tell you, dear friend, that simplemindedness has prompted you to hold such an opinion. Come back to yourself, recover your senses, and do not trouble yourself anymore over such absurdities. For you know that any evil spoken of women so generally only hurts those who say it, not women themselves.”

3. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE LADY WHO HAD SAID THIS SHOWED HER WHO SHE WAS AND WHAT HER CHARACTER AND FUNCTION WERE AND TOLD HER HOW SHE WOULD CONSTRUCT A CITY WITH THE HELP OF THESE SAME THREE LADIES.

I.3.1 The famous lady spoke these words to me, in whose presence I do not know which one of my senses was more overwhelmed: my hearing from having listened to such worthy words or my sight from having seen her radiant beauty, her attire, her reverent comportment, and her most honored countenance. The same was true of the others, so that I did not know which one to look at, for the three ladies resembled each other so much that they could be told apart only with difficulty, except for the last one, for although she was of no less authority than the others, she had so fierce a visage that whoever, no matter how daring, looked in her eyes would be afraid to commit a crime, for it seemed that she threatened criminals unceasingly. Having stood up out of respect, I looked at them without saying a word, like someone too overwhelmed to utter a syllable. Reflecting on who these beings could be, I felt much admiration in my heart and, if I could have dared, I would have immediately asked their names and identities and what was the meaning of the different scepters which each one carried in her right hand, which were of fabulous richness, and why they had come here. But since I considered myself unworthy to address these questions to such high ladies as they appeared to me, I did not dare to, but continued to keep my gaze fixed on them, half-afraid and half-reassured by the words which I had heard, which had

made me reject my first impression. But the most wise lady who had spoken to me and who knew in her mind what I was thinking, as one who has insight into everything, addressed my reflections, saying:

“Dear daughter, know that God’s providence, which leaves nothing void or empty, has ordained that we, though celestial beings, remain and circulate among the people of the world here below, in order to bring order and maintain in balance those institutions we created according to the will of God in the fulfillment of various offices, that God whose daughters we three all are and from whom we were born. Thus it is my duty to straighten out men and women when they go astray and to put them back on the right path. And when they stray, if they have enough understanding to see me, I come to them quietly in spirit and preach to them, showing them their error and how they have failed, I assign them the causes, and then I teach them what to do and what to avoid. Since I serve to demonstrate clearly and to show both in thought and deed to each man and woman his or her own special qualities and faults, you see me holding this shiny mirror which I carry in my right hand in place of a scepter. I would thus have you know truly that no one can look into this mirror, no matter what kind of creature, without achieving clear self-knowledge. My mirror has such great dignity that not without reason is it surrounded by rich and precious gems, so that you see, thanks to this mirror, the essences, qualities, proportions, and measures of all things are known, nor can anything be done well without it. And because, similarly, you wish to know what are the offices of my other sisters whom you see here, each will reply in her own person about her name and character, and this way our testimony will be all the more certain to you. But now I myself will declare the reason for our coming. I must assure you, as we do nothing without good cause, that our appearance here is not at all in vain. For, although we are not common to many places and our knowledge

I.3.2

does not come to all people, nevertheless you, for your great love of investigating the truth through long and continual study, for which you come here, solitary and separated from the world, you have deserved and deserve, our devoted friend, to be visited and consoled by us in your agitation and sadness, so that you might also see clearly, in the midst of the darkness of your thoughts, those things which taint and trouble your heart.

I.3.3 “There is another greater and even more special reason for our coming which you will learn from our speeches: in fact we have come to vanquish from the world the same error into which you had fallen, so that from now on, ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and defense against the various assailants, those ladies who have been abandoned for so long, exposed like a field without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion to afford them an adequate defense, notwithstanding those noble men who are required by order of law to protect them, who by negligence and apathy have allowed them to be mistreated. It is no wonder then that their jealous enemies, those outrageous villains who have assailed them with various weapons, have been victorious in a war in which women have had no defense. Where is there a city so strong which could not be taken immediately if no resistance were forthcoming, or the law case, no matter how unjust, which was not won through the obstinance of someone pleading without opposition? And the simple, noble ladies, following the example of suffering which God commands, have cheerfully suffered the great attacks which, both in the spoken and the written word, have been wrongfully and sinfully perpetrated against women by men who all the while appealed to God for the right to do so. Now it is time for their just cause to be taken from Pharaoh’s hands, and for this reason, we three ladies whom you see here, moved by pity, have come to you to announce a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded, which has been predestined and established

by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue.”

4. HERE THE LADY EXPLAINS TO CHRISTINE THE CITY WHICH SHE HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED TO BUILD AND HOW SHE WAS CHARGED TO HELP CHRISTINE BUILD THE WALL AND ENCLOSURE, AND THEN GIVES HER NAME.

“Thus, fair daughter, the prerogative among women has been bestowed on you to establish and build the City of Ladies. For the foundation and completion of this City you will draw fresh waters from us as from clear fountains, and we will bring you sufficient building stone, stronger and more durable than any marble with cement could be. Thus your City will be extremely beautiful, without equal, and of perpetual duration in the world. I.4.1

“Have you not read that King Tros founded the great city of Troy with the aid of Apollo, Minerva, and Neptune, whom the people of that time considered gods, and also how Cadmus founded the city of Thebes with the admonition of the gods? And yet over time these cities fell and have fallen into ruin. But I prophesy to you, as a true sybil, that this City, which you will found with our help, will never be destroyed, nor will it ever fall, but will remain prosperous forever, regardless of all its jealous enemies. Although it will be stormed by numerous assaults, it will never be taken or conquered. I.4.2

“Long ago the Amazon kingdom was begun through the arrangement and enterprise of several ladies of great courage who despised servitude, just as history books have testified. For a long time afterward they maintained it under the rule of several queens, very noble ladies whom they elected themselves, who governed them well and maintained their dominion with great strength. Yet, although they were strong and powerful and had conquered a large part of the entire Orient in the course of I.4.3

their rule and terrified all the neighboring lands (even the Greeks, who were then the flower of all countries in the world, feared them), nevertheless, after a time, the power of this kingdom declined, so that as with all earthly kingdoms, nothing but its name has survived to the present. But the edifice erected by you in this City which you must construct will be far stronger, and for its founding I was commissioned, in the course of our common deliberation, to supply you with durable and pure mortar to lay the sturdy foundations and to raise the lofty walls all around, high and thick, with mighty towers and strong bastions, surrounded by moats with firm blockhouses, just as is fitting for a city with a strong and lasting defense. Following our plan, you will set the foundations deep to last all the longer, and then you will raise the walls so high that they will not fear anyone. Daughter, now that I have told you the reason for our coming and so that you will more certainly believe my words, I want you to learn my name, by whose sound alone you will be able to learn and know that, if you wish to follow my commands, you have in me an administrator so that you may do your work flawlessly. I am called Lady Reason; you see that you are in good hands. For the time being then, I will say no more.”

5. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE SECOND LADY TOLD HER NAME AND WHAT SHE SERVED AS AND HOW SHE WOULD AID HER IN BUILDING THE CITY OF LADIES.

I.5.1 When the lady above finished her speech, before I could resume, the second lady began as follows: “I am called Rectitude and reside more in Heaven than on Earth, but as the radiance and splendor of God and messenger of His goodness, I often visit the just and exhort them to do what is right, to give to each person what is his according to his capacity, to say and uphold the truth, to defend the rights of the poor and the innocent, not to hurt anyone through usurpation, to uphold the reputation of those unjustly accused. I am the shield

and defense of the servants of God. I resist the power and might of evil-doers. I give rest to workers and reward those who act well. Through me, God reveals to His friends His secrets; I am their advocate in Heaven. This shining ruler which you see me carry in my right hand instead of a scepter is the straight ruler which separates right from wrong and shows the difference between good and evil: who follows it does not go astray. It is the rod of peace which reconciles the good and where they find support and which beats and strikes down evil. What should I tell you about this? All things are measured by this ruler, for its powers are infinite. It will serve you to measure the edifice of the City which you have been commissioned to build, and you will need it for constructing the façade, for erecting the high temples, for measuring the palaces, houses, and all public buildings, the streets and squares, and all things proper to help populate the City. I have come as your assistant, and this will be my duty. Do not be uneasy about the breadth and long circuit of the walls, for with God's help and our assistance you will build fair and sturdy mansions and inns without leaving anything vague, and you will people the City with no trouble."

6. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE THIRD LADY TOLD HER WHO SHE WAS AND HER FUNCTION AND HOW SHE WOULD HELP BUILD THE HIGH ROOFS OF THE TOWERS AND PALACES AND WOULD BRING TO HER THE QUEEN, ACCOMPANIED BY NOBLE LADIES.

Afterward, the third lady spoke and said, "My friend Christine, I am Justice, the most singular daughter of God, and my nature proceeds purely from His person. My residence is found in Heaven, on Earth, or in Hell: in Heaven, for the glory of the saints and blessed souls; on Earth, for the apportionment to each man of the good or evil which he has deserved; in Hell, for the punishment of the evil. I do not bend anywhere, for I have not friend nor enemy nor changeable will; pity cannot persuade me

I.6.1

nor cruelty move me. My duty is only to judge, to decide, and to dispense according to each man's just deserts. I sustain all things in their condition, nothing could be stable without me. I am in God and God is in me, and we are as one and the same. Who follows me cannot fail, and my way is sure. I teach men and women of sound mind who want to believe in me to chastise, know, and correct themselves, and to do to others what they wish to have done to themselves, to distribute wealth without favor, to speak the truth, to flee and hate lies, to reject all viciousness. This vessel of fine gold which you see me hold in my right hand, made like a generous measure, God, my Father, gave me, and it serves to measure out to each his rightful portion. It carries the sign of the fleur-de-lis of the Trinity, and in all portions it measures true, nor can any man complain about my measure. Yet the men of the Earth have other measures which they claim depend upon and derive from mine, but they are mistaken. Often they measure in my shadow, and their measure is not always true but sometimes too much for some and too little for others. I could give a rather long account of the duties of my office, but, put briefly, I have a special place among the Virtues, for they are all based on me. And of the three noble ladies whom you see here, we are as one and the same, we could not exist without one another; and what the first disposes, the second orders and initiates, and then I, the third, finish and terminate it. Thus I have been appointed by the will of us three ladies to perfect and complete your City, and my job will be to construct the high roofs of the towers and of the lofty mansions and inns which will all be made of fine shining gold. Then I will populate the City for you with worthy ladies and the mighty Queen whom I will bring to you. Hers will be the honor and prerogative among all other women, as well as among the most excellent women. And in this condition I will turn the City over to you, completed with your help, fortified and closed off with strong gates which I will search for in Heaven, and then I will place the keys in your hands."

7. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW SHE SPOKE TO THE THREE LADIES.

When the speeches of all three ladies were over—to which I had listened intently and which had completely taken away the unhappiness which I had felt before their coming—I threw myself at their feet, not just on my knees but completely prostrate because of their great excellence. Kissing the earth around their feet, adoring them as goddesses of glory, I began my prayer to them: I.7.1

“Oh ladies of supreme dignity, radiance of the heavens and light of the earth, fountains of Paradise and joy of the blessed, where did such humility come from to Your Highnesses that you have deigned to come down from your pontifical seats and shining thrones to visit the troubled and dark tabernacle of this simple and ignorant student? Who could give fitting thanks for such a boon? With the rain and dew of your sweet words, you have penetrated and moistened the dryness of my mind, so that it now feels ready to germinate and send forth new branches capable of bearing fruits of profitable virtue and sweet savor. How will such grace be bestowed on me that I will receive the boon, as you have said, to build and construct in the world from now on a new city? I am not Saint Thomas the Apostle, who through divine grace built a rich palace in Heaven for the king of India, and my feeble sense does not know the craft, or the measures, or the study, or the science, or the practice of construction. And if, thanks to learning, these things were within my ken, where would I find enough physical strength in my weak feminine body to realize such an enormous task? But nevertheless, my most respected ladies, although the awesomeness of this news seems strange to me, I know well that nothing is impossible for God. Nor do I doubt that anything undertaken with your counsel and help will not be completed well. Thus, with all my strength, I praise God and you, my ladies, who have so honored me by assigning me such a noble commission, which I most happily accept. Behold your handmaiden

ready to serve. Command and I will obey, and may it be unto me according to your words.”

8. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW, UNDER REASON’S COMMAND AND ASSISTANCE, SHE BEGAN TO EXCAVATE THE EARTH AND LAY THE FOUNDATION.

I.8.1 Then Lady Reason responded and said, “Get up, daughter! Without waiting any longer, let us go to the Field of Letters. There the City of Ladies will be founded on a flat and fertile plain, where all fruits and freshwater rivers are found and where the earth abounds in all good things. Take the pick of your understanding and dig and clear out a great ditch wherever you see the marks of my ruler, and I will help you carry away the earth on my own shoulders.”

I.8.2 I immediately stood up to obey her commands and, thanks to these three ladies, I felt stronger and lighter than before. She went ahead, and I followed behind, and after we had arrived at this field I began to excavate and dig, following her marks with the pick of cross-examination. And this was my first work:

I.8.3 “Lady, I remember well what you told me before, dealing with the subject of how so many men have attacked and continue to attack the behavior of women, that gold becomes more refined the longer it stays in the furnace, which means the more women have been wrongfully attacked, the greater waxes the merit of their glory. But please tell me why and for what reason different authors have spoken against women in their books, since I already know from you that this is wrong; tell me if Nature makes man so inclined or whether they do it out of hatred and where does this behavior come from?”

Then she replied, “Daughter, to give you a way of entering into the question more deeply, I will carry away this first basketful of dirt. This behavior most certainly does not come from Nature, but rather is contrary to Nature, for no connection in the world is as great or as strong as the great love which, through the

will of God, Nature places between a man and a woman. The causes which have moved and which still move men to attack women, even those authors in those books, are diverse and varied, just as you have discovered. For some have attacked women with good intentions, that is, in order to draw men who have gone astray away from the company of vicious and dissolute women, with whom they might be infatuated, or in order to keep these men from going mad on account of such women, and also so that every man might avoid an obscene and lustful life. They have attacked all women in general because they believe that women are made up of every abomination.”

“My lady,” I said then, “excuse me for interrupting you here, but have such authors acted well, since they were prompted by a laudable intention? For intention, the saying goes, judges the man.”

“That is a misleading position, my good daughter,” she said, “for such sweeping ignorance never provides an excuse. If someone killed you with good intention but out of foolishness, would this then be justified? Rather, those who did this, whoever they might be, would have invoked the wrong law; causing any damage or harm to one party in order to help another party is not justice, and likewise attacking all feminine conduct is contrary to the truth, just as I will show you with a hypothetical case. Let us suppose they did this intending to draw fools away from foolishness. It would be as if I attacked fire—a very good and necessary element nevertheless—because some people burnt themselves, or water because someone drowned. The same can be said of all good things which can be used well or used badly. But one must not attack them if fools abuse them, and you have yourself touched on this point quite well elsewhere in your writings. But those who have spoken like this so abundantly—whatever their intentions might be—have formulated their arguments rather loosely only to make their point. Just like someone who has a long and wide robe cut from a very large piece of cloth when the

material costs him nothing and when no one opposes him, they exploit the rights of others. But just as you have said elsewhere, if these writers had only looked for the ways in which men can be led away from foolishness and could have been kept from tiring themselves in attacking the life and behavior of immoral and dissolute women—for to tell the straight truth, there is nothing which should be avoided more than an evil, dissolute, and perverted woman, who is like a monster in nature, a counterfeit estranged from her natural condition, which must be simple, tranquil, and upright—then I would grant you that they would have built a supremely excellent work. But I can assure you that these attacks on all women—when in fact there are so many excellent women—have never originated with me, Reason, and that all who subscribe to them have failed totally and will continue to fail. So now throw aside these black, dirty, and uneven stones from your work, for they will never be fitted into the fair edifice of your City.

I.8.4 “Other men have attacked women for other reasons: such reproach has occurred to some men because of their own vices and others have been moved by the defects of their own bodies, others through pure jealousy, still others by the pleasure they derive in their own personalities from slander. Others, in order to show they have read many authors, base their own writings on what they have found in books and repeat what other writers have said and cite different authors.

I.8.5 “Those who attack women because of their own vices are men who spent their youths in dissolution and enjoyed the love of many different women, used deception in many of their encounters, and have grown old in their sins without repenting, and now regret their past follies and the dissolute life they led. But Nature, which allows the will of the heart to put into effect what the powerful appetite desires, has grown cold in them. Therefore they are pained when they see that their ‘good times’ have now passed them by, and it seems to them that the young,

who are now what they once were, are on top of the world. They do not know how to overcome their sadness except by attacking women, hoping to make women less attractive to other men. Everywhere one sees such old men speak obscenely and dishonestly, just as you can fully see with Mathéolus, who himself confesses that he was an impotent old man filled with desire. You can thereby convincingly prove, with this one example, how what I tell you is true, and you can assuredly believe that it is the same with many others.

“But these corrupt old men, like an incurable leprosy, are not the upstanding men of old whom I made perfect in virtue and wisdom—for not all men share in such corrupt desire, and it would be a real shame if it were so. The mouths of these good men, following their hearts, are all filled with exemplary, honest, and discreet words. These same men detest misdeeds and slander, and neither attack nor defame men and women, and they counsel the avoidance of evil and the pursuit of virtue and the straight path. I.8.6

“Those men who are moved by the defect of their own bodies have impotent and deformed limbs but sharp and malicious minds. They have found no other way to avenge the pain of their impotence except by attacking women who bring joy to many. Thus they have thought to divert others away from the pleasure which they cannot personally enjoy. I.8.7

“Those men who have attacked women out of jealousy are those wicked ones who have seen and realized that many women have greater understanding and are more noble in conduct than they themselves, and thus they are pained and disdainful. Because of this, their overweening jealousy has prompted them to attack all women, intending to demean and diminish the glory and praise of such women, just like the man—I cannot remember which one—who tries to prove in his work, *De philosophia*, that it is not fitting that some men have revered women and says that those men who have made so much I.8.8

of women pervert the title of his book: they transform 'philosophy,' the love of wisdom, into 'philofolly,' the love of folly. But I promise and swear to you that he himself, all throughout the lie-filled deductions of his argument, transformed the content of his book into a true philofolly.

I.8.9 "As for those men who are naturally given to slander, it is not surprising that they slander women since they attack everyone anyway. Nevertheless, I assure you that any man who freely slanders does so out of a great wickedness of heart, for he is acting contrary to reason and contrary to Nature: contrary to reason insofar as he is most ungrateful and fails to recognize the good deeds which women have done for him, so great that he could never make up for them, no matter how much he try, and which he continuously needs women to perform for him; and contrary to Nature in that there is no naked beast anywhere, nor bird, which does not naturally love its female counterpart. It is thus quite unnatural when a reasonable man does the contrary.

I.8.10 "And just as there has never been any work so worthy, so skilled is the craftsman who made it, that there were not people who wanted, and want, to counterfeit it, there are many who wish to get involved in writing poetry. They believe they cannot go wrong, since others have written in books what they take the situation to be, or rather, *mis*-take the situation—as I well know! Some of them undertake to express themselves by writing poems of water without salt, such as these, or ballads without feeling, discussing the behavior of women or of princes or of other people, while they themselves do not know how to recognize or to correct their own servile conduct and inclinations. But simple people, as ignorant as they are, declare that such writing is the best in the world."

9. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW SHE DUG IN THE GROUND,
BY WHICH SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THE QUESTIONS

WHICH SHE PUT TO REASON, AND HOW REASON REPLIED TO HER.

“Now I have prepared for you and commanded from you a great work. Consider how you can continue to excavate the ground following my marks.” And so, in order to obey her command, I struck with all my force in the following way: I.9.1

“My lady, how does it happen that Ovid, who is thought to be one of the best poets—although many believe, and I would agree with them, thanks to your correcting me, that Vergil is much more praiseworthy—that Ovid attacks women so much and so frequently, as in the book he calls *Ars amatoria*, as well as in the *Remedia amoris* and other of his volumes?” I.9.2

She replied, “Ovid was a man skilled in the learned craft of poetry, and he possessed great wit and understanding in his work. However, he dissipated his body in every vanity and pleasure of the flesh, not just in one romance, but he abandoned himself to all the women he could, nor did he show restraint or loyalty, and so he stayed with no single woman. In his youth he led this kind of life as much as he could, for which in the end he received the fitting reward—dishonor and loss of possessions and limbs—for so much did he advise others through his own acts and words to lead a life like the one he led that he was finally exiled for his excessive promiscuity. Similarly, when afterward, thanks to the influence of several young, powerful Romans who were his supporters, he was called back from exile and failed to refrain from the misdeeds for which his guilt had already punished him, he was castrated and disfigured because of his faults. This is precisely the point I was telling you about before, for when he saw that he could no longer lead the life in which he was used to taking his pleasure, he began to attack women with his subtle reasonings, and through this effort he tried to make women unattractive to others.”

“My lady, you are right, and I know a book by another Italian author, from the Tuscan marches, I think, called Cecco d’Ascoli, who wrote in one chapter such astounding abominations that a reasonable person ought not to repeat them.”

She replied, “If Cecco d’Ascoli spoke badly about all women, my daughter, do not be amazed, for he detested all women and held them in hatred and disfavor; and similarly, on account of his horrible wickedness, he wanted all men to hate and detest women. He received the just reward for it: in his shame he was burned to death at the stake.”

“I know another small book in Latin, my lady, called the *Secreta mulierum*, *The Secrets of Women*, which discusses the constitution of their natural bodies and especially their great defects.”

She replied, “You can see for yourself without further proof, this book was written carelessly and colored by hypocrisy, for if you have looked at it, you know that it is obviously a treatise composed of lies. Although some say that it was written by Aristotle, it is not believable that such a philosopher could be charged with such contrived lies. For since women can clearly know with proof that certain things which he treats are not at all true, but pure fabrications, they can also conclude that the other details which he handles are outright lies. But don’t you remember that he says in the beginning that some pope—I don’t know which one—excommunicated every man who read the work to a woman or gave it to a woman to read?”

“My lady, I remember it well.”

“Do you know the malicious reason why this lie was presented as credible to bestial and ignorant men at the beginning of the book?”

“No, my lady, not unless you tell me.”

“It was done so that women would not know about the book and its contents, because the man who wrote it knew that if women read it or heard it read aloud, they

would know it was lies, would contradict it, and make fun of it. With this pretense the author wanted to trick and deceive the men who read it.”

“My lady, I recall that among other things, after he has discussed the impotence and weakness which cause the formation of a feminine body in the womb of the mother, he says that Nature is completely ashamed when she sees that she has formed such a body, as though it were something imperfect.”

“But, sweet friend, don’t you see the overweening madness, the irrational blindness which prompt such observations? Is Nature, the chambermaid of God, a greater mistress than her master, almighty God from whom comes such authority, who, when He willed, took the form of man and women from His thought when it came to His holy will to form Adam from the mud of the ground in the field of Damascus and, once created, brought him into the Terrestrial Paradise which was and is the most worthy place in this world here below? There Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at his feet like a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flesh. If the Supreme Craftsman was not ashamed to create and form the feminine body, would Nature then have been ashamed? It is the height of folly to say this! Indeed, how was she formed? I don’t know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint? But some men are foolish enough to think, when they hear that God made man in His image, that this refers to the material body. This was not the case, for God had not yet taken a human body. The soul is meant, the intellectual spirit which lasts eternally just like the Deity. God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble in the feminine and in the masculine bodies. Now, to turn to the question of the creation of the body, woman was made by the Supreme

Craftsman. In what place was she created? In the Terrestrial Paradise. From what substance? Was it vile matter? No, it was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was from the body of man from which God made woman.”

I.9.3 “My lady, according to what I understand from you, woman is a most noble creature. But even so, Cicero says that a man should never serve any woman and that he who does so debases himself, for no man should ever serve anyone lower than him.”

She replied, “The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues. And surely he is happy who serves the Virgin, who is above all the angels.”

“My lady, one of the Catos—who was such a great orator—said, nevertheless, that if this world were without women, we would converse with the gods.”

She replied, “You can now see the foolishness of the man who is considered wise, because, thanks to a woman, man reigns with God. And if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve when humanity was conjoined to the Godhead, which would never have taken place if Eve’s misdeed had not occurred. Thus man and woman should be glad for this sin, through which such an honor has come about. For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this same creature. And as for conversing with the gods, as this Cato has said, if there had been no woman, he spoke truer than he knew, for he was a pagan, and among those of this belief, gods were thought to reside in Hell as well as in Heaven, that is, the devils whom they called the gods of Hell—so that it is no lie that these gods would have conversed with men, if Mary had not lived.”

10. MORE ARGUMENTS AND ANSWERS ON THIS SAME SUBJECT.

“This same Cato Uticensis also said that women who are pleasing to men naturally resemble the rose, which is pleasant to look at but whose thorn always lurks beneath to prick.”

I.10.1

She answered, “Again this Cato spoke truer than he knew, for every good and honest woman of virtuous life ought to be, and is, one of the most pleasant things to look at which exist. And, nevertheless, there remains the thorn of fear of sinning and of contrition in the heart of such a woman, who cannot separate herself from what makes her remain tranquil, composed, and respectful, and it is this which saves her.”

“My lady, is it true that some authors have testified that women are naturally lecherous and gluttonous?”

“My daughter, you have many times heard the proverb repeated which says ‘What Nature gives, no one can take away.’ Thus it would be surprising if women were so much inclined that way and yet were *rarely* or *never* found in those places ordained to this purpose. They are, however, scarce there, and if anyone would respond that shame keeps women away, I say that this is not at all true, that nothing keeps them away except their nature, which is not inclined this way at all. But let us suppose that they were so inclined and that shame made them resist their natural inclination, then this virtue and constancy should redound to their credit. Furthermore, recall that not long ago, during a holiday, as you were standing in the doorway of your residence conversing with the honorable young lady who is your neighbor, you spied a man coming out of a tavern who was telling another man, ‘I spent so much in the tavern, my wife will not drink any wine today,’ and then you asked why she would not drink any wine that day, and he answered, ‘Because, my lady, every time I come back from the tavern, my wife always asks me how much I spent, and if it is more

than twelve pennies, she makes up for what I have spent with her own sobriety and says that if we both wanted to spend so much, we could not afford it.’”

“My lady,” I said then, “I remember this well.”

And she to me, “Thus you have plenty of examples that women are by nature sober, and that women who are not go against their own nature. There is no uglier vice in a woman than gluttony, for this vice, wherever it might be, attracts many others. And you can see them quite well in big crowds and groups near churches during sermons and at confession, reciting the Our Father and the Offices.”

“This is obvious, my lady,” I said, “but these men say that women go there all dressed up to show off their beauty and to attract men to their love.”

She responded, “This would be believable if you saw only young and pretty women there. But if you watch carefully, for every young woman whom you see, you will see twenty or thirty old women dressed simply and honestly as they pray in these holy places. And if women possess such piety, they also possess charity, for who is it who visits and comforts the sick, helps the poor, takes care of the hospitals, and buries the dead? It seems to me that these are all women’s works and that these same works are the supreme footprints which God commands us to follow.”

I.10.2 “My lady, you are only too right, but another author has said that women by nature have a servile heart and that they are like infants, and because of this, infants love to speak to them and they love to speak to infants.”

She answered, “My daughter, if you observe closely an infant’s condition, you know that infants naturally love tenderness and gentleness. And what is more tender and gentle than a well ordered woman? Indeed! They are evil, diabolical people who wish to twist the good as well as the virtue of kindness naturally found in women into evil and reproach. For if women love infants, such affection does not spring from the vice of ignorance but comes

from the sweetness of their character. And if women resemble infants in kindness, then they are superbly well advised to be so, for as the Gospel recalls, did not our Lord tell His Apostles, when they were arguing among themselves who was the greatest among them and He called a child and placed His hand on the child's head, 'I tell you that whoever humbles himself like this child shall be the most rewarded, for whoever humbles himself is raised up and whoever raises himself up is humbled.'"

"My lady, men have burdened me with a heavy charge taken from a Latin proverb, which runs, 'God made women to speak, weep, and sew,' which they use to attack women."

I.10.3

"Indeed, sweet friend," she replied, "this proverb is so true that it cannot be held against whoever believes or says it. Early on, God placed these qualities in those women who have saved themselves by speaking, weeping, and sewing. And in answer to those who attack women for their habit of weeping, I tell you that if our Lord Jesus Christ—from whom no thought is hidden and who sees and knows every heart—had believed that women's tears come only from weakness and simplemindedness, the dignity of His most great Highness would never have been so inclined through compassion to shed tears Himself from the eyes of His worthy and glorious body when He saw Mary Magdalene and her sister Martha weep for their dead brother Lazarus the leper and then to resurrect him. What special favors has God bestowed on women because of their tears! He did not despise the tears of Mary Magdalene, but accepted them and forgave her sins, and through the merits of those tears she is in glory in Heaven.

"Similarly, He did not reject the tears of the widow who wept as she followed the corpse of her only son as it was being carried away for burial. And our Lord, the fountain of all pity, moved to compassion by her tears as He saw her weep, asked her, 'Woman, why do you weep?' and then brought her child back to life. God has

I.10.4

performed other miracles, which are found in the Holy Scriptures and would take too long to relate, on behalf of many women because of their tears, and continues to do so, for I believe that many women, as well as others for whom they pray, are saved by the tears of their devotion. Was not Saint Augustine, the glorious Doctor of the Church, converted to the Faith by his mother's tears? For the good woman wept continuously, praying to God that it would please Him to illuminate the heart of her pagan, unbelieving son with the light of faith. Saint Ambrose, to whom the holy lady often went to ask that he pray to God on behalf of her son, told her for this reason, 'Woman, I believe it is impossible that so many tears could be shed in vain.' O blessed Ambrose who did not think that women's tears were frivolous! And this might answer those men who attack women so much, because thanks to a woman's tears does this holy luminary, Saint Augustine, stand at the fore of the Holy Church which he completely brightens and illuminates. Therefore, let men stop talking about this question.

I.10.5 "Similarly, God endowed women with the faculty of speech—may He be praised for it—for had He not done so, they would be speechless. But in refutation of what this proverb says, (which someone, I don't know whom, invented deliberately to attack them), if women's language had been so blameworthy and of such small authority, as some men argue, our Lord Jesus Christ would never have deigned to wish that so worthy a mystery as His most gracious resurrection be first announced by a woman, just as He commanded the blessed Magdalene, to whom He first appeared on Easter, to report and announce it to His apostles and to Peter. Blessed God, may you be praised, who, among the other infinite boons and favors which You have bestowed upon the feminine sex, desired that woman carry such lofty and worthy news."

"All those who are jealous of me would do best to be silent if they had any real insight, my lady," I said, "but I smile at the folly which some men have expressed and

I even remember that I heard some foolish preachers teach that God first appeared to a woman because He knew well that she did not know how to keep quiet so that this way the news of His resurrection would be spread more rapidly.”

She answered, “My daughter, you have spoken well when you call them fools who said this. It is not enough for them to attack women. They impute even to Jesus Christ such blasphemy, as if to say that He wished to reveal this great perfection and dignity through a vice. I do not know how a man could dare to say this, even in jest, as God should not be brought in on such joking matters. But as for the first question, regarding talking—in fact it was fortunate for the woman from Canaan who was so great a talker and who would not stop yelling and howling after Jesus Christ as she followed Him through the streets of Jerusalem, crying, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, for my daughter is sick.’ And what did the good Lord do? He in whom all mercy abounded and abounds and from whom a single word from the heart sufficed for Him to show mercy! He seemed to take pleasure in the many words pouring from the mouth of this woman ever perseverant in her prayer. But why did He act like this? In order to test her constancy, for when He compared her to the dogs—which seemed a little harsh because she followed a foreign cult and not that of God—she was not ashamed to speak both well and wisely when she replied, ‘Sire, that is most true, but the little dogs live from the crumbs from their master’s table.’ ‘O most wise woman, who taught you to speak this way? You have won your cause through your prudent language which stems from your good will.’ And one could clearly see this, for our Lord, turning to His Apostles, testified from His mouth that He had never found such faith in all of Israel and granted her request. Who could sufficiently sum up this honor paid to the feminine sex which the jealous despise, considering that in the heart of this little bit of a pagan woman God found more faith than in all the bishops, princes, priests, and

all the people of the Jews, who called themselves the worthy people of God? In this manner, at equal length and with great eloquence, the Samaritan woman spoke well on her own behalf when she went to the well to draw water and met Jesus Christ sitting there completely exhausted. O blessed Godhead conjoined to this worthy body! How could You allow Your holy mouth to speak at such length for the sake of this little bit of a woman and a sinner who did not even live under Your Law? You truly demonstrated that You did not in the least disdain the pious sex of women. God, how often would our contemporary pontiffs deign to discuss anything with some simple little woman, let alone her own salvation?"

I.10.6 "Nor did the woman who sat through Christ's sermon speak less wisely. For she was so fired up by His holy words that—as they say, women can never keep quiet—she then fortunately spoke the words which are solemnly recorded in the Gospel, which she loudly pronounced after having stood up through great force of will, 'Blessed is the womb which bore You and the breasts which You sucked.'

I.10.7 "Thus you can understand, fair sweet friend, God has demonstrated that He has truly placed language in women's mouths so that He might be thereby served. They should not be blamed for that from which issues so much good and so little evil, for one rarely observes that great harm comes from their language.

I.10.8 "As for sewing, truly has God desired that this be natural for women, for it is an occupation necessary for divine service and for the benefit of every reasonable creature. Without this work, the world's estates would be maintained in great chaos. Therefore it is a great wickedness to reproach women for what should redound to their great credit, honor, and praise."

11. CHRISTINE ASKS REASON WHY WOMEN ARE NOT IN THE SEATS OF LEGAL COUNSEL; AND REASON'S RESPONSE.

I.11.1 "Most high and honored lady, your fair words amply

satisfy my thinking. But tell me still, if you please, why women do not plead law cases in the courts of justice, are unfamiliar with legal disputes, and do not hand down judgments? For these men say that it is because of some woman (whom I don't know) who governed unwisely from the seat of justice."

"My daughter, everything told about this woman is frivolous and contrived out of deception. But whoever would ask the causes and reasons of all things would have to answer for too much in this question, nor would Aristotle be at all sufficient, in spite of all the many reasons which he gives in his *Problemata* and *Categoriae*. Now, as to this particular question, dear friend, one could just as well ask why God did not ordain that men fulfill the offices of women, and women the offices of men. So I must answer this question by saying that just as a wise and well ordered lord organizes his domain so that one servant accomplishes one task and another servant another task, and that what the one does the other does not do, God has similarly ordained man and woman to serve Him in different offices and also to aid and comfort one another, each in their ordained task, and to each sex has given a fitting and appropriate nature and inclination to fulfill their offices. Inasmuch as the human species often errs in what it is supposed to do, God gives men strong and hardy bodies for coming and going as well as for speaking boldly. And for this reason, men with this nature learn the laws—and must do so—in order to keep the world under the rule of justice and, in case anyone does not wish to obey the statutes which have been ordained and established by reason of law, are required to make them obey with physical constraint and force of arms, a task which women could never accomplish. Nevertheless, though God has given women great understanding—and there are many such women—because of the integrity to which women are inclined, it would not be at all appropriate for them to go and appear so brazenly in the court like men, for there are enough men who do so. What would be accomplished by sending

three men to lift a burden which two can carry easily? But if anyone maintained that women do not possess enough understanding to learn the laws, the opposite is obvious from the proof afforded by experience, which is manifest and has been manifested in many women—just as I will soon tell—who have been very great philosophers and have mastered fields far more complicated, subtle, and lofty than written laws and man-made institutions. Moreover, in case anyone says that women do not have a natural sense for politics and government, I will give you examples of several great women rulers who have lived in past times. And so that you will better know my truth, I will remind you of some women of your own time who remained widows and whose skill governing—both past and present—in all their affairs following the deaths of their husbands provides obvious demonstration that a woman with a mind is fit for all tasks.”

12. HERE SHE TELLS OF NICAULA, EMPRESS OF ETHIOPIA.

I.12.1 “Please tell me where there was ever a king endowed with greater skill in politics, government, and sovereign justice, and even with such lofty and magnificent style as one can read about the most noble Empress Nicaula. For though there had been many kings of great fame called pharaohs in the vast, wide, and varied lands which she governed, and from whom she was descended, during her rule this lady was the first to begin to live according to laws and coordinated policies, and she destroyed and abolished the crude customs found in the territories over which she was lord and reformed the rude manners of the savage Ethiopians. This lady accomplished even more praiseworthy deeds than reforming the rough manners of others, according to the authors who speak of her. She remained the heiress of these pharaohs, and not just of a small land but of the kingdom of Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the island of Meroë (which is very long and wide and filled with all kinds of goods and is near to the Nile), which she governed with wonderful prudence.

What more should I tell you about this lady? She was so wise and so capable a ruler that even the Holy Scriptures speak of her great virtue. She herself instituted laws of far-reaching justice for governing her people. She enjoyed great nobility and vast wealth—almost as much as all the men who have ever lived. She was profoundly learned in the Scriptures and all fields of knowledge, and she had so lofty a heart that she did not deign to marry, nor did she desire that any man be at her side.”

13. HERE REASON SPEAKS OF A QUEEN OF FRANCE, NAMED FREDEGUND, AND ALSO OF SEVERAL QUEENS AND PRINCESSES OF FRANCE.

“I could tell you a great deal about ladies who governed wisely in ancient times, just as what I will presently tell you will deal with this question. In France there was once a queen, Fredegund, who was the wife of King Chilperic. Although she was cruel, contrary to the natural disposition of women, nevertheless, following her husband’s death, with great skill this lady governed the kingdom of France which found itself at this time in very great unrest and danger, and she was left with nothing else besides Chilperic’s heir, a small son named Clotaire. There was great division among the barons regarding the government, and already a great civil war had broken out in the kingdom. Having assembled the barons in council, she addressed them, all the while holding her child in her arms: ‘My lords, here is your king. Do not forget the loyalty which has always been present among the French, and do not scorn him because he is a child, for with God’s help he will grow up, and when he comes of age he will recognize his good friends and reward them according to their deserts, unless you desire to disinherit him wrongfully and sinfully. As for me, I assure you that I will reward those who act well and loyally with such generosity that no other reward could be better.’ Thus did this queen satisfy the barons, and through her wise government, she delivered her son from the hands of his enemies. She herself nourished him until

I.13.1

he was grown, and he was invested by her with the crown and honor of the kingdom, which never would have happened if she had not been so prudent.

I.13.2 “Similarly, the same can be said of the most wise and in every instance virtuous and noble Queen Blanche, mother of Saint Louis, who governed the kingdom of France while her son was a minor so nobly and so prudently that it was never better ruled by any man. Even when he was grown, she was still the head of his council because of her experience of wise government, nor was anything done without her, and she even followed her son to war.

I.13.3 “I could tell you countless other examples which I will omit for brevity’s sake. But since we have started speaking about the ladies of France, we do not need to go any further to seek examples from history: you yourself saw in childhood Queen Jeanne, widow of King Charles, the fourth of that name. As you recall her, remember this lady’s good deeds to which her fame attests, as much in the noble arrangement of her court as in both customs and the maintenance of sovereign justice. Never has any prince been as renowned as this lady for having so upheld justice and preserved her land’s prerogatives.

I.13.4 “Her noble daughter who married the duke of Orléans, son of King Philip, resembled her a great deal. During her widowhood which lasted a long time, she maintained justice in her country with such righteousness that more could not have been done.

I.13.5 “Likewise Blanche, queen of France, late wife of King John, ruled and governed her land with great order of law and justice.

I.13.6 “What can one say of the valiant and wise duchess of Anjou, late daughter of Saint Charles of Blois, duke of Brittany, and late wife of the second oldest brother of the wise King Charles of France, who was then king of Sicily? How well did this lady hold her lands and countries under the firm rod of justice—as much in Provence as

elsewhere—which she governed and kept in hand on behalf of her most noble children as long as they were minors! How greatly is this lady to be praised in all virtues! During her youth she was of such supreme beauty that she surpassed all other ladies, and of most perfect chastity and wisdom, and in her maturity, of most great government and sovereign prudence and force and constancy of heart, as became apparent when, for a short time after her lord's death in Italy, his entire fief of Provence rebelled against her and her noble children. But this noble lady worked and strove so hard that either through force or negotiation she restored the entire land to obedience and allegiance. So well did she maintain the order of law in that country that a single outcry or complaint of the slightest injustice which she might have committed was never heard.

“I could tell you much about other ladies of France who, as widows, governed themselves and their jurisdictions with fairness and justice. The countess of La Marche, lady and countess of Vendôme and of Castres, and a most great landowner, who is still alive—what can one say of her government? Does she not wish to know how and in what way her own justice is upheld? And she herself, as a good and wise ruler, takes an avid interest in this whole question. What should I tell you? I assure you that the same can be said of a great many women, whether from the upper, middle, or lower class, who, as anyone who wishes to pay attention can clearly see, have maintained and maintain their dominions in as good condition as did their husbands during their lifetime and who are as well-loved by their subjects. There are better examples, too, for there can be no doubt—no offense to men, certainly—that although there are ignorant women, there are many women who have better minds and a more active sense of prudence and judgment than most men—isn't it so?—and if their husbands would believe them or would have equal sense, it would be a great boon and profit for them.

I.13.7

I.13.8 “All the same, it makes no difference if women are not usually involved in handing down decisions or pleading cases: for they have that fewer burdens on their souls and bodies. Although it is necessary to punish criminals and to secure justice for everyone, there are enough men in these offices who must wish that they never knew any more than their mothers, for if they follow the right path, when a crime is committed, if God knows of it, the punishment is not small.”

14. MORE EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHRISTINE AND REASON.

I.14.1 “Certainly you speak well, my lady, and your words are most harmonious in my heart. But though such is the case as far as women’s minds are concerned, it is a proven fact that women have weak bodies, tender and feeble in deeds of strength, and are cowards by nature. These things, in men’s judgment, substantially reduce the degree and authority of the feminine sex, for men contend that the more imperfect a body, the lesser is its virtue and, consequently, the less praiseworthy.”

She answered, “My dear daughter, such a deduction is totally invalid and unsupported, for invariably one often sees that when Nature does not give to one body which she has formed as much perfection as she has given to another and thereby makes some things imperfect, whether in shape or beauty or with some impotence or weakness of limbs, she makes up the difference with an even greater boon than she has taken away. For example, just as is said, the great philosopher Aristotle had a very ugly body, with one eye lower than the other and with a strange face, but although he had some physical deformity, truly Nature made this up to him spectacularly by giving him a retentive mind and great sense, just as he appears in his authentic writings. This recompense of such a fine mind was thus worth more to him than if he had had the very body of Absalom or a similar body.

I.14.2 “The same might be said of the great emperor Alex-

ander, who was quite ugly, little, and had a sickly build. Nevertheless, it seems that he possessed great virtue in his heart. It is the same situation for many others. Fair friend, I assure you that a large and strong body never makes a strong and virtuous heart but comes from a natural and virtuous vigor which is a boon from God, which He allows Nature to imprint in one reasonable creature more than in another, and thus a malady is transformed into understanding or courage and not at all into the strength of the body or its limbs. We have observed this often, having seen many large men with strong bodies who are cowardly and recreant and others with small and weak bodies who are bold and vigorous, and the same holds true for other virtues. But as for boldness and physical strength, God and Nature have done a great deal for women by giving them such weakness, because, at least, thanks to this agreeable defect, they are excused from committing the horrible cruelties, the murders, and the terrible and serious crimes which have been perpetrated through force and still continuously take place in the world. Thus women will never receive the punishment which such cases demand, and it would be better, or would have been better, for the souls of several of the strongest men, if they had spent their pilgrimage in this world in weak feminine bodies. And truly I tell you, and here I come back to my major point, that if Nature did not give great strength of limb to women's bodies, she has made up for it by placing there that most virtuous inclination to love one's God and to fear sinning against His commandments. Women who act otherwise go against their own nature.

“But recall, nevertheless, dear friend, how it seems that God has deliberately wished to show men that even if women do not possess the great strength and physical daring which men usually have, they should not say nor should they believe that this is because strength and physical daring are excluded from the feminine sex: this is obvious, because in many women God has made mani- I.14.3

fest enormous courage, strength, and boldness to undertake and execute all kinds of hard tasks, just like those great men—solemn and valorous conquerors—have accomplished, which different writings frequently mention, and presently I will give you several examples.

I.14.4 “Fair daughter and dear friend, now I have prepared for you a large and wide ditch, completely cleared of earth, which I have carried out in large basketfuls on my shoulders. Now it is time that you lay down the heavy and sturdy stones for the foundation of the walls of the City of Ladies. Take the trowel of your pen and ready yourself to lay down bricks and to labor diligently, for you can see here a great and large stone which I want to place as the first in the first row of stones in the foundation of your City. I want you to know that Nature herself has foretold in the signs of the zodiac that it be placed and situated in this work. So I shall draw you back a little and I will throw it down for you.”

15. HERE SHE SPEAKS OF THE QUEEN SEMIRAMIS.

I.15.1 “Semiramis was a woman of very great strength—in fact, of strong and powerful courage in enterprises and undertakings in deeds of arms—and was so outstanding that the people of that time who were pagans used to say, because of her enormous strength on land and on sea, that she was a sister of the great god Jupiter and daughter of the ancient god Saturn who, they believed, were the gods of the earth and the sea. This lady was the wife of King Ninus, who named the city of Nineveh after his own name and who was such a forceful conqueror that, with the help of his wife Semiramis (who, like him, would campaign in arms), he subjugated mighty Babylon and all the strong land of Assyria and many other countries. When the lady was still quite young, Ninus her husband was killed by an arrow, during the assault of a city. Once the funeral rites had been solemnly celebrated, as befitted Ninus, the lady did not give up the exercise of arms, but, with greater courage than before, vigorously undertook

to govern and rule the kingdoms and lands over which her husband and she had held power on their own to begin with, as well as those which they had conquered with the sword and which she memorably and valorously controlled. She undertook and accomplished so many notable works that no man could surpass her in vigor and strength. This lady, with her great courage, feared no pain and was frightened by no danger, and so bravely exposed herself to every peril that she vanquished all her enemies who had thought to expel her during her widowhood from the countries she had conquered. Because of this, she was so feared and revered in arms that, finally, she not only controlled the lands already in her power, but also marched with a very large army to Ethiopia, with which she subjugated Ethiopia and annexed it to her empire, and from there she moved in force against India. She attacked the Indians in force, whom no man had ever approached before with the intention of making war on them, and subdued and vanquished them, and then advanced against other countries so that, in brief, she had soon conquered the entire Orient and placed it under her rule. Along with these great and mighty conquests, this lady, Semiramis, reinforced and rebuilt the strong and cruel city of Babylon, which had been founded by Nimrod and the giants and was located on the plain of Shinar. This lady strengthened the city even more with many defenses and had wide and deep moats dug around it. Once, when Semiramis was in her chamber surrounded by her maidens who were braiding her hair, news came that one of her kingdoms had revolted against her. She stood up immediately and swore by her power that the other lock of her hair which remained to be braided would not be braided until she had avenged this injustice and brought this land back under her dominion. She had her massed troops quickly armed and advanced on the rebels and, thanks to great force and strength, brought them back under her authority. She so frightened these rebels and all her other

subjects that ever after no one dared revolt. A large and richly gilt cast-bronze statue on a high pillar in Babylon which portrayed a princess holding a sword, with one side of her hair braided, the other not, bore witness to this noble and courageous deed for a long time. This queen founded and built several new cities and fortifications and performed many other outstanding deeds and accomplished so much that greater courage and more marvelous and memorable deeds have never been recorded about any man.

I.15.2 “It is quite true that many people reproach her—and if she had lived under our law, rightfully so—because she took as husband a son she had had with Ninus her lord. But here are the two principal reasons which prompted her to do this: first, she wanted no other crowned lady in her empire besides herself, which would have happened if her son had married another lady; and second, it seemed to her that no other man was worthy to have her as wife except her own son. But this lady did nothing to excuse herself for this great mistake because at this time there was still no written law, and people lived according to the law of Nature, where all people were allowed to do whatever came into their hearts without sinning, for there can be no doubt that if she thought this was evil or that she would incur the slightest reproach, she would never have done this, since she had such a great and noble heart and so deeply loved honor. And now the first stone is set in the foundation of our City. Now we must lay many more stones to advance our edifice.”

16. CONCERNING THE AMAZONS.

I.16.1 “A country called Scythia lies along the borders of Europe near the great ocean which surrounds the entire world. A long time ago it happened that this land lost all the important men living there through war. When the women of the place saw that they had all lost their husbands and brothers and male relatives, and only old

men and children were left them, they courageously assembled and took counsel among themselves and decided finally that thenceforth they would maintain their dominion by themselves without being subject to men, and they promulgated an edict whereby no man was allowed to enter into their jurisdiction. In order to maintain a succession, they would go into neighboring lands during certain times of the year and then return; if they then gave birth to males, they would send them to their fathers, but if their offspring were females, they would raise them. To carry out this ordinance, they selected two of the most noble ladies from among them and crowned them queens, the first of whom was named Lampheto and the second Marpasia. Once this was accomplished, they banished all the remaining males from their land, and afterward they armed themselves and in large battalions constituted solely of ladies and maidens, they advanced on their enemies and laid waste to their lands with fire and the sword, and no one could resist them. In short, they exacted a most fine revenge for their husbands' deaths. And in this way the women of Scythia began to carry arms and were then called Amazons, which actually means the 'breastless ones,' because they had a custom whereby the nobles among them, when they were little girls, burned off their left breast through some technique so that it would not hinder them from carrying a shield, and they removed the right breast of commoners to make it easier for them to shoot a bow. They so delighted in the vocation of arms that through force they greatly increased their country and their dominion, and their high fame spread everywhere. Just as I mentioned before, these two queens, Lampheto and Marpasia, extended their rule into various countries, each leading a very great army, and they finally conquered a great portion of Europe and of Asia, subjugating and adding many kingdoms to their dominion, founding many cities and towns, and, in Asia itself, they founded the city of Ephesus, which has long been very famous. Of

these queens, Marpasia died first, in battle, and in her place the Amazons crowned one of her fair and noble virgin daughters, who was called Synoppe. She had such a great and lofty heart that not for a day in her life did she deign to couple with a man, but remained a virgin her entire lifetime. Her only love and care was the exercise of arms. Here she so ardently cultivated all her pleasure that she could never be sated in the attacking and conquering of different lands. She soundly revenged her mother by having all the inhabitants of the country where her mother was killed put to the sword, and she devastated the entire land, and along with this country, she conquered many others.”

17. CONCERNING THAMIRIS, THE QUEEN OF AMAZONIA.

I.17.1 “Just as you heard, for a long time the Amazons strongly maintained their dominion, over which ruled queens in succession, one after another, all valiant ladies, and to name all of them one by one could bore readers, so it will suffice to name a few important ones.

I.17.2 “The brave, valiant, and wise Thamiris was once queen of this land. Thanks to her sense, prudence, and strength, the Amazons captured and conquered Cyrus, the strong and powerful king of Persia who had wrought so many marvels and had conquered mighty Babylon and much of the world. After so many other conquests, Cyrus wanted to proceed against the kingdom of Amazonia, in the hope of placing it too under his lordship, like the other lands he had conquered. Thus, when this wise queen learned from her spies that Cyrus was moving against her with a force great enough to conquer the entire world, she realized that it would be impossible to defeat such an army through force of arms, so it occurred to her to employ a ruse. Then, like a valiant sovereign, when she found out that Cyrus had already, much earlier, entered her land (which she had deliberately allowed to take place without his having met any resistance), she had all her maidens armed and, in an extremely clever move, posi-