

CHRISTIAN STRENGTH

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) ranks among the great names in Italian literature. One of the world's great books is his *Decameron*, a collection of prose tales which greatly enriched the literature and language. In *The Conversion in Rome*, he tells about a rich merchant, Jeannot de Seigny, who lived in Paris in close friendship with a Jew, a respectable merchant whose name was Abraham. Impressed by the integrity and honesty of this Jew and concerned with the salvation of Abraham's soul, Jeannot tried to convert him to the Christian truth. Overcome by Jeannot's persistence, Abraham decided to go to Rome to see the one who "represents God on Earth" and to learn about the way of life of the cardinals.

From all that Abraham saw, he soon learned about the corruption reigning in Rome — the addiction to sensual pleasure. There was

not piety, no devotion, nothing praiseworthy. Jeannot had no hope that his friend would become a Christian. To his great surprise, Abraham upon his return home declared that, although he found in Rome only evil, nothing in the world would keep him from adopting the Christian religion. He gave this reason for his conversion:

"As it appears to me, your Lord Bishop and consequently all others, too, are trying hard to disgrace the Christian religion and blot it out from this world; whereas they should be its foundation and pillars. But since they are not succeeding in their aspiration, for your religion gains more ground daily, and shines ever so bright and pure, my conclusion, which I believe to be right, is that the Holy Ghost Himself must be the basis and support of this religion and that it surpasses all others in truth and holiness." — *Andrew R. Cecil.*