Fam. XXIV, 3

To Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Francesco sends his greetings to his Cicero. After a lengthy and extensive search for your letters, I found them where I least expected, and I then read them with great eagerness. I listened to you speak on many subjects, complain about many things, waver in your opinions, O Marcus Tullius, and I who had known the kind of preceptor that you were for others now recognize the kind of guide that you were for yourself. Now it is your turn, wherever you may be, to hearken not to advice but to a lament inspired by true love from one of your descendants who dearly cherishes your name, a lament addressed to you not without tears. O wretched and distressed spirit, or to use your own words, O rash and ill-fated elder, why did you choose to become involved in so many quarrels and utterly useless feuds? Why did you forsake that peaceful ease so befitting a man of your years, your profession, and your fate? What false luster of glory led you, an old man, into wars with the young, and into a series of misfortunes that then brought you to a death unworthy of a philosopher? Alas, forgetful of your brother's advice and of your many wholesome precepts, like a wayfarer at night carrying a lantern before him, you revealed to your followers the path where you yourself stumbled most wretchedly. I make no mention of Dionysius, of your brother or of your nephew, and, if you like, even of Dolabella, all men whom you praise at one moment to the high heavens and at the next rail at with sudden wrath. Perhaps these may be excused. I bypass even Julius Caesar, whose oft-tested clemency proved a haven of refuge for those very men who had assailed him; I likewise refrain from mentioning Pompey the Great, with whom you seemed able to accomplish whatever you liked by right of friendship. But what madness provoked you against Mark Anthony? Love for the Republic, I suppose you would say, but you yourself confessed that it had already collapsed. But if it were pure loyalty, if it were love of liberty that impelled you, why such intimacy with Augustus? What would your answer be to your Brutus who says, "If you are so fond of Octavius, you seem not to have fled a tyrant, but rather to have sought a kindlier one." There still remained your last, lamentable error, O unhappy Cicero: that you should speak ill of the very man whom you had previously praised, not because he was doing you any harm, but merely because he failed to check your enemies. I grieve at your destiny, my dear friend, I am filled with shame and distress at your shortcomings; and so even as did Brutus, "I place no trust in those arts in which you were so proficient."

For in truth, what good is there in teaching others, what benefit is there in speaking constantly with the most magnificent words about the virtues, if at the same time you do not give heed to your own words? Oh, how much better it would have been, especially for a philosopher, to have grown old peacefully in the country, meditating, as you write somewhere, on that everlasting life and not on this transitory existence; how much better for you never to have held such offices, never to have yearned for triumphs, never to have had any Catilines to inflate your ego. But these words indeed are all in vain. Farewell forever, my Cicero.

From the land of the living, on the right bank of the Adige, in the city of Verona in transpadane Italy, on 16 June in the year 13 45 from the birth of that Lord whom you never knew.

Fam. XXIV, 4

To the same correspondent.

Francesco sends his greetings to his Cicero. I hope that my previous letter did not offend you; for as you are wont to say, there is truth in what your contemporary says in the *Andria*: "Indulgence begets friends, truth only hatred." Accept then what may somewhat soothe your wounded feelings so that the truth may not always seem hateful; if we are irritated by true criticism, we rejoice in true praise. Allow me to say, O Cicero, that you lived as a man, you spoke as an orator, you wrote as a philosopher; and it was your life that I censured, not your intellect and your tongue since I admire the former and am astounded by the latter. Moreover, nothing was lacking but constancy in your personal life, a desire for the tranquillity necessary for the practice of philosophy, and withdrawal from civil strife, once liberty was spent and the Republic buried and mourned. Note how different is my treatment of you than yours of Epicurus throughout your works, but especially in the *De finibus,* where you approve of his life and ridicule his intellect. I do not ridicule you at all; I pity only your life, as I said, and applaud your talent and your eloquence. O great father of Roman eloquence, not I alone but all who bedeck themselves with the flowers of Latin speech are grateful to you; for it is with the waters from your wellsprings that we irrigate our fields, frankly admitting that we are sustained by your leadership, aided by your judgments, and enlightened by your radiance. In a word, under your auspices, so to speak, we have achieved whatever writing skills and principles we possess. In the realm of poetry we followed another master since necessarily we had to follow one supreme guide in the unencumbered ways of prose and another in the more restricted paths of poetry; we were moved to admire one who spoke and one who sang since, and I beg the indulgence of you both, neither of you could serve both purposes; in your waters he was unequal to you, and you to him in his measured flow. Possibly I would not have ventured to say this first, however much I felt it, but before me the great Anneus Seneca from Cordova said it, or borrowed it from someone else. He laments that the obstacle to his knowing you was not your ages but the fury of civil strife; he could have met you but never did, yet he was always an admirer of your works and those of that other writer. According to him, then, each of you is confined to his own realm of eloquence and is bidden to yield to his colleague in all else. But I am keeping you too long in suspense: you would like to know who the other master is. You know him; you must remember his name: it is Publius Virgilius

Maro, a citizen of Mantua, about whom you prophesied great things. For we read that, struck by one of his youthful works, you sought the author's name; you, already advanced in years, saw him while he was still young, and expressed your delight with him, rendering a judgment from the inexhaustible fount of eloquence, which, though mingled with self-praise, was truly honorable and splendid for him: for you called him "the second hope of great Rome." At your words, he was so pleased and committed them so deeply to memory that twenty years later, after your earthly journey had long since ended, he inserted your very words into his divine poem. Had it been given to you to see the work, you would have rejoiced at discerning from the first blossom the promise of the real fruit to come; what is more, you would have congratulated the Latin Muses either for having left a doubtful superiority to the insolent Greek Muses or for having won a decisive victory. There are defenders of both these opinions; and if I have come to know your mind from your works, which I do seem to know as though I had lived with you, your choice will be the latter, and as you gave primacy in oratory to Latium, so would you give it the poetic palm. Doubtless you would have ordered the *Iliad* to yield to the *Aeneid,* something that Propertius did not fear to affirm from the very beginning of Virgil's labors. For in his work on the fundamentals of poetry, he openly declared his feelings and hope for those works in these verses: "Yield, O Roman authors, yield, O Greeks; something greater than the *Iliad* is born." So much for the other master of Latin literature, the other hope of great Rome; now I return to you.

You have heard my opinions about your life and your talent. Do you also wish to hear about your books, how fortune has treated them and how the public and scholars view them? Some splendid volumes still exist that I can hardly list, much less peruse with care; moreover, your works enjoy an immense reputation and your name is on everyone's lips, but rare are those who study you, whether because the times are unfavorable or men's minds dull and sluggish, or, as I think more likely, because greed has bent their minds to other pursuits. Thus, some of your books, I suspect, are lost for us who still live, and I know not whether they will ever be recovered: how great is my grief, how great a shame for our times, how great a wrong to posterity! It was not degrading enough to neglect our own intellects to the detriment of the following age, but we had to destroy the fruit even of your labor with our cruel and unpardonable negligence. What I am deploring with respect to your works has also happened to many works of other illustrious authors. But since at present I am dealing only with yours, here are the titles of those whose loss is most to be deplored: *De republica, De re familiari,*

De re militari, De laude philosophie, De consolatione, and *De gloria,* although my feeling is one of faint hope for the last ones rather than total despair. And furthermore, even of the surviving books, large portions are missing; it is as though after winning a great battle against oblivion and sloth, we now had to mourn our leaders, and not only those who had been killed but those who had been maimed or lost. This we deplore in many of your works, but particularly in *De oratore,* the *Academica,* and *De legibus,* all of which have reached us in such fragmentary and mutilated condition that it would perhaps have been better for them to have perished.

In conclusion, you will wish to know about the condition of Rome and of the Roman state, as well as the appearance of your homeland, the degree of harmony among its citizenry, to whom power has been entrusted, and by whose hands and with what wisdom the reins of government are held; also whether the Danube, the Ganges, the Ebro, the Nile, the Don are still our boundaries, or whether in the words of your Mantuan poet, someone has arisen "whose empire shall reach to the ocean's limits, whose fame shall end in the stars," or "whose empire shall expand beyond the Garamants and Indians." I surmise that you are most eager to hear these and similar tidings, owing to your patriotism and your love of country, which led to your death. But it is truly better to pass over such subjects in silence, for believe me, O Cicero, were you to learn your country's condition, you would weep bitter tears, wherever in heaven or in Erebus your lodging may be. Farewell forever.

From the land of the living, on the left bank of the Rhone, in transalpine Gaul, in the same year, on 19 December.