

With bolted doors and window-shutters closed,
The inhabitants of Atri slept or dozed ;
When suddenly upon their senses fell
The loud alarm of the accusing bell !
The Syndic started from his deep repose,
Turned on his couch, and listened, and then rose
And donned his robes, and with reluctant pace
Went panting forth into the market-place,
Where the great bell upon its cross-beam swung
Reiterating with persistent tongue,
In half-articulate jargon, the old song :
'Some one hath done a wrong, hath done a wrong !'
But ere he reached the belfry's light arcade
He saw, or thought he saw, beneath its shade,
No shape of human form of woman born,
But a poor steed dejected and forlorn,
Who with uplifted head and eager eye
Was tugging at the vines of briony.
'Domeneddio !' cried the Syndic straight,
'This is the Knight of Atri's steed of state !
He calls for justice, being sore distressed,
And pleads his cause as loudly as the best.'

Meanwhile from street and lane a noisy crowd
Had rolled together like a summer cloud,
And told the story of the wretched beast
In five-and-twenty different ways at least,
With much gesticulation and appeal
To heathen gods, in their excessive zeal,
The Knight was called and questioned ; in reply
Did not confess the fact, did not deny ;
Treated the matter as a pleasant jest,