A TRANSLATION OF CONRAD FERDINAND MEYER'S
"DIE HOCHZEIT DES MÖNCHS"

by

Victor Krebs

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Victor H. 6

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This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Jean R. Beck May 12, 1962
JEAN R. BECK Date
Associate Professor of German
"There was in Florence (among others) of the mightie Families, Buondelmonti, and Uberti; next unto them were the Amidei and Donati. In the house of Donati was a Gentlewoman, a widow and rich, who having one only daughter, a maiden of much beautie, whom within her selfe, shee determined to marrie unto Buondelmonti a young Gentleman, and the chiefe of his house. This her intent, eyther through negligence or delay of time (none beeing made privie thereof) was deferred so long, that Buondelmonti was contracted to the daughter of Amidei: wherewith she greatly discontented, and supposing it were possible with the beautie of her daughter to stay the marriage, before the same should be solemnized: one day, seeing Buondelmonti comming towards her house, came downe, her daughter following; and meeting him at the gate, said, I am very glad that you are now become married, yet was it my meaning you should have had this my daughter, and with those words (she opened the gate) and shewed her unto him. The Gentleman beholding the beautie of the maiden (which indeed was rare) and therewith considering that her parentage and portion was not inferior to hers, whom he had alreadie taken; became exceedingly desirous to have her. Then, not respecting his faith alreadie given, nor the injurie he did in breaking the same, not yet the inconvenience that might ensue thereof, said: Sith it hath pleased you to reserve your daughter for me, I should bee unthankfull (beeing yet all in time) to refuse her. After speaking of these words (without further delay) hee married her. This marriage beeing known, highly offended
all the Familie of Amidei, and Ubarti: who were by his first marriage allied. Then assembling themselves, and consulting together, in the ende concluded, that such an injurie might not bee borne without shame; nor the revenge thereunto due, could bee other than the death of Buondelmonti. And albeit some did fore-cast the inconveniences that might followe such an Action: yet Moscha Lamberti sayde, that who so ever casteth all doubts, should never resolve anie thing; alledging the auncient Proverbe, A thing once done, is past remedie. Then gave they the charge of this murther to bee performed by Moscha, Stiatta, Uberti, Lambertuccio, Amidei, Odorigo Fifanti. These men in the morning of Easter day, at the Hour of Resurrection, assembled themselves in the house of the Amidei; by which streete, Buondelmanti passed the bridge upon a white horse: and supposing (as it seemeth) that it had bene a thing as easie to forget an injurie, as renounce a marriage, was at the footes of the bridge unde an Image of Mars (which there is standing) assaulted and slaine. This murther divided the whole Citie, the one halfe tooke part with Buondelmonti, the other with Uberti. These Families, by reason they were strong in houses, towers, and men, fought manie yeares, before the one could chase the other out of the Cittie: till at length (without anie firme peace made) a truce was taken, which according unto occasion, was sometimes kept, and sometimes broken.

"Florence continued in these troubles, till the time of Federigo the second: who being also King of Napoli, was perswaded hee might encrease his dominion against the Church. And to make his authoritie more assured in Toscana, he favoured the Uberti and their followers, who thereby drave out the Buondelmonti: and so our Cittie (like unto other
Townes of Italy) became divided into Guelfi and Ghibilini.”

This quaint account from Machiavelli’s Florentine History provided C. F. Meyer with the historical setting for his novella. His first reaction to Machiavelli’s story materialized in a ballad, Mars von Florenz, which he wrote as early as 1867. In this ballad he dramatized the love of Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti and his young wife and their assassination at the Ponte Vecchio close by the pilaster which bore the image of Mars.

In 1883 Meyer decided to use the same motif in his novella, Die Hochzeit des Mönchs. He searched for a narrator and finally chose Dante. He and his sister Betsy had been familiar with the great epic poet from childhood on. Besides, had not Dante in his Divine Comedy referred twice to this ancient family feud which led to the famous Ghibelline and Guelf parties in Italy, once in the twenty-eighth canto of his Inferno and again in the sixteenth canto of the Paradiso? Had he not married Gemma Donati, a descendent of one of the families involved in this feud? But most important, Dante was a Florentine and an ardent Ghibelline.

Once the choice of the narrator was made, it became only natural to place the story of the Rahmen at the court of the Scaligers. Dante had enjoyed the hospitality of Bartolomeo della Scala as early as 1303, and, when Florence in 1315 pronounced a new death sentence upon the Ghibelline exile, he again sought refuge in Verona, this time with the son of his first patron, the then twenty-four year old Can Grande to whom he dedicated his Paradiso and whom he later immortalized in the seventeenth canto of the last part of his trilogy.

Dante's life at the court of Can Grande was not without humiliations if we are to believe Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, the narrator of Meyer's *Plautus im Nonnenkloster*. This Italian humanist had married at the age of fifty-five the eighteen year old Vaggia Buondelmonti, another direct descendent of the feuding families. In one of his facetias, *Responsio Dantis*, he described how undignified Dante's life had been at the court of Can Grande, how the Veronese podesta used to lavish his favors upon a Florentine jester who scorned and envied the poet and who missed no opportunity to gloat over him. Dante responded by telling him that princes are wont to favor those who resemble them and that he had never been able to find a congenial patron. Meyer, who must have read this facetia, treats this animosity between poet and jester as well as Dante's contempt for Can Grande's base taste in his *Rahmen.*

"Es ist durchaus undenkbar, dass ein so ernster und ursprünglich edler Geist wie Ezzelin Narren gefüttert und sich an Ihm Blödsinn ergänzt habe."

Meyer continues, "Diesen geraden Stich führte der Florentiner gegen seinen Gastfreund, auf dessen Mantel Gocciola sass, den Dichter angrinsend." His narrative also contains a jester whom Meyer depicts with acid sarcasm. This probably induced him to use the name and appearance of Dante's listeners again in the narration.

The idea to let Dante develop his story from an epitaph, which he had found in a remote nook of a monastic garden and which could only be read by the novices if they crept on hands and knees to avoid the thorns of a thick rosebush covering the inscription, also goes back to Poggio. This famous humanist devoted his entire life to the resuscitation of
classical literature. He explored the libraries of Swiss and Swabian monasteries restoring numerous lost masterpieces of Latin literature. He was so ardent in his search that if a codex proved unattainable by fair means he was ready to use fraud, as when he bribed a monk at the monastery library of Hersfield in order to obtain a Livy and an Aminianus. Burckhardt, whom Meyer knew well, tells in his Kunst der Renaissance how Poggio, while tracing the history of ancient Rome, once crawled through a thicket in order to reach an inscription covered by vegetation.

Meyer's love for historical research was a heritage from his father, Ferdinand Meyer, an outstanding Swiss historian whose major work, Geschichte der evangelischen Gemeinde in Locarno (which caused the University of Zürich to bestow upon him the degree of doctor honoris causa), was even commended by Ranke, Ferdinand Meyer's idol. The influence of the father is easily discernible when we regard the first three poetic works of the son, Huttens letzte Tage, Das Amulett and Jüng Jenatsch, all of which have their setting in the same period of the Counter Reformation which was so dear to Ferdinand Meyer. But although Meyer did extensive historical research which rendered his environments so authentic that Eugene Rambert called him an homme de haute culture, he never made the attempt to write historically. He freely deviated from history whenever and wherever it pleased him and merely used historical events to enhance the coloration of his narratives.

The plans for The Monk's Wedding date back as far as 1876. The name was to be Götz der Münch, and the novella was to take place first in Avignon and then in Nürnberg during the time of Barbarossa. But the longer he occupied himself with the narrative, the clearer it became to
him that this passionate fable belonged under a southern sky and he finally chose the explosive air of Padua under the terrible Eccelino da Romano (according to Burckhardt the cruelest tyrant in the history of the Italian city states). This is the period with which the Ghibelline Meyer is most familiar. Now the role of Buondelmonti is played by the monk Astorre Vicedomini, the daughter of Amidei is transformed into the austere Diana Umberti, the rich widow Donati is changed into the insane widow Canossa and Mosca becomes Germaino Umberti. The stage is set.

Another reason why this period was chosen is Meyer's love for the last Staufer, Frederick II, whom Burckhardt called the first modern man on the throne, and whom Meyer's Ascanio somewhat exuberantly entitles "the most consummate of knights and the most unprejudiced of men". ²

It was at this court, however, as Dante pointed out, where Italian poetry had its beginning, and Pier della Vigna wrote the first sonnet there before the once all powerful favorite and minister was accused of treason and disgraced. The "most consummate of knights" had him blinded and in rags he was dragged in the emperor's train, like one of the animals of Frederick's menagerie, until in despair he dashed out his brains. Frederick's remarks in the novella regarding the three charlatans, Moses, Mohammet and Christ, are historical, and he was excommunicated three times in the course of his struggle with the

² More objective historians are apt to find some flaws in the description of this strange, but colorful emperor at whose court science and art flourished beside extreme cruelty and oriental licentiousness. Frederick even maintained a complete harem at Lucera, and eunuchs were a prominent feature of his household.
The Monk's Wedding was to be the first of three Kaisernovellen, Die Hochzeit des Mönchs, Die Richterin, and Petrus de Vinea; the latter remained a fragment. According to Betsy, the poet's sister, Ezzelin's role was initially intended for Frederick II. But although Meyer never wrote the novella or tragedy about Frederick II, he nevertheless created a series of poems to glorify his idol. He was possessed with the plans for a novel which would bring out the relationship of Frederick and his chancellor, Pier della Vigna, whose strange suicide so aroused his poetic imagination that he permitted himself to interrupt his Monk with a long discussion between Cangrande and Dante about the guilt or innocence of Frederick's minister, which has no real place in the narrative and which impairs the coherence of the story.

Eccelino da Romano, Meyer's Ezzelin, the Ghibelline leader and Frederick's most loyal supporter, was the descendent of a German family which had settled in Italy in the first half of the 11th century. They were lords of Romano, near Padua. In 1238 he became the emperor's son-in-law by marrying Selvaggia, one of Frederick's illegitimate children. His cruelties - the Italians referred to him as the tyrant - led to his excommunication by Gregory IX and later by Alexander IV, who went so far as to proclaim a crusade against him which was led by Philip, archbishop of Ravenna. In 1259 Eccelino was wounded and taken prisoner.

3 A legend afterwards transferred to Barbarossa, the original emperor in Götz der Mönch, related how the red haired emperor sat in a cavern of the Kyffhäusern before a stone table through which his beard had grown, waiting for the right time to restore the empire to its original glory.
He was so enraged at his captivity that he tore off his bandages, refused food, and died at Soncino on October 7 of the same year. His excessive cruelty gained him a place in Dante's *Inferno*, and Eichendorff made him the subject of his drama, *Gräfin Romana*.

Besides the historical Ezzelino, Baron Bettio Riccòlì, the "Iron Baron" as he was called by his contemporaries because of his rigid austerity, also served as Meyer's model for Ezzelino. Meyer had made the acquaintance of Riccòlì long before the latter had succeeded Cavour to the premiership in 1861. Their friendship dates as far back as 1849 when the baron visited his home in Zürich. Judging from the intimations of Meyer's biographers there must have existed a platonic love affair between the baron and Betsy. At that time Meyer considered him a rigid idealist, but his opinion changed when he visited him in Italy in 1858. The poet and his sister were guests in his castle Brolio, and Meyer was deeply impressed by the austere and unbending personality of the "Iron Baron". Ezzelino's morbid fascination with funerals and his peculiar love to close the eyes of the deceased goes back to Riccòlì, who had a predilection for funeral processions and who yielded to this funereal fondness by personally placing his own wife into her casket. The choice of the "Iron Baron" as a model for his Ezzelino becomes even more comprehensible when we remember that Meyer's Ezzelino was no cruel tyrant; his cruelty was just beginning, and he is portrayed throughout the story as a just ruler, although his pretentious show of benevolence during the trial is deliberately unconvincing. Only when Ezzelino brings the news of the accident on the Brenta to the old Vicedomini, do we get a first glimpse of his blood-
stained reign. The old man, overcome by his grief, forgets all caution and rages hysterically:

Schicksal und Sternguckerei und Beschworungen und Verschwörungen und Enthauptungen, von der Zinne auf das Pflaster sich werfende Weiber und hundert pfedurchbohrte Jünglinge vom Rosse sinkend in deinen verruchten waghalsigen Schlachten, das ist deine Zeit und Regierung, Ezzelin, du Verfluchter und Verdammer!...

This outbreak was provoked by Ezzelin's casual manner in which he reported the tragic accident and his explanation was characteristic: Fate. He was himself extremely fatalistic which is brought out when he explains to Ascanio the futility of attempting to save Astorre from Germano's sword. His belief in astrology, which explains in part his grandiose fatalism, as well as his two astrologers, Guido Bonatti and Paul von Bagdad, are historical. So is his unswerving loyalty to Frederick II, which contrasted favorably with many of his contemporaries, and which even extended to Frederick's son, Conrad IV, who succeeded to the throne in 1250.

Another historically accurate description is found in his half Saracen, half German guard, which was an imitation of the imperial guard.

And this is the point where historicity ends. The plot of the novella bears no further resemblance to history and is characteristic of Meyer's eventual usage of historical events. History spurs the imagination of the poet; it provides the characters who will later be moulded according to the poet's imagination; it assists in the choice of time and place best suited for the intended narrative and it effortlessly transfers the poet as well as the reader into the desired atmosphere.
The monk motif is nothing new in Meyer's writings. "Der selber ich der Zelle früh entsprang - Mir graut, wie lang der Luther drinnen rang," exclaims his Hutten. Again and again he is drawn to this theme. In Engelbert, in Jenatsch, in Schuss von der Kanzel, in Der Heilige and in Plautus im Nonnenkloster the Protestant Meyer examines the problematic nature of monasticism. The young cleric, one of Dante's listeners, poses the question, "Muss es denn überhaupt Mönche geben?" And when Dante attempts to justify the three vows, he is countered by the agnostic cleric with the question, "Gibt es aber nicht mehr schlechte Mönche als gute?" Dante's scholastic reply borders on naivety and leaves the author's opinion unchallenged.

But there is another reason why Meyer converted the irresponsible young Buondelmonti into the sheltered, weak-willed monk. Besides adding to the dramatic quality of the transformation, it renders Astorre's action more plausible. This is why Ascanio warns his regained friend, "...gib acht, ich bitte dich, Astorre, dass du den Menschen aus dem Mönche entwickelst, ohne den guten Geschmack zu beleidigen!" He advises him to visit the imperial court in order to acquaint himself with "the ways of the world", to inhale the cultural atmosphere which prevailed in Palermo, to learn to regard the opposite sex objectively, and to participate in a campaign in order to adjust to the mannerisms of nobility. But the Paduans were correct in their persistence to refer to him as "the monk" long after his secularization. Astorre remained a monk at heart. He covered his face not to protect it from the burning sun rays but to adhere to an old habit; he had never been able to accustom himself to the realization that he was a wealthy Vicedomini; he evaded the ostentatious
chambers of his home, and the first pouch of gold which he handled in violation of his second monastic vow contained the money which he used for the purchase of Diana's wedding band. And when Antiope Canossa, the love of his youth, reenters his life, he is unprepared to quench the passion which arises within him. This reckless behavior at the hour of decision confirms the justification of Ascanio's apprehensions. And this irresponsible reaction of the unsophisticated, weak youth affords Meyer the formulation of the main theme of his novella, which Lily Hohenstein expressed admiringly in her biography: "Ein Schicksal, das mit dem wehrlosen Menschen spielt und ihm dennoch die innere Verantwortung überlässt." 4

The Wedding of the Monk is a complement to Leiden eines Knaben which is by Meyer's own admission largely autobiographical, and which preceded the Monk in the same year. 5

4 Lily Hohenstein, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1957), p. 265. From here on, this work will be referred to as "Hohenstein".

5 Meyer's innate reluctance to bare his soul to his readers as Keller had done in his Der grüne Heinrich compelled him to depict his fate as if it were the result of a chain of historical events. The Leiden eines Knaben contains the suffering of a young boy who was depressed by constant feelings of inferiority. Although the plot of the novella bears no resemblance to Meyer's life, the suffering of young Julian in the Jesuit school is the suffering of Conrad under the tutelage of a religiously fanatic mother who stifled all his attempts at self-expression by admonishing her "poor Conrad" to refrain from vanity. Herself a neurotic, she was convinced that her son's poetic aspirations, "Eitelkeitsanfälle" as she called them, were psychopathic symptoms. In a letter to Dr. Borrel, who had treated Meyer at the insane asylum, she wrote, "Dass der Wahn, er sei zu Ausserordentlichem berufen, des Sohnes Unglück ist, und dass er besser täte, Schreiner zu werden, als sich weiterhin aussichtslosen Hirnspinsten hinzugeben." (Hohenstein, p. 39). After Meyer had translated the Recits des Temps Merovingiens by the French historian Thierry, he planned to write a French dissertation. He mentioned his plans to his mother in the hope of meeting with some encouragement. Her advice to him is repeated in a letter to her daughter, "Vor ein paar Tagen sprach er wieder
If Julian is the "poor Conrad", then Astorre is the mature Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (Meyer added his father's name to his in order to prevent being confused with a contemporary Swiss writer bearing the same name), who at the age of fifty married the wealthy Luise Ziegler, relinquishing his "robe" for the first time.

It is not surprising that a boy subjected to such a mother should grow up shy and extremely reserved. He had periods in his childhood when he would not enter the streets during daytime. His only real friends were Conrad Wäscher and his beloved sister Betsy who assisted him all her life. At the age of twenty-one he used to visit a friend in the Kirchergasse.

Meyer suffered immensely under her Pietistic bigotry, more so because he himself had long begun to doubt his poetic calling. This perennial maternal sermon of humility to which he was incessantly subjected had a traumatic effect and is doubtlessly at least partially responsible for his almost pathologically slow artistic maturation. He lacked the strength to ignore her relentless refusal to recognize and encourage him. One of his letters to Betsy shows his striving to impress his mother and the frantic attempt of a fatherless boy to gain her approval. "Alles für die liebe Mutter," he writes, "das andere ist Dreck." (Hohenstein, p. 109).

By 1852 he had developed all the symptoms of neurotic depression; he even showed suicidal tendencies. Before going on his long nightly swims he would toy with weights so that both mother and sister awaited his return with extreme anxiety. In June of that year his mother succeeded in persuading him to enter the insane asylum Prefargier. Following his mother's wishes he remained at Prefargier until January, 1853 although Dr. Borrel had advised his release as early as October, 1852. Three years later his mother entered the gates of the same asylum never to leave them again. On September 27, 1856 she threw herself from a bridge into the river Zühl.
From the window he observed a young girl, Marie Burkhardt, with whom he fell vehemently in love. "Schwanlein" he called her in his dreams, but not once did he speak to her. When he was twenty-eight years old he wrote a rather childish letter to his mother who had urged him to seek a position in life, "...Eine Stelle, will ich wegen meiner Ehre, aber eine andere, und keine Frau, weder eine grosse noch eine kleine, und am wenigsten eine reiche." Yet, when he finally did get married at the late age of fifty, he married a very wealthy woman. Keller summarized somewhat maliciously Zürich's public opinion in a letter to Paul Heyse, "...dass Betsy des Bruders Heirat mit einem reichen Müllerchen Fräulein zuwege gebracht habe."7

In The Monk's Wedding Ascanio flirts with the gardener's daughter. Astorre is so shocked at this "frivolous" display that he frightens the girl into running away. This indignation of the monk Astorre bears a peculiarity resemblance to the bigoted generalizations of the monkish Conrad in Paris where he wrote to his sister, "Man sagt, die Italiener seien nichts wert, aber die Italienerinnen seien gut; hier scheint es mir umgekehrt. Die Franzosen sind wohl so Übel nicht, aber die Französinnen, nach Theater und öffentlichen Spaziergängen zu urteilen, widerstehen mir mit ihrem herzlosen Lachen, dem Leichtsinn, mit dem sie alles zeigen; bei allem diesem Schmeicheln und Schüntun blickt ihnen die kälteste Berechnung aus den verdrehten Augen. Schlangen."8

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6 Hohenstein, p. 96.
7 Ibid., p. 201.
8 Adolf Frey, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Sein Leben und seine
This astonishing reaction to the entire female population of a city hailed for the charm of its womanhood appears rather strange, and while it reminds the reader of the sour grapes in the fable, it is also an indication of Meyer's extreme shyness as regards the opposite sex. Lily Hohenstein refers to him throughout her biography as the monk with the same consistency with which his mother had called him "der arme Conrad".

Astorre's immaturity and his inability to cope with the harsh realities of his world, the sinister nature of which he grasped for the first time when he began to comprehend the cruel nature of the tyrant whom he had hitherto regarded as justice personified, corresponds to Meyer's own inexperience in the face of everyday problems. "Lange, lange," he remarked once to Adolf Frey, "war mir alles, was Wirklichkeit heisst, so zuwider wie mäglich." 9

Such withdrawal is characteristic of any youth with marked neurotic tendencies, and it is not surprising that "poor Conrad" showed so little promise in school that Sauppe, one of his teachers, was utterly amazed when he learned that one of his former pupils had become a famous poet. He did not even remember him, although it was Conrad who had been chosen to hand him a silver cup when he departed from Zürich.


The absence of an exclamation mark after "Schlangen" seems to indicate the author's attempt to sound as objective as possible.

9Frey, p. 299.
Meyer's literary success came so late in life that he used to console himself with Cervantes.

"Ich bin fast vierzig Jahre alt," sagt Meyer im Gefühl seiner Gelähmtheit zum Freund, "und habe eigentlich nichts geleistet; aber mir fällt oft Cervantes ein, der erst nach den sechziger Jahren berühmt wurde, das tröstet mich: ich habe also noch Zeit."

Lily Hohenstein, his most accurate biographer, describes him at this point of his life:

Vierzig Jahre ist er alt; der Lohn unendlicher Mühe, willig gebeugter Geduld aber ist ein smales Bündchen Balladen, das schon vergessen ist, und eine Mappe voll unvollendeter Gedichte, die er vielleicht nie zur "Gestalt" läuten darf...

Die Nervenkraft, die andere zur Entfaltung ihrer Anlagen nutzen dürfen, musste er in unfertigbarer Verteidigung verschwenden, und er hat damit eine ohnehin zarte Gesundheit, vielleicht, untergraben. Großvater und Mutter waren nervenkrank, - muss nicht auch er diesem Fluch der Generationen verfallen?...

Frey explains the poet's slow maturation similarly:

Die Kinder schwächlicher oder doch neurasthenischer Eltern, wie der Regierungsrat Ferdinand Meyer und seine Frau Betsy waren, zumal die Kinder aus alten Familien, leiden häufig unter einer Belastung von verhängnisvollem Gepräge: endlose, quälische Selbstbetrachtung, tausendfältige Reflexion, Mangel an Energie und Lebenskraft, Unentschiedenheit, Scheu vor dem Leben und der Tat, oft Unfähigkeit zur Arbeit.

So war Meyers Anlage im Grunde, und daraus erklärt sich seine ungewöhnlich späte, in ihrer Art einzige Entwicklung.

Er selber schilderte die Empfindung jener Zeit der Hemmung und des Gebundenseins:

Ich war von einem schweren Bann gebunden,
Ich lebte nicht. Ich lag im Traum erstarrt.

10 Alfred Rochat, Privatdozent at the University of Zürich.
12 Frey, p. 296.
Meyer suffered greatly from his inability to produce. Convinced of the reality of his poetic calling, he could not bring himself to strive seriously for a position which could have rehabilitated him amidst his friends and neighbors, who did their best to prove to him that a former mental case without civic responsibilities had no status in society. He well remembered "All die Zärtlichkeiten meiner Mitpilger" (younger people who would make it a point to enter before him, inquiries regarding his health, questions about his vocation). All this embittered him to such an extent that he accepted Vulliamy's advice to make himself a name by translating. But he cringed every time when his paternal friend proudly introduced him as Thierry's translator and he never once signed his translations which the poet in him despised. He even accepted an unpaid position at the Lausanne Institute for the Blind where he taught Swiss history, which was to prepare him for a possible position as lecturer at the University of Zürich, a goal which he never reached. In the light of these failures and humiliations we can understand his enthusiasm when he received his first self-earned fee: "Es ist natürlich, dass die Ankunft des bescheidenen Honorars aus Elberfeld den dauernd pädagogisch Gedemütigten in eine solche 'Extase' versetzt, 'dass er wie ein Kind auf und davon und zu Onkel Wilhelm läuft, um ihm seinen Schatz zu zeigen.' So eindeutig ist ihm klargemacht worden, dass in der société nur ein Mensch, der Geld verdient, Lebensrecht besitzt."\(^{13}\)

Only a poet with Meyer's background could convincingly portray the abrupt change in Astorre's character. Before this violent

\(^{13}\)Hohenstein, p. 109.
transformation we see a youth who appears to be a paragon of virtue, a suspiciously tractable boy who never questioned his father's decisions and who became a monk following an old family tradition. Once ordained he found it easy, as he explained to Ezzelin, to obey his monastic vows. He seems to have no will of his own and proves incapable of denying his father's last request to relinquish his robe and to marry a woman he does not love. He behaves so passively that no one suspects the volcanic passions within him, which break forth without warning when he finally runs amuck.

The same tractability can be observed with "poor Conrad" who replied to his mother who urged him to enter the asylum at Prefargier, "Ja, dir zuliebe will ich es tun." At the age of twenty-seven he finally had the courage to ask his mother to be allowed to pay his own bills, and despite Frau Betsy's bigoted domination of his life, he never ceased in his attempts to please her. How many times must he have felt the desire to rebel as the monk had done. But poetic imagination is able to sublimate aggressive tendencies. Meyer's "rebellion" results in The Monk's Wedding, and Lily Hohenstein therefore calls this work repeatedly the "Kulminationspunkt seines Lebenswillens."

How was this "Kulminationspunkt" of Meyer's "Lebenswillen" received? In 1883 The Monk's Wedding appeared for the first time in the December issue of the Rundschau. The greatest amount of criticism is directed against the complicated form of the novella. Paul Heyse's letter is characteristic of the objections which many of his friends

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14 Hohenstein, p. 55.
Es sind höchst neuartige Motive und die Figuren von Ihrem eigensten Gepräge, die Verschlingung der Leidenschaften unentrinnbar, die Farben ganz gesättigt mit südlichem Gold und Feuer. Dass ich's aber offen heraussage: in die Form habe ich mich nicht hineingefunden. Schon im Leiden eines Knaben schien mir die Aufgabe, aus dem Munde eines Arztes die Details zu vernehmen, kaum günstig für die Unmittelbarkeit des Eindrucks, abgesehen von der Überstilisierung durch das "Du", das diesem Könige doch anstössiger als irgend einem sein musste. Nun haben Sie es sogar gewagt, den grössten Epiker zum Erzähler zu wählen, dessen Weise uns so vertraut und doch ewig fremd ist, und lassen ihn neben archaischen Wendungen sich der modernsten Palettenkünste bedienen, während wir in der vita nuova ein Beispiel haben, wie er und seine Zeitgenossen sich betrügen, wenn sie mit der deutlich ausgesprochenen Absicht, zu erzählen, an eine Geschichte gingen. Ich wäre sehr begierig, zu hören, was Sie zu dem barocken Rahmen um das gewaltige Bild verführt hat, was mit dem rätselhaften Scherz der gleichen Namengebung - in Bild und Rahmen - bezweckt ist, und warum Ihnen überhaupt der direkte Vortrag nicht angemessener schien, da ja eine persönliche Beziehung gerade dieses Erzählers zu dem Stoffe nicht einleuchten will.

München, 10. XI. 84

Paul Heyse.

Meyer responded immediately in an interesting letter which attempts to justify his choice of Dante as the narrator of his novella, but which agrees with the just criticism of the somewhat confusing form of his work.

...Und jetzt zur einfachen Beantwortung Ihrer Frage: Mein Dante am Herde ist nicht von ferne der grosse Dichter, welchen ich in Ehrfurcht ungerührt lasse, sondern eine typische Figur und bedeutet einfach: Mittelalter. Er dient, den Leser mit einem Schlage in eine fremde Welt zu versetzen, wo ein Münch z. B. etwas ganz anderes vorstellt als im letzten Jahrhundert. Er dient ferner dazu, das Thema herrisch

zu formulieren, woran mir, dieses Mal, liegen musste. Wenn nun einer aus Dantes Rede auch noch eine Warnung an Ezselin vor Astrologie und Grausamkeit und seiner kleinen Freundin vor Schlag oder Stock herausliest, so steht es ihm frei. Einen persönlichen alten Gefühle; Dante habe sein Florenz über das Mass grausam behandelt, Luft zu machen, verführte dann die Gelegenheit.

Über die „modernsten Palettenkünste", lieber Freund, habe ich aufrichtig hier oben in Kilchberg ein bisschen gelacht. Von wem hätte ich das hier in meiner Stille gelernt?

Die Neigung zum Rahmen dann ist bei mir ganz instinktiv. Ich halte mir den Gegenstand gerne vom Leibe oder richtiger gerne so weit als möglich vom Auge und dann will mir scheinen, das Indirekte der Erzählung (und selbst die Unterbrechungen) mildern die Härte der Fabel. Hier freilich wird der Verschlingung von Fabel und Hörer zu viel, die Sache wird entschieden zu mühsam, ein non plus ultra! M'en voilà guéri!

Sie sehen, ich werde gegen meine Gewohnheit eifrig. Es ist aber auch ganz hübsch, von Paul Heyse zur Rede gestellt zu werden!

Kilchberg 12 Nov. 1884

Herzlich

C. F. Meyer

16

Keller1's reaction arrived late and the brevity of his polite praise as well as the complete absence of any specific criticism reveal his disapproval: "Durch wiederholtes, wenn auch nicht schweres Unwohlsein, bin ich abgehalten worden. Ihnen in hüflicher Frist für Die Hochzeit des Mönches zu danken. Gelesen habe ich indessen das Werk auf der Stelle wieder und mich aufs neue der erreichten Stylhöhe gefreut, sowie des Inhalts, ohne dass ich Sie weiter mit mehr als einem aufrichtigen Glück- wunsch behelligen will..."17

Meyer was quite aware of some of the shortcomings of his novella as many of his letters indicate. In a letter to Friedrich von Wyss, the

17 Frey I, p. 304.
prominent legal historian, he remarked, "Den Münch wirst du etwas roh finden." Writing to Ernst Hückelberg, a painter from Basel, he confesses, "Die meinige (Die Hochzeit des Münchs) wurde gestern fertig, zu meinem eigenen Erschrecken und Ärgernisse, ein bisschen ala Makart." To his editor, Hermann Haessel, he mentioned three defects:

Der Münch, dessen im Vorrat gedruckte Ed. 2 (vice Vertrag) mich ein bisschen erschreckte, hat drei Klippen:
1. Seine scheinbare Frechheit stösst die Mittelschichten.
2. Das aufs Äusserste (zu weit) getriebene Hin und Her der Erzählung und Hörerkreis erscheint raffiniert und strengt zu sehr an.
3. Der Styl ist zu epigrammatisch.

Yet, The Wedding of the Monk was a literary success and one of Meyer's outstanding works. It was translated into several languages and only three years after its appearance Klughardt wrote a four act opera, Die Hochzeit des Münches, based upon the novella. Although Klughardt's opera was soon forgotten, Meyer's work is widely read to this day.

18 Frey I, p. 90.
19 Ibid., p. 442.
20 Frey II, pp. 120-121.
THE MONK'S WEDDING

It was in Verona. Before a large fire which filled a spacious hearth, a group of young courtiers of both sexes reclined, in the most comfortable positions which decorum would permit, about a youthful prefect and two beautiful women. The entire assemblage formed a quarter circle so that one side of the fireplace was left entirely open, as was the custom of the court. The ruler was the Scaliger, Gangrande. Of the women between whom he sat, the one reclining in semi-darkness next to the hearth was probably his wife, while the other, who was fully illuminated by the flames, may have been a relative or friend. The assembly was engaged in telling stories which evoked meaningful glances and suppressed laughter.

Now a grave man, whose large features and flowing robes seemed to stem from a different world, approached this genial and capricious group. "Sire," said this odd apparition half solemnly, half disdainfully, "I have come to warm myself at your hearth." He failed to add that the lax servants had, despite the frosty November evening, forgotten or neglected to kindle a fire in his upstairs chamber.

"Sit down beside me, dear Dante," replied Gangrande, "but if you want to warm yourself socially, then do not look mutely into the flames, as is your habit. We are telling stories, and the hand which today has forged terza-rima — ascending to my astrological chamber, I overheard in yours the muffled chant of verses being
scanned -- this forceful hand cannot refuse to take between its
fingers such a trivial toy as an entertaining tale without breaking
it. Dismiss the goddesses for a while -- he probably meant the
muses -- and take pleasure in these beautiful mortals." With a
slight gesture of his hand the Scaliger showed his guest the two
women. The taller one, who sat apathetically in the shadows, gave
no indication of moving aside, while the smaller, alert one cheer-
fully made room for the Florentine. He, however, ignored the
invitation of his host and proudly chose the last seat at the end
of the circle. He was either displeased by the bigamous display of
the prince, although this may have been the mere whim of an evening,
or perhaps he felt repelled by the jester who sprawled beside his
master on the princely cloak, which had fallen to the floor. This
old, toothless creature with protruding eyes and a flaccid, flippant,
greedy mouth -- besides Dante, the only one of advanced age in the
company -- was called Gocciola, or droplet, because of his habit
of quaffing the last sticky drops from the emptied glasses. He hated
the stranger with infantile malice, for he regarded Dante as a rival
for the favors of his rather undiscriminating master. He made a
face, then grinning derisively, he insolently directed the attention
of the pretty neighbour on his left to the illuminated ceiling of
the high room which showed distinctly the shadow of the poet's pro-
file. Dante's silhouette resembled a gigantic woman with the long,
curved nose and the drooping lower lip of a Parca. The vivacious
girl suppressed a childlike laugh. Her neighbour, an intelligent
looking youth by the name of Ascanio, assisted her by turning to
Dante with that measured respect with which the latter enjoyed being addressed.

"Do not be disdainful of joining our harmless game, you Homer and Virgil of Italy," he implored. "Descend to us, Master, and instead of singing, speak to us."

"What is your topic?" retorted Dante, who was less aloof than in the beginning but still quite ill-humored.

"Sudden vocational changes," answered the youth succinctly, "with good, bad, or ludicrous outcome."

Dante reflected. His melancholy eyes regarded the company, the make-up of which did not at all seem to displease him, for in it he detected some lofty minds. "Has anyone among you discussed the unfrocked monk?" he uttered in somewhat gentler tones.

"Certainly, Dante!" rejoined a staunch-looking soldier, pronouncing his Italian with a slight German accent. His name was Germano, and he wore chain-mail and a long droopy mustache. "I myself told about young Manuccio, who climbed the walls of his convent in order to become a soldier."

"He was right in doing so," declared Dante. "He had deceived himself about his own propensities."

A pert, somewhat buxom Paduan named Isotta chattered, "I, Master, have told the story of Helena Manente, who had just sacrificed the first lock to the consecrated scissors, when, among the crowd in the nave of the church, she discovered her lover, who had been carried into Berberian slavery and later miraculously saved. She quickly covered her remaining curls with both hands and suppressed her
vow, when she spied him hanging his loosened fetters" — she meant to say on the wall, but Dante interrupted her prattling.

"She acted honorably," he said, "for this was in accord with the dictates of her love. But here we are concerned with quite a different case. Let us assume that a monk, not impelled by a personal drive, urged neither by an awakening worldliness, nor a belated recognition of his true nature, under the pressure of an outside will, and perhaps even motivated by the sacred dictates of piety, but for someone else's sake, becomes even more unfaithful to himself than to the church and casts away the habit which covered his body without oppressing him. Has this been told already? No? Then I shall do so. But tell me, how must such a story end, my patron and protector?" He had turned to Cangrande.

"Necessarily badly," answered the latter without hesitation. "He who jumps freely, jumps well; and he who is pushed, jumps badly."

"You speak the truth, Sire," confirmed Dante, "and the Apostle, if I understand him, means the same when he writes: "Sin is that which does not originate from faith," that is to say, from the conviction and truth of our nature."

"Must there be monks at all?" chuckled a muffled voice out of the semi-darkness, as if he meant to imply that any liberation from an unnatural state constituted a boon.

This audacious and heretical utterance aroused no anger here, for at this court the boldest remarks regarding religious affairs were tolerated, even received with a smile, while a free or merely
careless word about the ruler, his person or his policies could prove
destructive.

Dante's eyes sought the speaker and discovered him to be a
distinguished young cleric, whose fingers played with the precious
cross which he wore outside his cassock.

"Not so far as I am concerned," answered the Florentine
thoughtfully. "May monks become extinct as soon as a generation is
born which learns to unite justice and compassion, the two highest
forces of the human soul, which seem to be mutually exclusive. Until
that late hour in world evolution, let the state administer the one,
the church the other. Since, however, the practice of compassion
presupposes an entirely selfless soul, the three monastic vows are
justified, for it is less difficult, as experience teaches, to give
up all desire than to renounce it merely in part."

"But are there not more bad monks than good ones?" con-
tinued the ecclesiastical sceptic.

"No," alleged Dante, "not if we consider human frailty.
There would then have to be more unjust judges than just ones, more
cowardly soldiers than courageous ones, more bad men than good men."

"And is not that the case?" whispered the cleric.

"No," decided Dante, and a divine ecstasy illuminated his
severe features. "Does not our philosophy inquire and investigate
how evil entered this world? Were the bad ones in the majority, we
would ask: how did virtue come into the world."

These proud and obscure sentences impressed the company,
but also kindled the apprehension that the Florentine might lose
himself in his scholastic philosophy rather than in his story.

Gangrande saw how his young friend suppressed a pretty yawn. Under such circumstances he felt obliged to interrupt and inquired, "Will you tell us a true story, dear Dante, according to documents, or a popular legend, or an invention of your lofty mind?"

Dante answered with deliberate emphasis, "I shall develop my story from an epitaph."

"From an epitaph?"

"From an epitaph which I read years ago in a Franciscan monastery at Padua. The stone which bore the inscription stood in a nook of the monastery garden, and, although concealed beneath wild rose bushes, it was still accessible to the novices, if they crept on all fours and were willing to disregard a scratched cheek. I commanded the prior — — I mean I inveighed upon him — — to transfer the stone to the library and to place it under the protection of the old caretaker."

"How did the epitaph read?" asked the wife of the Prince indolently.

"The inscription," replied Dante, "was in Latin and read:

Hic jacet monachus Astorre cum uxore Antiope. Sepeliebat Azzolinus."

"And what does that mean?" asked the lady curiously.

Gangrande translated fluently: "Here rests the monk Astorre beside his wife Antiope. Both were buried by Ezzelin."

"The hideous tyrant!" exclaimed the impressionable young girl at his side. "He undoubtedly had the two buried alive because they loved each other and he insisted upon mocking his victims even in
"Hardly," remarked Dante. "This, according to history, is highly improbable, and the story, in my mind at least, has taken quite a different turn. For Ezzelín would have preferred the breach of a spiritual vow to ecclesiastical obedience. I suspect that "sepeliebat" was meant in an amicable sense: he provided them with a burial."

"Correct," exclaimed Cangrande gayly, "you think as I do. Ezzeline was domineering and somewhat coarse and violent, but nine-tenths of his atrocities have been imputed to him by the church and by the imagination of the people."

"That might be so," sighed Dante. "Moreover, he is not yet the monster which the chronicle justly or unjustly describes, when he makes his appearance in my story, but his cruelty is only beginning to appear in a certain expression about the mouth, so to speak —"

"A commanding figure," Cangrande completed the picture fervidly, "with bristling black hair, as you paint him in your twelfth canto as an inhabitant of hell. Where did you receive the idea for such a head?"

"It is yours," replied Dante boldly, and Cangrande felt flattered.

As he turned to the company, he continued with a threatening smile, "If you permit me, I shall take the remaining characters from your midst and shall give them your names: the inner man I shall leave untouched since I am unable to read therein."

"I surrender my mien to you," said the princess magnanimously, as her indifference began to yield.
A murmur of the highest excitement ran through the audience, and "Your story, Dante, your story!" was whispered from all sides.

On a beautiful summer day, a flower-bedecked barque, teeming with festively clad people, glided to the muted sounds of flutes over the rapid but quiet waters of the Brenta. The barque was entering the graceful curve which the river describes as it approaches the city of Padua. It was the bridal procession of Umberto Vicedomini and his betrothed, Diana Pizzaguerra. The Paduan had fetched his bride from a convent situated along the upper course of the river. According to an old local custom, girls of position were in the habit of retiring to this convent for the purpose of pious meditation before marriage. The bride sat in the center of the barque upon a purple cushion between the bridegroom and the three handsome youths who were the issue of his first marriage. Five years ago, Umberto Vicedomini had buried the wife of his youth while the plague raged in Padua, and, although he stood in the prime of his manhood, it was only with reluctance and difficulty that he had finally acceded to the daily entreaties of his aged and ailing father and decided in favor of a second marriage.

The barque drifted in the current of the river. Softly chanting, the oarsmen accompanied the gentle music. Then everything became silent. All eyes turned toward the right bank of the stream where a tall knight restrained his stallion as he waved toward the barque with a sweeping gesture. A shy murmur ran through the passengers. The oarsmen hastily doffed their red caps, and the entire party, including the bridegroom, Diana and the boys rose in fear and respect. With subservient
gestures, waving arms and half-bent knees, they turned toward the beach with such impetuosity and violence of motion that the barque, its equilibrium upset, leaned to the right and suddenly capsized. There was a shriek of terror, a wildly spinning whirlpool, then momentary silence which was soon shattered by the screams of the sinking and emerging victims who struggled among the wreaths of the capsized barque. Help was not long in coming, for a little farther downstream lay a hamlet inhabited by fishers and ferrymen. Here also stood the horses and litters which were to have taken the company now drowning in the river the remainder of the way to Padua.

The first two rescue boats approached each other from opposite banks. In the one, beside a bristly-bearded old ferryman, stood Ezzelin, the tyrant of Padua and the innocent cause of the disaster; in the other were a young monk and his boatman who had been pushing his dusty ferry across the river just at the time of the accident. The two boats reached each other. In the water between them floated an abundance of heavy blonde hair, which the kneeling monk seized resolutely with outstretched hands, while his ferryman leaned with all his weight toward the opposite side of the boat. Grasping the thick hair the monk lifted from the current the head of a woman whose eyes were closed. Then with the help of Ezzelin who had come up beside him he drew up the body which had increased in weight because of the drenched clothes. The tyrant leapt from his boat into the other and regarded the lifeless head, which bore an expression of defiance and suffering, almost benevolently, as if he were stirred by the pleasing features or perhaps by the presence of death.
"Do you know her, Astorre?" he asked the monk. Since the latter shook his head, he continued, "Look, it is your brother's wife."

The monk cast a shy, compassionate glance upon the woman, who slowly opened her eyes.

"Take her to the beach," ordered Ezzelin. However, the monk left her to his boatman. "I want to search for my brother," he exclaimed, "until I find him."

"I shall help you, monk," said the tyrant, "but I doubt that we shall save him. I saw him being born down into the depth of the river as he embraced his boys."

Meanwhile, the Brenta was teeming with vessels. They fished with poles, hooks, rods and nets and within the rapidly changing scene the ruler's figure seemed to be ubiquitous among the searchers and the rescued.

"Come, monk," he said finally. "You can no longer help here. Umberto and his boys have been lying at the bottom of the river too long to return to life. The current has carried them off. It will set them ashore once it tires of them. But do you see the tents there?" A number of them had been erected on the beach of the Brenta for the reception of the wedding barque. Now they contained the deceased and the seemingly dead and were surrounded by wailing relatives and servants who had hurried hither from near-by Padua. "There, monk, do what your office dictates: works of charity! Console the living. Bury the dead."

The monk stepped ashore and lost sight of the prefect. Out of the multitude, Diana, his brother's bride and widow, stepped toward him disconsolately but again in full possession of herself. Droplets
of water were still trickling from her heavy hair upon a new garment which she had received from a compassionate fisherwoman who, in return, had taken possession of her precious wedding gown. "Pious brother," she addressed Astorre, "I have been abandoned. In the confusion, someone else, alive or dead, has returned to town in the litter intended for my use. Accompany me to the house of my father-in-law who is your father."

The young widow deceived herself. The servants of the old Vicedomini had not abandoned her in confusion and consternation but because of cowardice and superstition. They were too frightened to face their irascible master with a widow instead of a bride and to deliver the tidings of the disaster which had befallen the family.

The monk yielded to the request since he saw many others of his kind busying themselves with charitable works among the tents and in the open. "Let us go," he said and conducted the young woman to the street leading to the city whose spires and cupolas seemed to grow out of the blue sky. The road was crowded by hundreds of people who were hurrying to the beach or returning from it. The two walked in the middle of the street without conversing, often separated but always finding each other again, and by now they had already passed through the suburb which was inhabited by the guilds. Loudly chatting or whispering groups stood about everywhere -- the accident at the Brenta had excited the entire populace -- regarding with commiserative curiosity the unfortunate couple which had lost bridegroom and brother.

The monk and Diana were figures which every child in Padua knew. Astorre, although he was not considered a saint, still had the reputation of a model monk. The people were so proud of him and esteemed him so much that he could have been called the monk of Padua.
And rightly so, for he had bravely and cheerfully renounced the privileges and the immeasurable possessions which were connected with his noble descent and offered his life willingly to the lowest and poorest in times of plague and other public emergencies. In addition, he was a graceful man, as people love their saints, with his chestnut-brown hair, his warm eyes and his noble bearing.

In her own way, Diana was no less prominent due to her junonian stature, something which lesser folk find more appealing than the subtle enticements. Her mother had been a German, a descendant of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, as some alleged, although only according to blood and not legally. Germany and Italy had combined their efforts as good sisters to create this imposing figure.

No matter how strict and austere she was in dealing with her peers, she was affable to the common people, listened to their difficulties, answered them briefly but distinctly and kissed the most ragged children. She donated and contributed without hesitation; perhaps because her father, the old Pizzaguerria, after Vicedomini, the wealthiest Paduan, was the vilest miser, and she felt humiliated by the paternal vice.

Thus, the people, whose affection she held, made Diana the object of their daily gossip and married her monthly to some distinguished Paduan, although reality failed to reward these pious desires. Three obstacles complicated her betrothal: Diana's proud and often austere bearing, the closed fist of her father and her brother's blind affection for the tyrant, whose possible overthrow would cause the downfall of his faithful followers as well, thus endangering the entire family.
Finally, Umberto Vicedomini, who now lay at the bottom of the Brenta, entered into a loveless betrothal with her, a state of affairs known to the entire city.

The young couple was so steeped in justifiable sorrow that they either did not hear the eager prattle which followed them or else paid little attention to it. The people took no umbrage at seeing the monk and the woman walking side by side. It was in order, since it was a monk's calling to offer consolation and since, as the nearest and most obvious bearers of the bad tidings, both had the same destination: the house of the old Vicedomini.

The women bemoaned Diana's fate, complaining that she had been compelled to marry a man who had merely accepted her as a substitute for his beloved, deceased wife; bewailing in the same breath the loss of this man even before her marriage.

The men, on the other hand, deliberated with important gesticulations and cleverest miens a burning question which had arisen because of the drowning of the four heirs of the most prominent family in Padua. The head of the family, as energetic as he was cunning, had managed to remain at peace with both the Tyrant of Padua and the Church, although the latter was held in contempt by Ezzelin since she had placed him under a five-fold ban. For a lifetime he had remained aloof from public affairs, concentrating his entire being and his splendid will-power upon one aim: the wealth and prosperity of his family. Now all this was destroyed. His oldest son and his grandchildren lay at the bottom of the Brenta. His second and third sons had died this same fatal year, the one two, the other three months ago. The older one had been wasted
and abandoned during one of the tyrant's wild battles. The other, whom the unprejudiced father had turned into a splendid Venetian merchant, had bled to death on some oriental shore, after having been nailed to the cross by pirates who had failed to receive their ransom in time. The fourth was Astorre, the monk. The rapidly calculating Paduans never doubted for a moment that his father would frantically attempt to compel this one to break his monastic vows. Whether he would succeed, and whether the monk would agree to this was now the argument of the excited crowd. And they debated in the end so loudly and vehemently that even the mourning monk himself could no longer remain in doubt as to who was meant by the esli’s and alla’s which sounded from the various groups. Thus, more for his companion’s sake than for his own, he turned into a shady, grass covered alley, which was well known to him, for it led alongside the weathered walls of his monastery. Here, it was almost chilly, but the news which filled all of Padua with terror, had reached even these shadows. From the open windows of the refectory, which was built into the thick wall, where the monks gathered around the dinner table much later than usual -- the catastrophe on the Brenta had upset the schedule of the entire town -- came the sounds of a conversation so querulous and piercing, so full of -inibus and -atibus -- Latin was the vehicle of discussion -- so filled with decretal quotations, that the monk could easily discern that the same dilemma discussed in the street was under dispute here also. And although he did not ask himself what was said, he nevertheless knew who was at issue. However, what he did not discover were --
In the course of his narration Dante's eyes had searched for the distinguished cleric who had concealed himself behind his neighbor.

-- two burning, hollow eyes which gazed at him and the woman at his side through a gap in the wall. These eyes belonged to an unfortunate creature, a lost monk, named Serapion, who consumed himself, body and soul, in the monastery. With his precipitate imagination, he grasped instantly that his fellow monk, Astorre, had hungered and fasted for the last time according to the rule of St. Francis, and he envied him intensely the secular possession of wealth and joys cast his way by a whim of death. He lay in wait for the returning monk in order to scrutinize his features so that he might read therein what Astorre had resolved to do about himself. His eyes devoured the woman and fixed themselves on her footsteps.

Astorre directed his steps toward a small square formed by four mansions and entered the arched gate of the most impressive one. Upon a stone bench in the courtyard, he beheld two reclining figures: an extremely young German in full armour and an aged Saracen. The German slumbered stretched across the bench, his reddish blond locks in the lap of the sitting infidel with a snow-white beard who was likewise drowsing and whose head nodded paternally. The two belonged to Ezzelin's guard, which was composed of an equal number of Germans and Saracens in imitation of the imperial guard of his brother-in-law, the Emperor Frederick. The tyrant was within the palace. He may have considered it his duty to visit the old Vicedomini. From the spiral staircase, Astorre and Diana could indeed hear a conversation in which
Ezzelin conducted himself calmly and succinctly while the old man, who seemed completely beside himself, screamed and clamoured. The monk and the woman stopped at the entrance of the hall among the servants, who were trembling from head to toe. Their master had showered them with the most vehement maledictions and then chased them away with clenched fists because they had been so late in bringing the news from the beach and had stuttered with fear, hardly daring to pronounce their message. In addition, these servants were petrified by the feared presence of the tyrant. To announce him was forbidden on pain of death. He entered the houses of Padua as unrestrainedly as a ghost.

"And this you relate so calmly, you fiend," raged the old man in his despair, "as if you reported the loss of a horse or a harvest! You have killed these four, nobody but you. Why did you have to ride to the beach at precisely that hour? Why did you have to wave at the barque? You have done this to me. Do you hear?"

"Fate," retorted Ezzelin.

"Fate!" exclaimed the Vicedomini. "Fate and astromancy, incantations and conspiracies, decapitations and women hurling themselves from the battlements and hundreds of young men sinking from their horses, pierced by hostile arrows during your foolhardy and infamous battles. That is your era, your reign, Ezzelin, you accursed tyrant. You drag us all along in your gory wake. All living and dying becomes violent and unnatural in your presence, and nobody meets his death any longer in bed as a repentant Christian."

"You do me an injustice," replied Ezzelin. "I have, indeed, no more dealings with the Church. She leaves me cold. But I have
never prevented you and your kind from remaining in Her fold. This you know, otherwise you would not possess the boldness to correspond with the Holy See. What is that which you twist in your hands, attempting to hide the papal seal. An indulgence? A breve? Give it here. Indeed it is a breve! May I read it? You permit? Your patron, the Holy Father, writes that, should your line of descent become extinct with the exception of your fourth and last son, the monk, this one should ipso facto be freed of his vows, provided that he returns to the world voluntarily and following his own resolve. You cunning fox, how many ounces of gold did this parchment cost you?"

"Are you mocking me?" howled the old man. "What other course was left for me after the death of my second and third son. For whom did I hoard and save? For the worms? For you? Do you want to rob me? No? Then help me, you, my son's god-father" — Ezzelin, before his excommunication, had lifted Vicedomini's third boy out of the font, the same one who had sacrificed himself for him on the battlefield — "help me to prevail over the monk, so that he may become worldly again and take a wife. Command him, you omnipotent ruler, give him to me for the son whom you have slaughtered. Assist me, if you love me!"

"That is not my concern," replied the tyrant without the slightest agitation. "He must decide that himself. 'Voluntarily', says the breve. Why should he relinquish his calling if he is a devout monk, as I believe he is? So that the blood of the Vicedomini may not run dry? Is that a prerequisite for the continuance of this world? Are the Vicedomini a necessity?"
The old man shrieked with fury, "You villain, you murderer of my sons! I see through you. You want to become my heir and conduct your insane campaigns with my money." At that moment he perceived his daughter-in-law, who entered the room, leaving the hesitant monk and the servants at the threshold. Despite his physical weakness, he staggered hurriedly toward her, grasped her by the hands, and drew her forward, as if to call her to account for the mishap which had befallen them.

"What have you done with my son, Diana?" he panted.
"He lies at the bottom of the Brenta," she replied sadly, and her blue eyes darkened.
"Where are my three grandsons?"
"At the bottom of the Brenta," she repeated.
"And you bring yourself here as a present to me? You I retain?" laughed the old man discordantly.
"Would to God," she said slowly, "the waves had dragged me down, and the others could stand here in my stead."

She fell silent. Then sudden anger seized her. "If my presence insults and disturbs you, then blame him; he tore me back to life by the hair, when I had already died."

Now the old man noticed the monk, his son, and he gathered his spirits with a strength and speed which sorrow seemed to have increased rather than decreased.

"Truly? This one saved you from the Brenta? Ha! Peculiar. How wondrous are God's ways." He grasped the monk's arm and shoulder as if he wanted to possess himself of the latter's body and soul and
dragged himself toward the sick bed upon which he fell, without relaxing the pressure on the arm of his son, who followed without resistance.

Diana followed and knelt with hanging arms and folded hands on the other side of the bed, leaning her head on its edge so that only the knot of her blonde hair remained visible. Ezzelin sat opposite the group with his right hand propped upon the rolled up breve as if it were a marshal's baton.

"Son, son," whimpered the old man with an affection composed of truth and cunning, "my last, my only consolation. You are the staff of my old age and will not break between these trembling hands. You realize," he continued already adopting a more practical tone of voice, "that under the prevailing conditions you can no longer remain in the monastery. It is canonical, is it not, son, that a monk whose father becomes ill or impoverished, is given leave by his prior to till the soil and to care for the author of his existence. I, however, need you much more urgently. Your brothers and nephews are gone, and it is you who bears the life-torch of our house. You are a flame which I have ignited, and it does me little good if it should cease glowing and go up in smoke in some monastic cell. Know one thing," — he had read sincere compassion in the warm brown eyes above him, and the reverential attitude of the monk seemed to promise blind obedience — "I am more seriously ill than you think. Am I not, Isaschar?" He turned to face a narrow figure which had entered through a side-door, bearing some flasks and a spoon, and which had stepped softly behind the sick-bed, nodding a pale head affirmatively. "I am leaving this world, but I tell you, Astorre, if you fail to grant my request, then your father
will refuse to step into the barque of death and will continue to
cower on the beach of twilight."

The monk stroked the feverish hand of his old father affectionately and calmly uttered the two words: "My vows!"

Ezzelin unrolled the breve.

"Your vows," coaxed the old Vicedomini. "Loose bonds, broken fetters! Make one move and they will fall. The Holy Church, to which you owe reverence and obedience, has declared them null and void. There it stands written." His thin finger indicated the parchment with the papal seal.

The monk approached the ruler respectfully, took the document and read under the observance of two pairs of eyes. Dizzily, he took a step backwards as if he had been standing upon a high tower and had seen the railing suddenly recede.

Ezzelin seized the reeling monk by the arm and asked him succinctly, "To whom did you make your vows, Monk, to yourself or to the Church?"

"Naturally to both," yelled the old man angrily. "You and your accursed sophistries! Beware of him, son! He wants to pauperize us Vicedominis."

Without anger Ezzelin placed his right hand upon his beard and swore, "Should Vicedomini die, the monk here, his son, will be his heir and will donate —— should the lineage expire with him, and if he loves me and the city of his birth —— a hospital of such size and splendor that we shall be the envy of the Hundred Cities" —— he meant the cities of Italy. "And now, my friend, since I have rendered myself
irreproachable, may I direct a few questions to the monk? You permit?"

Now the old man fell into such a rage that he was seized by cramps. Still he did not release the monk's arm, which he had grasped anew.

Isaschar cautiously approached the pale lips with a spoon which was filled with a strong-smelling essence. The tormented old man turned his head away with an effort. "Let me be," he groaned, "you are also the prefect's doctor," and he closed his eyes.

The Jew turned his eyes, which were gleaming black and very intelligent, toward the tyrant as if imploring forgiveness for this suspicion.

"Will he regain consciousness?" asked Ezzelin.

"I believe so," replied the Jew. "He is still alive and will awaken again, but not for long, I fear. He will not see this sun descend." The tyrant used the opportunity to talk to Astorre, who busied himself about his unconscious father.

"Explain to me, Monk," said Ezzelin and combed -- his favorite gesture -- with the spread fingers of his right hand through his full beard. "How much did the three vows cost you which you swore some ten years ago? You must be about thirty years old." The monk nodded.

Astorre raised his clear eyes and replied without hesitation, "Poverty and obedience, nothing. I have no mind for possessions and I obey easily." He hesitated and blushed.

The tyrant was pleased by this manly chastity. "Did someone force or persuade you to adopt your calling?" he changed the subject.
"No," declared the monk. "Our genealogy reveals that it is a long-standing custom that of three or four sons, the last one enters the clergy, perhaps in order to guard the heritage and the power of the family, or to possess thereby an intermediary for the Vicedominis — be this as it may, the custom is old and dignified. I knew my lot from childhood on without disliking it. There was no coercion."

"And the third?" said Ezzelin, returning to the original question, and referring to the third vow. Astorre understood him.

Blushing anew, but less intensely this time, he responded, "It has not been easy for me, but I succeeded as other monks do who are well advised. And that I was by St. Anthony," he added with reverence.

"This meritorious saint, as you know, ladies and gentlemen, had lived for some years with the Franciscans in Padua," explained Dante.

"How should we not know?" bantered one of the listeners.

"Have we not worshipped the relic which swims about in the pond of the monastery there? I mean the pike which once attended the sermon of the saint, repented, denounced meat, and has continued steadfastly to this day, at his advanced age, as a strict vegetarian — he suppressed the rest of his prank for Dante had turned to him with a frown.

"And what was his advice?" inquired Ezzelin.

"To follow my calling simply and righteously," related the monk, "like a punctual service, somewhat like the service of the soldier,
which demands obedient muscles and privations, which an honest warrior
is not even permitted to regard as such: to till the soil with sweat
of my brow, to eat moderately, to fast moderately, to hear the confessions
of neither girls nor young women, to walk in the face of God, and not
to pray to his mother more ardently than the breviary prescribes."

The tyrant smiled. Then he extended his right hand as if to
admonish or bless, and said, "Fortunate one, you have a star! Your
today arises easily out of your yesterday and is transformed unawares
into your tomorrow! You are something, and nothing lowly; for you
practice the office of compassion, which I recognize, although I hold
a different one. The world follows its own laws. And if you were to
enter it now, it would be too late for you to learn them. Then your
clear star would turn into a farcical will-o'-the-wisp which would
burst hissingly under the derision of heaven after a few grotesque
leaps.

"One more thing, and this I say as the ruler of Padua. Your
life was an edification to my people, an example of renunciation. The
poorest felt consoled with his frugal meal and his hard work when you
shared them with him. If you were to throw away your robe and pay
court, as a nobleman, to a noble woman and spend with full hands from
the wealth of your house, then you would rob your people who have taken
possession of you as one of theirs; you will create discontent and
greed, and I should not wonder if your step brought forth anger, dis-
obedience, and rebellion. Such things concatenate.

"I and Padua cannot spare you. The people are attracted by
your handsome and noble appearance, besides, you display far more
fortitude than your rustic brothers. If the people in their frantic ways want to murder this one here — " he pointed to the Jew — "because he wants to assist them, which almost happened to him during the last plague, who will defend him against the raving mob until I arrive to restore order?"

Ezzelin turned to the physician with a cruel smile. "Isaschar, help me to convince the monk that even for your sake he should not discard his robe."

"Sir," lisped Isaschar, "the irresponsible scene which you punished so harshly, although justly, will hardly recur under your scepter. And, since my faith values the continuance of the family as God's highest blessing, his lordship" — he already addressed the monk thus rather than with the ecclesiastical "your reverence" — "should not remain unmarried for my sake."

Ezzelin smiled at the subtlety of the Jew. "And whither wander your thoughts, Monk?" he asked.

"They stand and persist! I wish, however, — may God forgive me this sin — my father would not awaken again, so that I will not have to be harsh to him. If only he had received the viaticum already!" He vehemently kissed the cheek of his unconscious father, who consequently regained his senses.

The revived old man sighed heavily, raised his tired eyelids, and viewed the monk beseechingly through bushy, grey brows. "How does it stand?" he inquired. "What fate have you decided for me, beloved son, heaven or hell?"
"Father," implored Astorre, his voice revealing his emotion, "your time is up! Your hour has come. Renounce all worldly thoughts and sorrows. Think of your soul. Behold, your priests" -- he meant those of the parrish church -- "are gathered in the next room and wait with the holy sacraments."

And so it was. The door of the adjoining chamber was opened cautiously, and one could see the shimmering of a weak candle-flame hardly visible in the daylight. A choir hummed softly and the thin tremble of a small bell became audible.

Now the old man, who already felt the cold floods of Lethe at his knees, clasped the monk as St. Peter had once clasped Christ on the Sea of Galilee. "You will do it for me," he babbled.

"If only I could, if only I might!" sighed the monk. "By all the saints, father, think of eternity! Relinquish that which is temporal! Your hour is here!"

This veiled refusal transformed Vicedomini's last spark of life into a blazing flame. "Ingrate! Ingrate!" he raged.

Astorre waved to the priests.

"By all devils," raved the old man, "let me alone with your kneading and anointing. I have nothing to lose; I am already damned and would remain damned in the center of a heavenly chorus as long as my son repudiates me and wantonly destroys the germ of my life!"

The terrified monk, stirred to the depth of his soul by these ghastly blasphemies, saw his father falling irrevocably into eternal damnation. Thus he opined and was thoroughly convinced, as I myself would have been in his stead. In deepest despair he fell on his knees
before the dying man, beseeching him in tears, "Sir, I implore you, have mercy on yourself and me!"

"Let the cunning schemer go his way," whispered the tyrant. The monk did not hear him.

Again he gave a signal to the astonished priests and the litany was about to commence.

But the old man drew into himself like a defiant child and shook his grey head.

"Let the sly trickster go his way," warned Ezzelin louder.

"Father, Father," sobbed the monk, and his soul melted with compassion.

"Your lordship and Christian brother," asked one of the priests now, his voice trembling, "are you in the frame of mind in which you can receive your creator and savior?" The old man remained silent.

"Are you firm in your belief in the Holy Trinity? Answer me, Sir!" inquired the clergyman another time and turned pale as a sheet, for: "Be it denied and reviled," shouted the dying man in a loud voice, "reviled and — — "

"No more," exclaimed the monk springing to his feet. "I am at your command, Sir; do with me as you choose as long as you do not throw yourself into the flames!"

The old man sighed as after a heavy strain. Then he looked about him, relieved — I almost said merrily. His groping hand seized Diana's blonde hair in an attempt to lift the kneeling woman, who rose before him. Taking her hand, which she did not refuse him, he opened the clenched fist of his son and joined the two hands.
"Valid! Before the holy sacrament!" he exulted and blessed the couple. The monk did not protest, and Diana closed her eyes.

"Now quickly, reverend Fathers, there is little time; I think I am now in a Christian frame of mind."

The monk and his bride wanted to step behind the priestly group. "Stay," murmured the dying man, "stay, so that my consoled eyes may see you together, until they grow dim." Astorre and Diana, withdrawing a few steps, had to wait, hands united, before the dimming eyes of the obstinate old man.

He murmured a short confession, received the viaticum and expired, while they anointed his soles and the priest called into the already deafened ears that magnificent, "depart Christian soul." The dead features bore the distinct expression of triumphant slyness.

While everybody around him kneeled, the tyrant remained seated and observed the sacred rite with calm attentiveness, as one might regard a strange custom or like a scientist who examines a sarcophagus, depicting the sacrificial rites of an ancient race. He approached the bed and closed the dead man’s eyes.

Then he turned toward Diana. "Noble lady," he said, "I think, we shall return home. Your parents, although informed of your deliverance, will be anxious about you. Also, you are wearing a lowly garment which does not behoove you."

"Prince, I thank and follow you," replied Diana, failing, however, to release the hand of the monk whose eyes she had thus far evaded. Now she turned her gaze completely upon her betrothed and spoke in a low but sonorous voice, while a deep glow suffused her cheeks:
"My lord and master, we could not allow our father's soul to perish. Thus I became yours. Be more faithful to me than you have been to the monastery. Your brother did not love me. Forgive me, when I speak in this manner. I am telling you the plain truth. You will possess in me a good and obedient wife. There are two traits of mine, however, which you must tolerate. I am irascible when my rights or my honor are at stake, and I abhor broken promises. Even as a child I bore these either with difficulty or not at all. I am easily contented and demand nothing out of the ordinary; but, when something has been shown and promised to me, I require fulfillment, or I lose faith and grieve at the injustice more intensely than other women. But how can I accost you thus, my lord and master, whom I scarcely know? Let me be silent now. Fare well, my husband, and give me nine days to mourn your brother." Now she slowly withdrew her hand from his and disappeared with the tyrant.

In the meantime, the priests had removed the body to the family chapel in order to lay it in state and to consecrate it.

Astorre stood alone in his forfeited robe which covered a chest filled with contrition. A host of servants, having overheard and understood the strange incident, approached the new master obsequiously and with fearful gestures. They were perplexed and intimidated less by the change of masters than by the apparent sacrilege of the broken vows and the secularization of the reverent monk. The softly read words of the papal breve had not reached their ears. The latter sought in vain to mourn for his father. Having regained his reasoning power, he was aware of a suspicion; I should say he was overcome by the vexing certainty that his dying father had deceived his good faith and abused
his compassion. In the despair of the old man, he detected the ruse of cunning and, in the violent blasphemies, a calculated game at the threshold of death. Reluctantly, almost with hostility, his thoughts turned to his newly gained wife. He was tempted by the sly monkish thought to love her not with his heart, but merely as a substitute for his deceased brother. His sound judgement, however, and his honest mind rejected such a disgraceful subterfuge. Since he now regarded her as his wife, he could not ward off a certain astonishment that his spouse had confronted him with such a pertinent address and such harsh frankness, and that she had so soberly expounded her views without veil or cloud. She was a much hardier and more real figure than the gentle apparitions of legend. He had imagined women to be gentler.

Now he suddenly perceived his robe and the discrepancy between it and his emotions and reflections. He felt shamed by the garment which began to vex him. "Bring me worldly garments," he demanded. He was immediately surrounded by busy servants, from whose midst he soon emerged in the garb of his drowned brother who was approximately of the same height.

At this moment his father's jester, who was called Gocciola, fell on his knees before him and payed him homage, not to request continuance of his service as the other servants had done, but to beg permission to change his calling. He claimed to be tired of the world; his hair was greying, he remarked, and it would behoove him ill to enter the beyond with cap and bells. With these whining words, he possessed himself of the discarded robe which the other servants had not dared to touch. But his befuddled brain turned a somersault and
he added licentiously, "Only once more should I like to eat amarelles before I bid farewell to the world and its delusions. A wedding appears to be imminent, I believe." He licked the corners of his mouth with his greyish tongue. Then he bowed before the monk, shook his bells and leapt away dragging the robe behind him.

"Amarelle, or amare," explained Dante, "is the name of the Paduan wedding pastry, so called because of its bitter almond taste and at the same time alluding gracefully to the verb of the first conjugation." Here the narrator paused, shaded his forehead and eyes with his hand and pondered the continuation of his fable.

Meanwhile, the major-domo of the prince, an Alsatian named Burcardo, approached Gangrande with measured steps, awkward bows and rambling apologies regarding his interruption of the entertainment and asked for orders concerning some domestic affair. Germans were in those days no rare sight at the Ghibellinic courts of Italy; indeed they were in great demand and were preferred to the natives because of their honesty and their innate talent for ceremonies and customs.

When Dante raised his head again, he perceived the Alsatian and listened to his Italian. Burcardo's stubborn confusion of the hard and soft sounds delighted the court but offended the sensitive ear of the poet intensely. Then his eyes rested with visible pleasure upon the two young men, Ascanio and the armor-clad warrior. Finally he contemplated the two women, Diana, the lady of the house, who had become more vivid and whose marble cheeks had reddened slightly, and
Antiope, Cangrande's concubine, a pretty and natural creature. Then he continued:

Behind the mansion of the Vicedomini a broad area stretched to the base of the city walls. Now that the illustrious family has long been extinct, the entire place is changed. So extensive was this area that it contained grazing lands for herds of cattle, game enclosures, ponds abounding with fish, deep shadowy woods and sunny vine-covered arbors.

On a bright morning, seven days after the funeral, the monk Astorre -- he had retained this name among the Paduans, although he had forsaken the cloth during his short stay on this earth -- sat in the black shadow of a cedar, his back against the trunk, and stretched the buckles of his shoes into the burning sunlight. Facing a fountain which gushed a cool flood through the mouth of an unconcerned mask, he sat or lay near a stone bench, having preferred the soft cushion of the luxuriant grass.

While he was meditating or daydreaming, I know not which, two young men sprang from dust covered horses onto the sunlit square before the mansion. One was clad in armour; the other, although in his traveling habit, was meticulously dressed. The riders were Ascanio and Germano, the ruler's favorites and also the monk's former playmates, with whom he had studied and frolicked until his fifteenth year, the beginning of his novitiate. Ezzelin had sent them to his brother-in-law, the Emperor Frederick.
Dante paused and bowed before the great apparition.

The two were returning to the tyrant carrying imperial orders as well as the news of the day: a copy from the imperial chancery of a pastoral letter addressed to the Christian clergy, in which the Holy Father accused the keen-witted emperor, before the eyes of the world, of utter godlessness.

Although pressed for time and entrusted with important orders and the forementioned ominous document, the two could not bring themselves to gallop past the home of the playmate of their youth. In the last inn before Padua, where they had fed and watered their horses without dismounting, they learned from the gossiping landlord about the grave accident which had befallen the city and the even greater scandal, about the capsized wedding barque and the discarded robe of the monk. They had learned of almost every detail with the exception of the union of Astorre and Diana, which had not as yet been made public. Indestructible bonds which tie us to the playmates of our youth! Struck by Astorre's strange fate, the two could not find rest until they had seen their regained friend with their own eyes. For years they had only occasionally encountered the monk in the streets and greeted him in a friendly fashion, although they had become somewhat estranged due to their sincere reverence for his calling.

In the courtyard of the palace they met Gocciola, who sat, with dangling legs, upon a low wall and gnawed on a bun. He led them into the garden. Waddling ahead, the jester made no mention of the tragic fate which had befallen his master's house. Instead, he informed
the youths of his own affairs, which to him seemed far more significant. He disclosed his ardent desire for a blessed end and almost suffocated when he swallowed the remainder of his bun without making use of his decaying teeth. The frantic grimaces of the jester and the ludicrous aspect of the latter's monastic aspirations evoked a peal of laughter, so gay that even the brilliance of the sun seemed intensified.

Hoping to rid himself of the importunate company, Ascanio proceeded to chaff the "Droplet." "You unfortunate wretch, you will never reach your cell because my uncle, the tyrant, has come to regard you with covetous eyes. He has four jesters, whom he calls the Stoic, the Epicurean, the Platonist, and the Sceptic. These four, when the tyrant wishes to banter, must place themselves in the corners of a hall with a vaulted ceiling which depicts the planets and the various constellations. Then, my uncle, clad in his robe, steps into the center, claps his hands, and the philosophers leap from corner to corner. Two days ago the Stoic died howling and whining because the insatiable fool had devoured pounds of noodles. My uncle intimated to me in passing that he intends to replace him, by requesting you, Gocciola, as his share of your master's inheritance. Ezzelin covets you. Who knows, he might be standing behind you this very moment." This was an allusion to the tyrant's ubiquity, which kept the Paduans trembling in constant fear. Gocciola shrieked and turned around as if he felt the tyrant's hand upon his shoulder, and although there was nothing behind him except his shadow, he fled with chattering teeth to the nearest hiding place.
"I shall cross out the jesters," Dante interrupted himself, motioning with his hand as if he were writing his tale instead of relating it. "This incident, although Ascanio was lying, is still unnatural. It is entirely unthinkable that such a grave and basically noble mind as Ezzelino should have fed noodles to jesters and delighted in their idiocies." This direct thrust was aimed at his host, upon whose coat Gocciola was sitting, grinning at the poet.

Cangrande did not parry. He promised himself tacitly, however, to repay this debt with interest at the first opportunity.

Contentedly, almost gaily, Dante continued his narrative.

Finally, the two discovered the secularized monk, who, as I said before, was leaning with his back against the trunk of a pine.

"Against the trunk of a cedar, Dante," corrected the princess, whose attention had been captured.

-- Against the trunk of a cedar. He was so engrossed in his daydreams that he did not notice the two as they approached him. Ascanio quickly plucked a blade of grass with which he playfully tickled the monk's nose, causing him to sneeze violently three times. Astorre cordially grasped the hands of his former playmates and pulled them down beside him onto the lawn. "What do you think of my predicament?" he inquired in a tone of voice which sounded more timid than defiant.
"First, my sincere praise to your prior and your monastery," jested Ascanio. "They have shielded you successfully. You look younger than both of us, although perhaps the close fitting garb and beardless chin may have enhanced the youthfulness of your appearance. You are handsome! You are lying under this giant cedar, resembling the first man, whom God, if we are to believe the scholars, created as a thirty year old." Perceiving that his playfulness caused the monk to blush, he adopted an innocent expression and continued, "And I am truly the last one to reproach you for having discarded your robe, for to perpetuate one's lineage is the desire of all mortals."

"It was neither my wish nor my voluntary resolve," confessed the monk truthfully. "Reluctantly I acceded to the will of my dying father."

"Honestly?" smiled Ascanio. "Tell this to no one but us who love you, Astorre. Others would scorn or ridicule this dependence. And since we are mentioning ridicule, I beg of you, Astorre, pay heed that you achieve the transformation from monk to man without giving offense to good taste. This precarious transmutation requires utter caution and can only be accomplished gradually. Accept my advice. Spend, for example, a short year at the emperor's court, whence messengers travel constantly to Padua and back. Have Ezzelin send you to Palermo. There, beside the most eminent knights and the most unprejudiced of men -- I am referring to Frederick II -- you will also come to understand women. Thus you will vanquish the monk, who is still wont to either idolize or scorn them. The emperor's pervading spirit has left its hue upon court and city. The wild, turbulent and
extravagant life which exists here in Padua under my uncle the tyrant presents you with an erroneous picture of this world. Palermo offers a truer one. There, under the most humane of all rulers, gaiety and gravity, virtue and lust, loyalty and inconstancy, faith and intelligent scepticism are blended in the proper proportions. There you can squander the course of a year with the opposite or opposing sex in permissible or pardonable fashion — the monk frowned — participate in a campaign only to learn once more how to handle sword and shield, without recklessly exposing yourself to danger — remember your destiny — and return to us as a man who is in command of himself as well as of others. Thus you will retain the cheerful expression of your brown eyes, which, by Aurora's torch, shine and sparkle since you have left the monastery."

"He must marry a Swabian girl at the emperor's court," advised Germano good-naturedly. "They are more pious and more dependable than our women."

"Be silent," threatened Ascanio. "Do not remind me of those tedious damsels with their blonde braids." But the monk responded by pressing Germano's right hand which he still held in his own.

"Frankly, Germano, what do you think?"

"Of what?" asked the latter brusquely.

"Of my new station."

"Astorre, my friend," replied the bearded warrior, somewhat embarrassed, "once a step has been taken, there is no more need for further judgement or advice. You then assert yourself wherever you stand. Yet, if you must know my opinion, Astorre, lack of loyalty,
a broken vow, desertion, etc., are ill regarded in Germania. Your case, however, because of your dying father, is quite different. There is no parallel. Astorre, my dear friend, your decision was quite justified, although the reverse would have been more commendable. Such is my opinion," he concluded candidly.

"Then had you been present, you would have refused me your sister's hand, Germano?"

The latter was utterly astounded. "My sister's hand? Diana, who is mourning your brother?"

"The same; we are betrothed."

"Excellent," exclaimed the sophisticated Ascanio, and "Fine," added Germano. "Let me embrace you, brother-in-law!" This iron clad warrior was urbane despite his straight-forward nature. But he suppressed a sigh. As much as he esteemed his austere sister, he found it difficult to visualize her as the wife of the monk who sat at his side.

He twirled his mustache thoughtfully while Ascanio changed the subject. "First, Astorre, we must become reacquainted," he chatted gaily. "No less than fifteen of your years spent in pious contemplation separate our childhood from the present. They may not have altered our being essentially. Nothing does. Yet, we have matured. Germano, for example, has acquired great military fame, but I have to accuse him of having become half German. He -- Ascanio bent his arm as if drinking from a goblet -- and afterwards he becomes melancholy or quarrelsome. He also scorns our sweet Italian. 'I shall speak to you in German,' he boasts, grumbling like a bear in this inhuman tongue. Then his servants turn pale, his creditors flee, and our Paduan girls turn
their stately backs on him. Therefore, he may have remained as virginal as you, Astorre," inferred Ascanio, cordially placing his hand upon the monk's shoulder.

Germano laughed heartily and replied, pointing at Ascanio.

"And he has found his destiny by becoming the consummate courtier:"

"There you err, Germano," contradicted Ezzelin's favorite.

"My destiny is to enjoy life cheerfully and graciously." He proceeded to prove his assertion and in an authoritative yet friendly voice, he called the gardener's child whom he saw at some distance as she stole past them while glancing furtively at her new master. The pretty lass, who appeared more roguish than timid, carried upon her head a basket brimming with grapes and figs. While taking a grape out of the basket with his right hand, Ascanio placed his left around the girl's slender waist. At the same time his mouth sought her full lips. "I am thirsty," he said. The young maid feigned bashfulness but held still lest her basket overturn. Crossly, the monk turned his back on the frivolous display, and the frightened girl, upon seeing this harsh monkish gesture, fled, strewing her path with rolling fruits. Ascanio, still holding the grape, picked up two more and offered one to Germano, who, preferring this fruit fermented, flung it scornfully into the grass. Ascanio handed the other to the monk, who at first left it untouched, although he finally tasted it.

Ascanio, who was amused at the squeamishness of the thirty year old monk, threw himself down beside him on the lawn. "Courtiers," he continued, "do not believe that, Astorre; quite the reverse is true. I am the only one who exhorts my uncle, gently though intelligibly,
not to become unmerciful and to remain a human being..."

"He is only just and true to himself!" remarked Gemano.

"Justice!" complained Ascanio, "logic! Padua is an imperial fief. Ezzelin is its prefect. Those whom he dislikes he considers rebels against the empire. High treason is punished by — he could not bring himself to continue his sentence. "Detestable," he murmured. "And why should we Paduans be prevented from leading a life of our own beneath this radiant sky, why this nebulous phantom of an empire which impedes our very breath? I do not speak in my behalf. I am chained to my uncle. If the emperor dies, God protect him, all of Italy will hurl itself upon my uncle with curses and imprecations and strangle the nephew in the process." Ascanio regarded the cloudless sky above the luxuriant soil and sighed.

"Both of us," complemented Gemano coldly. "But that will wait. Ezzelin has obtained a definite prophecy. Paul of Bagdad, who sweeps the dust of Padua's narrow streets with his long beard, and Guido Bonatti, although these two envious pundits usually contradict each other, have unanimously unriddled a new and strange constellation: sooner or later a son of the peninsula will acquire Italy's undivided crown with the assistance of a Germanic emperor, who, for his part, will unite all Germans beyond the Alps into one strong nation. Is Frederick this emperor? Is Ezzelin this king? Only God in his omniscience knows the answer, but, on the strength of this prophecy, the tyrant has staked his glory and our heads."

"Chimeras!" uttered Ascanio angrily, while the monk marveled at the might of the stars, the far-reaching ambition of rulers, and the
maelstrom of the world. Yet he was frightened by the spectre of the tyrant's incipient cruelty for he had been wont to esteem Ezzelin as justice incarnate.

Ascanio answered his silent doubts by continuing, "May both meet with a bad end, the frowning Guido and the bearded pagan. They induce my uncle to yield to his whims and desires by persuading him that he is only doing that which is necessary. Have you ever observed him during his frugal meal, Germano? He uses the three or four drops of the Sicilian wine which he permits himself to color the water in his transparent crystal goblet. Then his attentive gaze pursues these symbols of blood as they spread, gradually clouding the purity of the water. And so much does he love to close the eyelids of the deceased that it has become a matter of courtesy to leave this sad performance to him and to invite the prefect to the various obsequies as if they were banquets. Ezzelin, my prince, do not become cruel," exclaimed the youth overwhelmed by his emotions.

"Fear not, Nephew," sounded a voice behind him. It was Ezzelin, who had approached them unnoticed, and although he had not been eavesdropping, he had overheard Ascanio's last woeful outcry.

The three youths rose quickly and greeted the ruler, who seated himself on the bench. His face was as calm as the mask of the fountain.

He called Ascanio and Germano to account, "How did it occur that you as my messengers visited him" — he nodded slightly toward the monk — "before me?"

"He is our old friend and has met with a strange fate,"
apologized his nephew, and Ezzelin let it pass. With a low bow, Ascanio handed the parchments to his uncle, who deposited everything in his pocket with the exception of the papal bull.

"See there," he said, "the latest news. Read it, Ascanio. Your eyes are younger than mine." Ascanio recited the apostolic brief, while Ezzelin stroked his beard and listened with diabolical pleasure.

The triple-crowned author of the letter commenced by calling the emperor an apocalyptic ogre. "I have heard that before. It is absurd," interrupted the tyrant. "The pontiff labelled me with the same immoderation until I exhorted him to chide me, Ezzelin the Roman, henceforth in the language of the classics. What does he call me this time? I am curious. There must be some passage, Ascanio, where he reproaches my father-in-law for his evil association with me. Hand me the brief." He took the bull and soon found what he expected.

"Here the pope accuses the emperor of loving the husband of his daughter, Ezzelino da Romano, the vilest malefactor on this earth. Quite correct," commended Ezzelin, returning the letter to Ascanio. "Now let us hear of the emperor's godlessness, nephew," he smiled.

Ascanio read that according to Frederick only two true gods exist in this insane world: nature and reason. Ezzelin shrugged his shoulders.

Ascanio continued, Frederic was also supposed to have said, "three charlatans, Moses, Mohammed, and - -" he hesitated - - "had deceived the world." "Superficial," reproved Ezzelin. "They followed their stars; but said or not, the arrow will find its mark, and it will gain the pontiff an army and a fleet. Proceed."
Next followed a curious tale: Frederic, riding through a rippling wheat-field, was supposed to have bantered with his retinue and to have improvised a verse which blasphemously alluded to the sacramental host.

So viele Aehren, so viele Götter sind,
Sie schießen empor in der Sonne geschwind
Und wiegen die goldenen Häupter im Wind —

Ezzelin pondered. "Strange," he whispered. "I remember this little verse. It was quite authentic. The emperor recited it cheerfully as we rode past the temple ruins of Enna through those luxuriant fields with which Ceres has blessed the Sicilian soil. I remember it with the same clarity which prevailed on that day on the island. I did not acquaint the pope with this gay little epigram. I am too staid for that. Who did? I ask you to pass judgement. There were three of us riding, and I recall distinctly that the third one was Peter de Vinea, the emperor's inseparable companion. Did the pious chancellor fear for his soul and relieve his conscience with a letter to Rome? Is one of the Saracens leaving for the capital today? Yes?

Quickly, Ascanio, I shall dictate a few lines to you."

Ascanio produced a stylus and a small slate, and wrote, kneeling on his right knee while balancing the slate on his left.

"Illustrious Sire, and beloved father-in-law: A brief note. The little verse in the bull, - - you are too witty to repeat yourself - - was heard by only two persons, myself and your Peter. I was on the island a year ago, you had summoned me to your court and we were riding through the wheat fields of Enna. Remember the rooster in the gospel
who confirmed Peter's betrayal. For your own sake and mine, Sire, test your chancellor with a pointed question."

"Nefarious innuendo! I refuse to write this! My very hand trembles," exclaimed Ascanio, turning pale. "I shall not place the chancellor on the rack," and he threw down his stylus.

"It is a question of duty," remarked Germano dryly, lifted up the stylus and concluded the note which he placed under his helmet. "It will be dispatched today," he said. "I have never liked the Capuan, his eyes are evasive."

Astorre shivered despite the warming rays of the noonday sun. For the first time since he had abandoned the sheltered life of the monastery, the monk vaguely began to grasp the envy and treachery of this world. Rising from the stone bench, Ezzelin accosted him with severity and awakened him from his brooding.

"Speak, Monk, why do you hide in the seclusion of your home? You have not left it since you donned secular garb. Do you shun public opinion? Confront it bravely and it will recede, but move in flight and it will fix itself to your tracks like a pack of howling dogs. Have you called on your bride Diana? The week of mourning is past. I advise you to invite your relations and wed Diana this very day."

"And then quickly away to your remotest castle," concluded Ascanio.

"That is not my advise," forbade the tyrant. "No fear. No flight. Today the wedding, tomorrow the masquerade. Valete!" He departed, beckoning Germano to follow him.
"May I interrupt," inquired Cangrande, who had been courteous enough to await a natural pause in the narration.

"It is your privilege," retorted the Florentine morosely.

"Do you believe the immortal emperor capable of that saying concerning the three great charlatans?"

"Non liquet."

"I mean, according to your innermost convictions?"

Dante answered in the negative by shaking his head emphatically.

"And still you condemned him as godless and banned him to the sixth circle of your hell? How could you? Justify yourself."

"Sire," replied the Florentine, "the Comedy addresses my own age, which, rightly or wrongly, ascribes the most atrocious blasphemies to this august mind. I am impotent in the face of such bigotry. Posterity perhaps will judge differently."

"Dante," questioned Cangrande once more, "do you believe Petrus de Vinea innocent of treason?"

"Non liquet."

"I mean, according to your innermost convictions?"

Dante shook his head again.

"And you permit the traitor in your Comedy to assert his innocence?"

The Florentine vindicated himself, "Sire, should I, in the absence of decisive evidence, accuse a son of the peninsula of treason, when so much deceit and guile dwell in our midst?"

"Dante, oh Dante," exclaimed the prefect, "you condemn where you suspect innocence and acquit where you surmise guilt." Then he
continued the narrative playfully:

"The monk and Ascanio also left the garden and entered the hall." But Dante interposed:

Not at all. Instead they ascended the tower and entered the same chamber which Astorre had occupied as a youth before his novitiate. He still avoided the large and ostentatious chambers of the palace which he had not as yet come to regard as his own property. Neither had he touched the gold which his father had bequeathed to him. Obeying Ascanio's beckoning, the Majordomo Burcardo, stifflegged and sullen, followed at a discreet distance.

Cangrande's majordomo, who bore the same name, had, after the acquittal of some domestic duty, returned to the hall and listened curiously, for he had noticed that the story dealt with well-known personages. When he heard his own name mentioned and found himself unexpectedly participating in the events of the Novelle, he considered this abuse of his honorable person audacious and utterly unseemly, especially since it came from this scholar, this tolerated exile, who merely enjoyed the hospitality of his master. Had he not prepared for him the most modest room in the upper story of the palace after due and just consideration of the circumstances and his social standing? What the others had smilingly accepted rankled him. He frowned and rolled his eyes. The Florentine was amused by the serious face and the indignation of the pedant and continued his story unperturbed.
"Honorable Sir," Ascanio asked the majordomo — did I mention that he was an Alsatian by birth — "How does one wed in Padua? Astorre and I are as inexperienced as children in this science."

The majordomo struck a stiff pose and stared at his master without so much as glancing at Ascanio, who in his opinion had no right to command him in any way.

"Distinguendum est," he said solemnly. "It is to be distinguished between courtship, nuptials and wedding ceremony."

"Where is that written?" bantered Ascanio.

"Ecce," replied the majordomo, opening a large book which he carried at all times. "Here!" He pointed with the outstretched finger of his left hand to the title, which read: The Ceremonies of Padova, Compiled through Meticulous Research for the Benefit of All Honorable Persons, by Messer Godoscalco Burcardo. He leafed through the volume and read, "Section one, the courtship. Paragraph one: 'A sincere suitor is accompanied by a friend of equal social standing, who serves as a valid witness —"

"For the sake of my unavailing patron," interrupted Ascanio impatiently, "let us alone with ante and post, with courtship and wedding ceremony, and enlighten us with regard to the nuptials."

"In Batova," crowed the irritated Alsatian, whose agitated frame of mind intensified his barbarous pronunciation, "in Batova, the bridegroom's majordomo, accompanied by six servants, invites the twelve noble families — he enumerated them from memory — ten days before the wedding, not earlier nor later. In the presence of this august assembly the rings are exchanged, and Cybrian wine and amarelles, the wedding tarts, are served."
"May heaven protect our throats," laughed Ascanio, and snatching the book from the majordomo's hands, he perused the list and found the names of six of the twelve patres familias erased, as well as the names of some of the younger family members. These might have perished because they had become involved in some conspiracy against the tyrant.

"Heed well, old man," commanded Ascanio, speaking for the monk, who, reclining in an armchair and absorbed in thought, suffered Ascanio's well-meant tutelage. "You are to call upon these six idlers this very hour, immediately, without delay, you understand? Invite them for this afternoon."

"Ten days before," reiterated Burcardo majestically, as if promulgating some imperial decree.

"Today, for today, you pedant!"

"Impossible," retorted the majordomo calmly, "do you alter the course of the planets?"

"Are you defying me? Does your neck itch, old man?" warned Ascanio with an odd smile.

That was sufficient. Burcardo understood instantly. Ezzelin had commanded, and the most obstinate pedant submitted without mumbling under the iron scepter of the tyrant.

"Do not invite Olympia and Antiope Canossa."

"Why not those two?" asked the monk suddenly as if aroused by magical power.

He stared fixedly and his mental eye reproduced a vision which captivated his very soul.
"Because the Countess Olympia is bereft of reason, Astorre.
Don't you know the story of the unfortunate woman? In those days you
were still in swaddling clothes, I mean in your robe. It was three
years ago in the fall."

"In the summer, Ascanio, precisely three years ago," contra-
dicted the monk.

"You are right; then you are familiar with this story? But
how could you be? At that time Count Canossa conspired with the papal
legate, was found out, arrested and sentenced to death. The countess
beseeched my uncle on bended knees, but he wrapped himself in silence.
She was then deceived in the vilest manner by a greedy chamberlain
who, seeking a reward, led her to believe that the count would receive
a last minute pardon. This did not occur, and when they presented the
decapitated body to the countess, thus hurling her from hope to utter
despair, she leapt from her window. Miraculously, she was not injured,
if we disregard a sprained ankle. But from that day on, her reason
was shattered. Normal emotions succeed each other imperceptibly as
the dimming light blends with the approaching dusk. Hers alternate at
a breathtaking pace from light to dark twelve times in twelve hours.
Spurred by constant restlessness, the wretched woman hastens from her
desolated palace in the city to her mansion in the country, and back
to the city on an eternal, senseless errand. Today she wishes to see
her child married to the son of a tenant, since only lowness of birth
affords protection and peace; tomorrow no suitor is noble enough for
her daughter. Needless to say, her presence discourages all courtship."
Had Ascanio during his narration so much as glanced at the monk, he would have desisted in astonishment, for the monk's countenance had become transfigured with compassion and pity.

Heedlessly Ascanio continued, "When the tryant passes Olympia's house on his way to the hunt, she rushes to the window, expecting him to dismount before her threshold in order to return her to his court and to end her disgrace and affliction. Suffice it to mention that this is furthest from his mind. She envisions herself impoversihed through the confiscation of her possessions which Ezzelin has never touched. Thus, she frantically alternates between extreme hot and excessive cold. Not only is she insane, but the ideas which she drags into the maelstrom of her mind are also insane. Since she has sporadic moments of lucidity, during which intervals she can express herself quite wittily and pertinently, she is at times taken seriously, which permits her to cause trouble wherever she goes. To invite her to the celebration is out of the question. It is a miracle that her child Antiope, whom she idolizes and whose marriage constitutes the focal point of her imagination, can retain her sanity under such trying conditions. But the girl, who is just reaching maturity and who is tolerably pretty, has a strong constitution..." and in this fashion Ascanio continued.

Astorre, however, was absorbed in his dream. This I say because the past is a dream. The monk saw what he had experienced three years ago: a block, beside it the executioner and himself. He had taken the place of a sick colleague and expected to give spiritual comfort to the condemned man. The Count Canossa appeared in chains. He struggled, either because he believed the pardon to be imminent,
since he already confronted the block, or because he simply loved life and abhorred the grave. He treated the monk crossly and rejected his prayers contemptuously. A terrible struggle had to ensue if he continued to strain and to resist. He held the hand of his daughter, who, unnoticed by the guards, had rushed toward him, and was now frantically clinging to her father while she fixed her expressive eyes beseechingly upon the monk. The count pressed the girl firmly to his chest as if this young life could shield him against destruction, but the executioner forced his head down upon the block. Then the child placed her head beside that of her father. Did she intend to arouse the executioner's compassion? Did she want to encourage her father to suffer the inevitable? Did she want to murmur the name of some saint into the ear of her unreconciled father? Was this unbelievable act the result of her overflowing filial love or a mere emotional impulse? Did she simply want to die with him?

Now the vision became so lucid that the monk perceived immediately before him the sunburnt neck of the count beside the child's snowy white neck, which was covered by downy brown-gold curls. The little girl's graceful neck was of exceptional beauty. The monk shuddered, expecting the falling blade to miss, and he experienced the same intense emotional strain as the first time, except that now he remained conscious. When the terrible scene had actually occurred, he had fainted and did not regain his senses until all was over.

The jarring voice of the majordomo awakened him from his trance, "Does my master have any orders for me?" he inquired, for he bore Ascanio's commands only with great difficulty.
"Bureardo," replied Astorre gently, "do not forget to invite the two ladies Canossa, both mother and daughter. It shall not be said that the monk rejects those who are shunned by the world. I honor the right of the unfortunate to be invited and received by me." Here the majordomo agreed, eagerly nodding his head. "It would grieve them bitterly in their present state were I to omit them."

"By no means!" warned Ascanio. "Don't do this, I beg you. Your betrothal is adventurous enough as it is, and adventures inspire those who are mentally ill. Her kind will undertake something unbelievable. She will hurl some crazed invective into the celebration which has already agitated all of Padua."

According to Burcardo, however, a Canossa, sane or insane, was entitled to assemble with the twelve. And since he believed that he owed obedience only to the Vicedomini, he bowed deeply before the monk and said, "Your Lordship alone I obey." With that he departed.

"O monk, monk!" exclaimed Ascanio. "You carry compassion into a world which scarcely leaves kindness unpunished."

"That is human nature," added Dante, "Often a prophetic light shows us the edge of an abyss, but then comes the mind and subtilizes and smiles and minimizes the danger."

Ascanio also rationalized to calm his conscience. What relationship exists between the insane woman and the monk in whose life she played not even the slightest role? And in the end if she gives rise to laughter, it will spice the amarelles. He was wholly unaware
of what went through Astorre's mind, and even if he had guessed and probed, the monk would not have relinquished his chaste secret.

Thus Ascanio let it rest, and remembering the tyrant's order to end the monk's seclusion, he asked merrily, "Are the rings taken care of, Astorre? For it is written in the Ceremonies, section two, paragraph so and so: the rings are to be exchanged." The monk answered indifferently that such could probably be found among the family jewels.

"Not so," retorted Ascanio. "If you take my advice, you will buy Diana a new one. Who knows what stories adhere to the used ones. Throw the past behind you. It is also quite fitting. You will buy a ring from the Florentine on the bridge. Do you know the man? But how should you? Listen, when returning with Germano to the city this morning, we were compelled to dismount when we arrived at the bridge because it was teeming with people. There on the weather-beaten pile-head of the only bridge leading across the canal, a goldsmith had opened his shop and all of Padua haggled and bartered in front of it. Why on the narrow bridge, Astorre, when there are so many other locations? Because in Florence you will find the jewelry stores on the Arno bridge. Because, and you can appreciate here the logic of fashion, where does one buy fine jewelry, but from a Florentine, and where does a Florentine exhibit his wares, if not upon a bridge? He would not have it otherwise. Otherwise his merchandise would be coarse, and he himself would not be a genuine Florentine. This one, however, is genuine. Above his booth you can read in gigantic letters: Niccolo Lippo dei Lippi, the Goldsmith, Exiled from his Homeland because of a Corrupt
and Unjust Sentence. Follow me to the bridge, Astorre."

The monk did not refuse since he himself might have felt the need to transgress the self-imposed boundaries of his estate, which he had not left since he discarded his robe.

"Did you take money along, Monk," bantered Ascanio. "Your vow of poverty has become invalid, and the Florentine will overcharge you." He tapped at the small sliding glass window of the steward's office, which was situated on the downstairs corridor through which they were striding. A wily, wrinkled face appeared, and with a fawning bow the Vicedomini's steward, a Genoese, if I am correctly informed, handed his master a pouch filled with Byzantine gold coins. Then a servant helped the monk into one of the comfortable Paduan summer cloaks. In the street Astorre covered his face with the hood of the cloak, not to protect himself against the burning rays of the sun but merely obeying an old habit. He turned to his companion, "Ascanio," he said in a friendly tone of voice; "I shall go on this errand alone. The purchase of a simple gold ring does not transcend my monkish mentality. You can rely upon me. I shall see you at my wedding this afternoon." Ascanio departed, calling over his shoulder, "One, not two. Diana will give you yours, remember that, Astorre." This was one of the numerous subtleties which Ascanio was wont to utter in the course of a day.

If you ask me why the monk dismissed his friend, the answer is: he did not want to mar the divine inspiration which the young martyrress of filial love had awakened within him.
Astorre had reached the bridge which despite the glowing sun was crowded with throngs of people approaching the shop of the Florentine from both banks. The monk remained unrecognized under his hood, although the uncovered part of his countenance was the object of occasional inquisitive glances. Nobility and citizenry alike sought access to the store. Distinguished ladies descended from their litters and permitted themselves to be pushed and pressed in order to purchase a few bracelets or a fillet of the newest fashion. The Florentine had announced throughout the city that he would close his business today following the Ave Maria. He had no such intention, but a lie comes easy to a Florentine.

Finally, the monk, wedged in by the multitude, stood before the shop. The hard-pressed merchant, who was reaping tenfold profits, regarded him with cunning, immediately recognizing the novice. "What can I do for his Lordship's distinguished taste?" he inquired. "Give me a simple gold ring," replied the monk. The merchant reached for a goblet which, according to Florentine art and custom, bore some elaborate design. He shook the cup, which contained hundreds of rings, and offered it to Astorre.

The monk became visibly embarrassed. He did not know the size of the finger which he was to adorn with a wedding band and, taking out several, he hesitated perceptibly in his choice of a larger and smaller one. The Florentine could not suppress his derision, since on the Arno ill-concealed raillery seems an inherent part of the speech of the people. "Is the gentleman unfamiliar with the finger which he certainly must have carressed frequently enough?" he asked with an innocent
face. Canny as he was, he immediately corrected himself, being secretly of the opinion that the suspicion of chastity constituted an insult, while it was flattering to be suspected of immorality. He handed Astorre two rings, one larger and one smaller, which he slipped adroitly into the monk's hand. "For the two loves of your grace," he whispered, bowing obsequiously.

Before the monk was able to take umbrage at this frivolous remark, he received a vehement blow. He had been hit by the armour plate of a steed so violently, that he dropped the smaller of the two rings. At the same moment the deafening blare of eight tubas resounded. Eight members of the prefect's German body guard rode in two rows across the bridge, forcing the crowd against the stone railing.

As soon as they had passed, the monk, concealing the larger ring under his cloak, rushed after the smaller one which had rolled through the hoofs of the mounts.

The center of the old bridge was hollowed by constant wear, thus the ring rolled downhill and gained sufficient speed to reach the opposite side. Here a young lady's maid, named Isotta, or, as they shorten the name in Padua, Sotte, had caught the shining object at the risk of being trampled to death by the horses. "A lucky ring!" rejoiced the imprudent girl, and with childish gaiety she slipped her find on the fourth finger of the left hand of her mistress. In Padua, as well as in Verona, if I remember correctly, the wedding ring is worn on the left hand.

Her mistress was both annoyed and amused at the maid's prank. She endeavored in vain to pull the tightly fitting band from her finger.
Suddenly the monk confronted her raising both arms in joyous amazement. He was deeply touched when he recognized in the matured young woman before him the same child whose slender neck he had once seen on the block.

While the girl's questioning eyes regarded him with dismay, he was hesitant to ask her for the ring which she struggled to remove from her finger. Yet it had to be. He was about to address her when two armour-clad arms pulled him upward. In an instant he felt himself being lifted onto a stamping steed. He heard good-natured laughter.

"Let us see if you can still ride." It was Germano. He had been commanded to lead the German guard to a near-by field where they were to be reviewed by the prefect. When he had unexpectedly perceived his friend and brother-in-law on the bridge, he permitted himself the innocent joke of lifting him onto one of the horses from which a young Swabian had quickly dismounted. The fiery steed, resenting the new rider, reared instantly; the other horses shied on the narrow bridge, and Astorre, struggling to remain in the saddle, lost his hood and was recognized by the crowd, which receded in terror. "The monk! The monk!" they shouted, pointing at him from all sides, but the small martial troop had already left the bridge and disappeared around the next corner. The unpaid jeweler ran after the monk, but he soon halted in fear for his merchandise, which was guarded only by a young lad. Soon, however, he was informed by the crowd that his customer had been a well-known personage whom he would be able to contact without difficulty. He was told how he could find the palace of the Vicedomini where he later went three times to collect his money. The first two times he was unsuccessful because of the confusion which prevailed.
there. The third time he found the tyrant's seal affixed to the locked gate. Since he was unwilling to deal with the latter, he renounced his money.

The two young women walking in the opposite direction of the riders were now joined by a third one who had been separated from them by the crowd. The latter, an odd looking, prematurely aged woman, with deep wrinkles, grey unkempt hair, and agitated features, carelessly dragged the train of her dress through the dust of the street.

This old woman, apparently the mother of the young girl, listened eagerly to Sotte's foolish account of what had occurred on the bridge. Astorre -- she had heard his name in the shouts of the multitude -- Astorre, the monk, who, as the entire city knew, was compelled to seek a wife, had furtively rolled a wedding band toward Antiope. She, Sotte, understanding the gesture of providence and the cunning of the monk, had slipped it on the dear girl's finger. Then, when the monk approached Antiope, she had chastely desired to return the ring.

Here, at last, the astonished Antiope was able to interrupt and to implore her mother not to heed Isotte's silly gossip. But in vain. In the middle of the street Olympia raised her arms toward the sky, thanking St. Anthony for having granted her daily prayers and for having exceeded all her expectations by presenting her darling with such a virtuous nobleman, one of his own sons. Her uninhibited conduct caused passersby to laugh and to point to their foreheads. The bewildered Antiope made every effort to dissuade her mother from believing such blatant exaggerations, but the old woman would not listen and continued to build her castle in the air.
Thus the women reached the gate of the mansion of the Canossas where they met a meticulously dressed majordomo followed by six elaborately clad servants. Burcardo stepped back respectfully, permitting Olympia to ascend the staircase before him. Having arrived in a gloomy hall, he stiltedly bowed thrice and spoke slowly and solemnly, "Your Ladyship, I am sent by Astorre Vicedomini to respectfully invite you to his wedding which will take place...this afternoon..." It pained him not to able to say "in ten days".

He, however, -- she imitated him -- had placed his left hand above his heart while raising his right with a gesture which meant in all of Italy: keep it beloved.

Dante paused. He pondered the continuance of his narrative, his disciplined mind sifting and simplifying. After a while Cangrande addressed him.

"Dante," he commenced, "I am astounded how harshly and caustically you depicted the Florentine. Niccolo die Lippi is exiled as the result of an expedient and unjust sentence. But he is a usurer, a flatterer, a liar, a cynic, a slippery and effeminate coward, a "genuine Florentine"! And this is only a tiny spark as compared with the volcano of imprecations which you shower upon Florence, merely a feeble innuendo in contrast to the virulent and acrimonious terza rima which you forged in your Comedy to decry the city of your birth. Let me remind you that it is ignoble to revile one's cradle and to shame one's mother. It is unbecoming! Believe me, it provokes resentment.
"Dante, I shall tell you of a puppet show which I attended recently while strolling through the city in disguise. During idle hours I am able to enjoy puppets and jesters, although I know that you frown upon such lack of taste. Nevertheless, accompany me to the stage. What do you see there? A husband and wife quarreling. She is beaten and weeps. A neighbor looks in, remonstrates and chastises, meddling in their dispute. And behold, the brave woman turns against the intruder and takes her husband's side. "But it pleases me to be beaten", she cries.

"In like manner, Dante, speaks a man of fortitude who is being maltreated by the city of his fathers, "I will suffer the punishment"."

Many a sharp young eye turned to the Florentine. He merely hung his head silently. What he thought no one knew. When he raised his head again, his nose seemed more elongated, his mouth more embittered, and his forehead more rueful.

Dante harkened. The wind whistled around the corners of the castle and tore open a carelessly closed shutter. Mount Baldo had sent its first snow flurry. One could see the flakes dance and whirl, illuminated by the blazing flames of the hearth. The poet regarded the snow-storm and through a red, fluctuating haze which contrasted with the white flurry outside, he perceived his declining days skipping away from him. He shuddered with cold.

His sensitive listeners shared with him the bitterness of a fate which forced him to depend not upon his own hearth, but rather upon the fickle grace of patrons to shelter him against the harsh winter which covered fields and forests with a heavy blanket of snow. Everyone became aware of this, and Gangrande, who possessed a noble mind, was the
first one to fully comprehend the despair of the exile.

The prince rose, shaking the jester from his cloak as if he were a feather and approached the banished poet. He took him by the hand and led him to his own seat near the fire. Dante did not object. Here he could easily observe the two women between whom he sat. In the light of the blazing flames, he continued his narration:

While the smaller bells rang for vespers, the remaining members of the twelve families assembled beneath the cedar beams of the resplendent hall of the Vicedomini's castle awaiting the entrance of their host. Diana stood closely beside her father and brother. There was a low murmur of voices. The men discussed gravely and thoroughly the political aspects of the union of two great local families. The young men joked softly about the monk and his marriage. Despite the brevity, the women shuddered at the imminent sacrilege. Only those who had daughters of marriageable age regarded the wedding less critically and excused it by emphasizing the force of circumstances and the kindheartedness of the monk. The girls were filled with expectation.

The presence of Olympia Canossa aroused astonishment and unrest, for she was conspicuously, almost royally, attired, as if expecting to play a major role during the celebration. She talked to Antiope with uncanny volubility, and the frightened girl imploringly whispered back in an attempt to appease her distraught mother. Olympia had already been incensed when she ascended the stairs and was greeted by Gocciola, who held in his hand a new crimson cap with silver bells, instead of by Burcardo who was just welcoming two other arrivals. Having joined the
assembly in the hall, she annoyed and frightened the guests with her uninhibited gestures. Everyone turned to look at her. Nobody would have invited her to his wedding and they all expected her to abuse her host.

Burcardo announced Astorre. The monk had immediately left Germano and his riders and hastily returned to the bridge arriving too late to find either the ring or the ladies. Although innocent, he reproached himself and resolved, during the remaining half hour before vespers, to act in the future according to the dictates of prudence. With this thought in mind, he entered the hall and joined his guests. A palpable pressure seemed to emanate from the attention he attracted and made him increasingly aware of the postulates of society which abhor frankness and prefer a veiled form of expression covering the ugliness of reality with a protective patina. Thus, instinctively hovering between truth and pretense, he expressed himself flawlessly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "Death has reaped a rich harvest among the Vicedomini. As I stand here before you, dressed in black, I am mourning my father, three brothers, and three nephews. Bowing to the wish of my dying father, I discarded my robe after serious consideration and — here his voice became veiled — scrupulous deliberation before God. This each of you will judge differently, approving or reprehending according to the dictates of your conscience. In consideration of my past, however, all of you will agree that it would have been in bad taste to hesitate and to choose when there was only one choice pleasing to God. Who stands closer to my heart than this virginal widow who mourns with me the death of my last brother?
Thus, with the blessing of my dying father I chose this hand. Now I am holding it again to adorn it with a wedding band." With these words he led her to the center of the hall where they exchanged rings. When Diana placed her ring on his finger, she said, "It belonged to my mother, an honest and virtuous woman. This ring is a true symbol of fidelity."
The guests murmured congratulations and the solemn act was completed. Pizzaguerra wept the customary tears. He was still a vigorous man since avarice is a healthy vice which fails to interfere with old age.

Olympia saw the castle of her dreams burst into blazing flames and collapse before her with crashing pillars. She took one step forward as if distrustful of her own eyes. Her gray hair bristling, she advanced still farther until she stood face to face with Diana and Astorre. Fuming with rage, she burst into a torrent of imprecations.

"Wretch," she shrieked. "This ring is contested by another ring which was given first." She held up the hand of her frightened daughter who followed her apprehensively, endeavoring to appease her mother's rage. "Not an hour ago you purchased this ring from the Florentine on the bridge and gave it to my child." Thus her imagination had distorted the event. "Villain! Adulterous monk! Does not the earth open to devour you? Hanged be the brother turnkey who snored drunkenly while you crawled from your cell! You want to pander to your lust, but why must you choose an unjustly persecuted, helpless widow and her defenseless orphan?"

The marble floor did not burst asunder to engulf the monk. The wretched woman, who was unaware of the vehemence of her expressions, merely felt she was venting the justified anger of a loving mother whose daughter had met with abuse. She was surprised, therefore, to encounter contempt where she had hoped to find compassion. Behind her she distinctly
heard the whispered word, "Fool," and her rage changed to frenzied laughter. "Behold this dullard," she laughed derisively, "choosing so absurdly between these two. I ask you gentlemen, and all who can see, to judge for yourselves. Here, this charming face, this blossoming youth — The remainder I have forgotten, but one thing I know: all the young men in the hall of the Vicedomini, and more than one of them might have been wanting in virtue, turned away their eyes and closed their ears to the disgraceful utterances and gestures of a mother who trampled chastity and propriety under foot before her own child by praising her like a procuress.

Everyone present felt compassion for Antiope. Only Diana, as little as she doubted the fidelity of the monk, felt a vague grudge at this impudent display of beauty before her bridegroom.

It might have been Antiope's fault for having kept the ring on her finger. Perhaps she was afraid to provoke her petulant mother any further, hoping that, disheartened by reality, she would lapse from excitement to apathy as she usually did, discarding the whole incident with upturned eyes and a few mumbled words. For a brief instant Antiope herself might have succumbed to the illusion. Was not their meeting on the bridge miraculous? Was the fate which freed him from his vows less strange than a possible union between them?

Now she was suffering cruel punishment. Her mother's uninhibited laudation made her feel soiled.

Her neck and forehead turned crimson. Then she broke the silence about her, bursting loudly into bitter tears.

Even the gray-haired maenad was taken aback. Then a terrible pain distorted her features and her rage doubled. "And the other one,"
she shrieked, pointing to Diana. "This unfinished block of marble! This flawed giantess whom God the Father bungled when he was still an apprentice learning how to knead! Pity upon that coarse body without life or soul! And who could have given her a soul? Her bastard mother? The stupid Orsola? Or that skinny miser over there? Only reluctantly did he dole out a mere pittance of a soul."

The old Pizzaguerra remained calm. With the acumen of the niggard he never once forgot with whom he was dealing. His daughter, however, did forget. Aroused by the crude ridicule of her body and soul she frowned and clenched her fist in indignation. And now, when this insane woman slandered her parents, cursing her mother in her grave, and publicly exposing her father, she lost control of herself and was overcome by a pale rage.

"Bitch!" she shouted and struck — Antiope's face, for the despairing but courageous girl had thrown herself in front of her mother. Antiope emitted a groan which stirred every heart.

Now the crazed old woman broke down completely. Her rage changed to ineffable sorrow. "They struck my child!" she moaned, fell on her knees, and sobbed. "Is there no God in heaven?"

This filled the cup to the brim. It would have run over before, but the fateful event occurred faster than I can relate it here, so fast that neither the monk nor Germano had been able to intercept Diana's raised arm.

Ascanio and one of the guests seized Olympia by the arms and legs, and she hardly resisted as they carried her to her litter and took her home.
Diana and Antiope were still facing each other, one paler than the other. Diana, her rage having vanished instantly, was contrite and remorseful while Antiope moved her lips, vainly groping for words.

When the monk took Antiope's hand in order to accompany the girl who had been mistreated by his bride, he merely obeyed the dictates of chivalry and hospitality. No one expected anything else. Diana above all must have wished to have this victim of her violence removed from her sight. Then she too left with her father and her brother. The guests discreetly hastened from the hall.

There was a tinkling of bells under the credence which was laden with amarelles and Cyprian wine. A fool's cap appeared and Gocciola crept on all fours from his well-chosen hiding place. In his opinion everything had gone splendidly. Now he was free to nibble amarelles and to quaff glass after glass. Thus he amused himself for a while until he heard footsteps approaching. He meant to slip away, but after a grumpy look at the intruder, he considered flight unnecessary. It was the monk who had returned, and the monk was just as exalted and inebriated as he; for the monk —

"Had fallen in love with Antiope," interrupted Cangrande's young friend, laughing convulsively.

"You are right, mistress; he was in love with Antiope," repeated Dante in a tragic tone of voice.

"Naturally!" "How else?" "It had to be!" "Such are the ways of love!" sounded from all sides.
"Careful," protested Dante. "No, such are not the ways of love. Do you think that a love which includes the complete devotion of life and soul is something ordinary? You even seem to believe that you yourselves have loved or been loved with such ardor. You deceive yourselves. Many speak of ghosts, but few have seen any. I shall bring you irrefutable evidence. Somewhere in the palace is an old book of legends. Leafing cautiously therein, I found one true saying among a great deal of rubbish. 'Love,' it pronounces, 'is rare and mostly comes to a bad end.' This he spoke gravely. "Now, however," he bantered, "since all of you are so familiar with the nature of love, and since it behooves me ill at my age to speak like a youth overwhelmed by passion, I omit the revealing soliloquy of the returning Astorre and say briefly: when the sensible Ascanio eavesdropped, he was shocked and preached reason to the monk."

Cangrande's excited young friend raised her hands beseechingly toward the Florentine and exclaimed, "Dante, you are not going to maim your story so cruelly? Let the monk speak, so that we may learn how he turns away from a crude woman to a gentle one, from a cold soul to a sensitive one, from a stone heart to a throbbing heart..."

"Yes, Florentine," interrupted Cangrande's wife, deeply stirred, her countenance glowing with excitement, "let the monk speak so that we may hear with astonishment how it could occur that Astorre, as in-experienced and credulous as he was, betrayed a noble woman for a sly one. Have you not noticed, Dante, that Antiope is sly? Little do you know women. I tell you truthfully, I also would have struck, not the unfortunate mother, but the wily girl who meant to attract the monk's attention at any price." She raised her strong arm and clenching her
fist she imitated the blow. The younger one shuddered slightly.

Cangrande steadily contemplated the two women opposite him, admiring his princess, whose fervour pleased him. At this moment he considered her incomparably more beautiful than the smaller, frail rival with whom he had presented her, for the highest and lowest emotions find expression only in a strong body and a strong soul.

Dante, however, smiled for the first and last time on this evening when he saw the two women so intensely aroused by his story. He even brought himself to jest, "Ladies," he said, "what do you demand of me? Soliloquy is unreasonable. Has a wise man ever spoken to himself?"

A roguish looking, curly-haired page, who might have been crouching behind some armchair emerged from the darkness of his hiding-place and shouted boldly, "Great master, how little you know or pretend to know yourself! I assure you, Dante, no one converses more fluently with himself than you, to such an extent that you not only ignore us ignorant pages but also permit beauty to pass close by you without heeding it."

"Indeed," said Dante. "Where was that? Where and when?"

"Well, yesterday on the Etseh bridge," smiled the boy. "You were leaning against the railing when the graceful Lucrezia Nani passed you, almost touching your toga. We boys followed her, admiring her beauty, and two enamored soldiers advanced toward her, seeking to catch a glance from her gentle eyes. She, however, searched for yours: not everybody has been able to promenade through hell uninjured. You, master, were murmuring something while regarding a gushing wave in the middle of the Etseh river."

"I was greeting the ocean. The wave was more beautiful than the girl. But now let us return to the two young fools. Hark, they speak
to each other. And by all the muses, from here on let no one interrupt again lest we be gathered around this hearth till midnight.

Having taken Antiope home, the monk re-entered the hall. I forgot to mention that on his way back he failed to meet Ascanio, although the latter had accompanied Olympia's litter. After leaving the devastated old woman in the care of her servants, the nephew hastened to his uncle, the tyrant. He wished to tell Ezzelin about the scandal, preferring this to bringing the news of some conspiracy.

I do not know whether the monk was as comely as the scoffer Ascanio had called him. But I see him striding like an Adonis; his winged feet hardly touch the floor, as if he were carried by Zephyr or led by Iris. His eyes glow, and he murmurs ecstatically. Gociola, who had consumed great quantities of Cyprian wine also felt bold and rejuvenated. The marble floor beneath him seemed to transform itself into a cloud. He felt an irresistible desire to harken to the mumbling of the agitated monk who was pacing the hall. Alternately strutting and hopping, his fool's scepter under his arm, he joined Astorre who was pacing the hall.

"The devoted child, once willing to die for her father, now sacrificed herself for the mother also. The shamed one! How she blushed! The mistreated one! How she suffered! The beaten one! How she cried out! Has she ever left me since I saw her head on the executioner's block? She lived in my mind; she absorbed my every thought; she was ubiquitous even in my prayers; she dwelt in my cell; she shared my pillow! Did not the delicate head with the white, slender, little neck lie side
by side with St. Paul?"

"With St. Paul?" chuckled Gocciola.

"With St. Paul, as he is depicted on our altar piece - ."

"With the black curls and red neck on the massive block, the axe of the executioner above him?" Gocciola sometimes attended service with the Franciscans.

The monk nodded. "Looking at it closely, I would see the flash of the axe, and I shuddered with fear. Have I not confessed it to the Prior?"

"And what did the Prior say?" interrogated Gocciola.

"Son," he said, "You behold a lamb of God, destined to precede the triumphal day of resurrection. Fear not. No harm will befall the tender child."

"But," prompted the spiteful jester, "the child has grown, so tall." He raised his hand. Then he lowered it almost touching the floor. "And the robe of your grace," he grinned, "has sunk so low."

Vileness could not touch the monk. A creative spark had passed from Antiope's hand into his veins. Although merely smoldering at first, it soon burst into blazing flames, raging through his blood like an all-consuming fire. "Praised be God the Father," he rejoiced suddenly, "who created man and woman."

"Eve?" asked the jester.

"Antiope!" retorted the monk.

"And the other? The tall one? What will you do with her? Will you send her begging?" Gocciola wiped his eyes.

"Which other one?" inquired the monk; "Is there a woman besides Antiope?"
This even startled the jester. Frightened and goggle-eyed, he stared at Astorre. But a hand seized him by the collar, dragged him toward the exit and set him on the ground. It was Ascanio, who now placed his hand upon Astorre's shoulder.

"Awaken, dreamer," he shouted, for he had overheard the last ecstatic remark. Pulling the entranced monk toward a windowsill, he looked at him intently until their eyes met. "Astorre," he said, "you have lost your senses."

The monk evaded the scrutinizing eyes, at first, as if dazzled. Then, his eyes still jubilant, he looked Ascanio full in the face. Suddenly, he lowered his eyes shyly. "Does it surprise you?" he replied.

"As little as the blazing of a flame," retorted Ascanio. "But since you are not a blind element, but a rational being, extinguish this flame before it consumes you and all of Padua. Must a layman preach divine and secular law to you? You are betrothed. The ring on your finger attests this. If now you break your promise as you broke your vows, you break custom, duty, honor and the peace of the city. If you do not pull Cupid's arrow quickly and heroically out of your heart, it will murder you, Antiope, and perhaps many others. Astorre! Astorre!"

Ascanio himself was astounded at the lofty and grave words which the fear in his heart had caused him to speak. "Your name, Astorre," he said half jokingly, "blares like a tuba calling you to battle against yourself."

Astorre regained his courage. "I have been given a philtre," he exclaimed. "I am raving, I am insane! Ascanio, I give you power over me. Bind me."
"I shall bind you to Diana!" said Ascanio. "Follow me, we shall seek her."

"Was it not Diana who struck Antiope?" asked the monk.


Ascanio's attempt to ignore reality was brought to nought by the approach of Germano whose clanking spurs could be heard in the hall. Diana's brother confronted the monk and seized his hand resolutely. "A ruined celebration, brother-in-law," he said. "My sister sent me --- I am lying --- she did not send me. She locked herself in her chamber, weeping and cursing her temper. Today we drown in the tears of women. She loves you, only she cannot bring herself to say it --- it is in the family: I cannot either. You, she never doubted for an instant. It is obvious: you lost a ring some place --- if it was yours which the little girl --- what was her name? --- that's right, Antiope --- wore on her finger. The foolish mother found it and spun her tale. Antiope, of course, is as innocent as a new-born child --- anybody disagreeing will have to answer to me."

"Not I!" exclaimed Astorre. "Antiope is as pure as heaven! Providence directed the ring." And he related the incident hastily.

"But you must not blame my sister either," alleged Germano. "She lost her temper; she did not see with whom she was dealing. She meant to strike the crazed old woman who was disgracing her parents and hit the innocent daughter instead. Antiope, however, has to be rehabilitated before God and man. Let that be my responsibility, brother-in-law. I am the brother. My duty is apparent."
"You rant on and on, still the meaning of your words remains obscure, Germano. What is your intention? How will you repay the unfortunate girl?" inquired Ascanio.

"My duty is apparent," repeated Germano. "I shall offer Antiope Canossa my hand in marriage."

Ascanio covered his forehead. This decision stunned him. After having glanced anxiously at the monk, he quickly composed himself however, and soon conceded the merit of this heroic solution. Astorre, having regained his equanimity, listened attentively without uttering a word. A manly sense of honor began to burgeon in the bleakness of his soul.

"Thus I kill two flies with one blow, brother-in-law," explained Germano. "The girl's honor is restored. I should like to see the one who would dare to hiss insinuations about her behind my back. Furthermore, I restore the peace between you and my sister. Diana need no longer be ashamed before you or herself and will quickly be cured of her bad temper. I tell you she is already cured, for the remainder of her life."

Astorre shook his hand. "You are right," he said. The will to suppress his heavenly or earthly desires courageously grew within him. But this will was not free, and this virtue not selfless, for it adhered to a dangerous sophism: as I shall embrace a woman without loving her, Astorre consoled himself, so will Antiope suffer the embrace of a man who merely seeks her hand to make amends for a grave injustice. We all renounce. Renunciation and penance in the world as in the monastery.

"Let us not postpone what must be done," urged Germano. "Otherwise she will toss and turn without a wink of sleep." I do not know whether he meant Diana or Antiope. "Brother-in-law, you will accompany
me as my witness: I shall observe the rules of decorum."

"No, no!" exclaimed Ascanio frightened. "Not Astorre! Take me!"

Germano shook his head. "Ascanio, my friend," he said, "for this you are not suited. You are no serious witness in matrimonial matters. Besides, my brother Astorre will want to aid in this courtship. It is to a great extent his responsibility. Is it not, Astorre?" The latter nodded. "Then prepare yourself, brother-in-law. Dress for the occasion."

Ascanio affected a laugh, "And when you pass through the courtyard, dip your head in the well. But you, Germano, wearing armour? So militant? Does this become a suitor?"

"I have not worn anything else for a long time; it is quite effective. But why do you look at me so intently, Ascanio?"

"I am asking myself, whence this warrior takes the assurance that he and his scaling ladder will not be hurled into the trench."

"That is out of the question," rejoined Germano calmly. "Would a humiliated and beaten girl refuse a knight? She would then be more foolish than her mother. That is self-evident, Ascanio. Come, Astorre."

While his friends walked the short distance to the palace of Canossa, Ascanio crossed his arms and pondered the new turn of events, not knowing whether it would result in a happy or a gloomy outcome.

The deep blue of the cloudless sky changed to a radiant gold, and hark, the bells rang the Ave. The monk recited the traditional prayers in his mind. The bells of the monastery, uncontested by the bells of the city below, prolonged the familiar ringing with a few plaintive chimes. The monk also shared in the peace which prevailed about him.
Then he turned to fix his eyes upon Germano's weathered features. They were bright and cheerful, doubtless the result of a duty well fulfilled, but also from an unconscious happiness at the prospect of reaching a blissful haven under the colors of righteousness. "The sweet young maid," sighed the warrior.

Instantly, he perceived that Diana's brother deceived himself by considering his action unselfish, that Germano was falling in love with Antiope and that he had become his rival. He felt an acute pain in his chest, then another so intense that he wanted to cry out. And now his bosom was teeming with grim and vindictive adders. May God protect all of us, men and women, from jealousy. From it accrue the most tormenting pains, and he who suffers from it is more unfortunate than all the condemned souls in my Comedy.

The monk, with distorted face and heavy heart, followed the self-assured suitor who ascended the staircase of the palace. The castle seemed bleak and desolate. Olympia may have locked herself in her room. There were no servants, and most of the doors were open. Unannounced, they walked through a number of semi-dark chambers. At the threshold of the last room they halted, for Antiope sat at the window.

Reflecting the glow of the evening sun, the leaf-shaped window described a radiant curve which framed the contours of her graceful profile with lambent flames. Her disheveled hair resembled a crown of thorns, and her lips were parted in ecstasy. Tired, the crestfallen girl sat wearily in her chair, her eyes closed and her arms languid. Yet in the depth of her heart she exulted, glorying in her disgrace, for it had united her with Astorre forever.
Had not compassion changed to love before? Who can resist the sight of beauty suffering unjustly? I know the difference and do not mean to blaspheme, but divinity also was smitten, and we kiss the stripes and wounds.

Antiope did not deliberate as to whether or not Astorre loved her. She knew it. There was no doubt. This conviction she felt more strongly than the throbbing of her heart. They had not exchanged a single word when he accompanied her to her home. The clasp of their hands had not tightened, yet their hands seemed like one. They seemed ethereal, almost weightless, yet, when it was time to leave, their fingers parted reluctantly like intertwined roots.

Antiope robbed Diana almost in innocence, for at this moment she possessed neither conscience nor consciousness. Padua with its steeple, her mother, the monk's betrothal, Diana, the entire world seemed obliterated. There was nothing but the gates of heaven replete with radiance and love.

Astorre had struggled with himself from the first to the last step of the staircase and deemed himself victorious. "I shall make the sacrifice and aid Germano in his courtship," he boasted to himself. On the last step he appealed once more to all the saints, beginning with St. Francis, the master of self-abnegation. He felt he had the strength of Hercules and believed that with the aid of heaven he had slain the snakes in his bosom. But the patron with the four stigmata had turned away from the unfaithful disciple who had rejected his cord and robe.

Meanwhile, Germano pondered the wording of his proposal, reiterating in his mind the same two arguments which he had advanced from the
Incidentally, he was quite confident. He had often addressed his riders in battle and was never diffident in the presence of a girl. But delay he could endure neither in war nor in courtship. Softly, he clanged his sword against his armour.

Antiope started, looked up, and rose quickly. Her countenance darkened as she turned from the window and confronted the two men bowing before her.

"Be of good cheer, Antiope Canossa," Germano addressed her.

"I have brought Astorre Vicedomini, whom they call the monk, the husband of my sister Diana, as a valid witness. Because of your mother's condition and since you have no father, I have come to ask you for your hand in marriage. My sister has wronged you." He refrained from using a harsher word to spare his sister whom he adored. "As her brother, I have come to make amends. With Diana married to Astorre and you to me, you two women can arrive at an understanding."

The sensitive monk became indignant at this crude equalization of aggression and suffering — or did he feel the fangs of a viper? "This is no way to court!" he whispered to Germano.

The latter heard it, and, since Antiope remained silent, he felt anger. He knew that he should be gentler, and yet he spoke more harshly still. "Without a father and with such a mother," he repeated, "you need the protection of a man. Today's occurrence should have taught you that, Antiope. Never again will you be stricken and humiliated before all of Padua. Give yourself to me, as you are, and I shall protect you from head to toe," Germano was thinking of his armour.

Astorre was indignant at the harshness of this courtship. It seemed to him that Germano was treating Antiope like one of his captives.
Or was this another snake hissing in his bosom? "This is no way to court," he groaned. Germano half turned, "If you can do better," he said angrily, "then you court for me, Brother-in-law." He stepped aside.

Then Astorre approached. He bent his knee, he raised his hands beseechingly, and his timid eyes questioned the delicate countenance framed by the fading gold of the setting sun. "Does love find words?" he stammered. There was a long silence.

Finally Antiope lisped, "For whom are you courting, Astorre?"
"For my brother Germano," he forced himself to say. Antiope covered her face.

Now Germano lost his patience, "I shall speak simply with her," he erupted; "in a word, Antiope Canossa," he said vehemently, "will you become my wife or not?"

Despite the growing darkness, he could see how she shook her head slowly but distinctly. "I have my refusal," Germano said dryly. "Come, Brother-in-law," and he left the hall as resolutely as he had entered. The monk, however, did not follow.

Astorre remained on his knees. Then, trembling himself, he seized Antiope's trembling hands and withdrew them from her countenance. Suddenly, their lips met. Who succumbed first, I do not know, for by now the chamber was enveloped in complete darkness.

It became so still, that, had not their ears been filled with the loud rejoicing of heavenly choirs, the lovers could easily have heard the sound of murmured prayers in the adjoining chapel where a priest was preparing the midnight mass which was to be read for the Count Canossa in the presence of the widow and her child. It was the
third anniversary of his death.

Neither did the couple perceive the shuffling of Olympia's slippers. She had come to seek her daughter and was now quietly and attentively observing the lovers by the dim light of a small lamp which she carried. She was not surprised to see the boldest lie of an extravagant imagination materialized before her very eyes. And to her credit it must be conceded that she did not harbour any thoughts of fulfilled revenge, gloating over the bitter sorrow this love would cause the unfortunate Diana. There was only the uncomplicated joy of a mother who sees her child valued, desired, and loved.

When a light ray from her lamp caused the two to look up in astonishment, she asked with a gentle and normal voice, "Astorre Vicedomini, are you in love with Antiope Canossa?"

"Above everything, Madonna," replied the monk.

"Will you defend her?"

"Against the whole world!" exclaimed Astorre boldly.

"Well said," she rejoined approvingly, "and you will be true to her, will you not? You will not reject her, as you did Diana? You will not deceive me? You will not aggrieve an old, insane woman, as they call me? You will not permit my child to fall into disgrace again? You will not seek subterfuges and delays? Will you convince us as a devout Christian and honest nobleman by leading Antiope to the altar now? You need not go far to find a priest. Do you hear the murmuring? There is a priest in the chapel below."

She opened a small door and pointed at a few steep steps which led to the chapel. Astorre looked down. Under the crudely vaulted ceiling,
before a small altar a monk prayed by the flickering light of a candle. He wore the robe of the Franciscans and resembled Astorre in age and appearance.

I believe that this Franciscan, kneeling here in prayer, was sent by divine providence to warn and admonish Astorre for the last time. But in the veins of the impassioned monk the medicine turned to poison. Upon viewing this embodiment of his monastic life, the defiant assurance of the blasphemer took possession of him. "I broke my first vow," he laughed, "why not the second? My saints and patrons have forsaken me. Perhaps they will save and protect the sinner." Yielding more and more to his passions, he seized Antiope and half carried her into the chapel. Madonna Olympia, however, whose mind, after a short lucid moment, lapsed again into darkness, slammed the heavy iron door behind the couple, as if securing a valuable prize and listened at the keyhole.

What she heard remains uncertain. According to the people, Astorre was supposed to have threatened the monk into submission at the point of his sword. This is impossible, for Astorre, the man, never wore a sword. I regret to say this, but it is more probable that the monk was corrupt and accepted a bribe, perhaps the same pouch which Astorre had previously intended for the purchase of Diana's wedding band.

That in the beginning the priest refused, that the two monks struggled, that the vaulted ceiling concealed an ugly scene, -- all this I read in Olympia's frightened and distorted features. The old woman grasped instantly that a sacrilege was being committed in her chapel, that, as instigator and accessory, she was now subject to the severity of the law and the revenge of the betrayed family. And since it was
the anniversary of her husband's execution, she believed her own head threatened by the axe. Her frenzied mind perceived the approaching steps of the tyrant. She fled screaming, "Help, murder!"

The tormented woman rushed into the hall and to the window overlooking the narrow inner courtyard. "My mule, my litter!" she shouted. Laughing loudly at the nonsensical order — the mule was for the country, the litter for the city — the servants rose slowly and leisurely from a corner where by the light of a pumpkin lantern they had been drinking and gambling. An old stable-keeper, the only one still faithful to his unfortunate mistress, obeyed sadly and saddled two mules, leading them through the gate of the inner court to the main entrance of the manor-house. He had already accompanied Donna Olympia on many fool's errands. The others followed, bearing the litter and joking loudly.

The frightened woman, impelled by the drive of self-preservation, which caused her to forget her own child, hastened down the stairs of the palace, where she encountered Ascanio. Anxious for news and deeply worried, he had come to find Astorre.

"What has happened, Signora," he asked hurriedly.

"A disaster," she croaked, ran down the stairs, mounted and, spurring her mule madly, she disappeared into the darkness.

Ascanio searched the dark chambers of the palace until he arrived in Antiope's room which was still illuminated by the lantern which Olympia had left behind. As he looked about, the door of the chapel opened and two beautiful apparitions ascended from the depth. Ascanio began to tremble. "Astorre; you have wed her!" The sonorous name blared in the vaulted chamber like a tuba on judgement day. "And you are still wearing
Diana's ring!

Astorre tore it off and hurled it through the open casement.

Ascanio rushed toward the window. "It slipped into a gap between two freestones," sounded a voice from below. Ascanio discerned turbans and helmets. It was Ezzelin's guard making the rounds.

"Come in for a moment, Abu Mohammed," he called, quickly composed.

"Your wish is my command," an old white-bearded warrior replied courteously, as he entered the gate of the palace with two other Saracens and one German.

Abu Mohammed-al-Tabib not only guarded the safety of the streets but also entered the houses of traitors -- as the prefect called them -- in order to make arrests. The emperor had given him to his son-in-law, the tyrant, to recruit and command a Saracen guard at Ezzelin's court. Abu Mohammed was a man of distinguished appearance and ingratiating manners. He sympathized with the family whose member he was compelled to lead to the dungeon or to the executioner's block, offering consolation by quoting Arabic poets in broken Italian. I presume that although he may have possessed some surgical knowledge, he owed his by-name, "al Tabib", which means physician, to certain medical mannerisms: such encouraging gestures and appeasing words as, "this does not hurt," or "it will soon pass," with which the disciples of Galen are wont to introduce a painful operation. In short, Abu Mohammed acted gently in the face of tragedy and was not a hated person in Padua at the time of my narration, despite the severe and odious nature of his office. Late, when the tyrant began to take pleasure in torturing human beings, a fact which you, Cangrande, refuse to believe, Abu Mohammed left him and returned to his kindhearted emperor.
On the threshold of the chamber Abu Mohammed beckoned his three companions to halt. The German who carried the torch, a defiant looking fellow, did not tarry long. This very afternoon he had accompanied Germano to the palace of the Vicedomini, and the latter had called to him jauntily, "Here we part. I must attend the betrothal of my little sister and the monk." The German knew his captain's sister and secretly admired her tall form and the frankness of her eyes. This noon he had ridden with the monk, and now he saw him standing hand in hand with a small slender woman who, compared with the tall Diana, appeared to him a mere puppet. Sensing adultery, he became enraged, hurled the blazing torch to the marble floor from whence one of the Saracens retrieved it, and hastened away to report the monk's betrayal to Germano.

Ascanio, who guessed the German's intention, asked Abu Mohammed to recall him. But the latter refused. "He would not obey," he said gently, "and would kill two or three of my men. How else can I be of service to you? Am I to arrest this young couple?"

"Astorre, they mean to separate us," screamed Antiope and sought protection in the arms of the monk. With the sacrilege at the altar she had lost the purity of her soul as well as her natural fortitude. The monk, on the other hand, felt encouraged and inspired by his guilt. Unexpectedly he stepped forward and tore the Saracen's sword from its sheath. "Careful, my boy, you could cut yourself," warned the latter goodnaturedly.

"Let me explain to you, Abu Mohammed, this mad-man is the companion of my youth and was for a long time the monk, Astorre, whom you must have often seen in the streets of Padua. His own father forced him
to forsake his vows and betrothed him to a wife he did not love. Only a few hours ago he exchanged rings with her, and now, as you see him here, he is the husband of Antiope."

"Fate!" judged the Saracen mildly.

"And the betrayed woman," Ascanio continued, "is Diana Pizzaguerre, Germano's sister. You know Germano. He is trusting, but when he realizes that he has been betrayed, his wrath flares and he kills the traitor."

"You are right," affirmed Abu Mohammed. "His mother was a German and they are the children of faithfulness."

"Advise me, Saracen. I can think of but one solution, perhaps a deliverance. We submit the matter to the prefect. Let Ezzelin judge. Meanwhile your men shall guard the monk in his own palace. I shall hasten to my uncle. The girl, however, Abu Mohammed, you shall take to the Margravine Cunizza, the prefect's sister, the pious and gentle domina, who for the last few weeks has established her court here in Padua. Take the pretty sinner. I entrust her to your care."

"You can rely upon me," Abu Mohammed assured him.

Antiope clung to the monk crying more desperately than before, "They want to separate us. Don't leave me, Astorre. Not for an hour, not for a single moment, or I shall die!" The monk raised his sword.

Ascanio who abhorred all violence looked questioningly at the Saracen. The latter regarded the couple paternally. "Suffer the shadows to embrace," he relented. Either he was a philosopher to whom life constituted a mere illusion, or he meant to say: perhaps Ezzelin will sentence them to death by tomorrow; do not begrudge the enamoured
pair this hour.

Ascanio did not doubt the reality of life; he was more inclined to fear the tyrant's sentence. Not simply because he was prone to take matters lightly, but also because he was kind and humane, he hesitated to separate the lovers.

"Astorre," he asked, "do you recognize me?"

"You were my friend," replied the monk.

"And I still am. You have none more devoted."

"O, do not take her from me!" the monk implored. The tone of his voice was so stirring that Ascanio could not resist. "Remain together," he said, "until you face your judge." He whispered with Abu Mohammed.

The latter approached the monk and gently extricated the sword from his cramped fingers. Sheathing it, he stepped to the window, and motioned to his men to take the litter which Olympia lad left at the entrance.

Quickly the procession moved through a narrow dark alley. First, Antiope carried by four Saracens, at her side the monk and Ascanio, then the remainder of the Saracens and finally Abu Mohammed.

Hurrying past the lighted windows of a church, the group crossed a small square. Entering the continuation of the narrow street, they collided with another procession which was accompanied by a large number of people. A violent quarrel arose. "Make way for the Sposina," clamored the crowd. Choirboys rushed from the church, protecting the flickering flames of long candles with cupped hands. The yellow sheen illuminated a tilted litter and an overturned bier. La Sposina was a commoner's deceased young bride who was being carried to her grave. Her
body remained rigid as it was replaced on the bier from which it had fallen. The multitude, however, beheld the monk as he protectively embraced Antiope who had sprung from the litter, and they all knew that only today the monk had been betrothed to Diana Pizzaguerra. Abu Mohammed restored order. Without further incidents they reached the palace.

Astorre and Antiope were received by astonished and bewildered servants. The two disappeared through the gate without taking leave of Ascanio and Abu Mohammed. The former enveloped himself in his cloak and accompanied the Saracen. Mohammed walked around the mansion which he was to guard counting the gates and measuring the height of the walls with his eyes.

"An eventful day," said Ascanio.

"A beautiful night," replied the Saracen regarding the starlit sky. The eternal lights, whether or not they rule our fate, followed their immutable course until the divine torch announced a new day, the last for Astorre and Antiope.

During the early morning of this day the tyrant and his nephew listened at a small Romanesque window of his city tower. The square below was filled by an excited crowd; their murmurs waxed louder and louder, soon resembling the rushing of the surf.

The turmoil of the night before, caused by the collision of the litter and the bier had rapidly spread throughout the city. All minds, dreaming or waking, occupied themselves with nothing else but the monk and his wedding. This profligate, it was said, had not merely broken his vows to heaven, but had also betrayed his bride here on earth. He had hurled away his ring, and then, with insane abandon, his passion
ablaze, he had wedded a new wife, a fifteen year old girl in the flower of her life. The discarded robe had bared a rapacious beast of prey. But the just tyrant who was no respecter of persons had placed the house which concealed the two criminals under guard. He would today, soon, perhaps even now, investigate the crime of the two nobles — for the young Antiope was a Canossa. He would make amends for the betrayal of the chaste Diana and would hurl the bleeding heads of the culprits through the window to appease his virtuous subjects, who had been offended by the bad example set by his nobility.

While observing the seething crowd, the tyrant listened to Ascanio's report of the events of the previous day. He was untouched by the love of the young couple and merely displayed a momentary interest in the lost ring as a novel device of providence. "I reprimand you for not having separated them forcibly yesterday," he said. "I commend you for having placed them under guard. Diana's betrothal must be recognized. Obtaining the sacraments at sword point or by bribery renders them void. The contemptible priest who permitted himself to be bought or intimidated deserves the gallows and shall hang if he is apprehended. But again: why did you not step between the fledgling and the infant? Why did you not tear the raving monk from the arms of the infatuated girl? You gave her to him. Now they are husband and wife."

Ascanio, who after a night's rest had regained his old spirit, concealed a smile. "You Epicurean!" scolded Ezzelin. Ascanio, however, said coaxingly, "It has happened, Uncle. If you assume jurisdiction, everything will be saved. I have summoned both parties for the ninth hour to hear your sentence." Just then a campanile opposite them struck the ninth hour. "You merely need to wish, Ezzelin, and your firm and
prudent hand will untangle this knot with ease. Love is wasteful and
avarice knows no honor. The infatuated monk will agree to any demand
of the vile niggard, our honorable Pizzaguerra. Germano will undoubt-
edly draw his sword, but you will command him to abstain from violence.
He is in your service. He will gnash his teeth, but he will obey."

"I am asking myself," said Ezzelin, "whether I am right in pro-
tecting the monk from Germano's sword. Should Astorre be permitted to
live? Can he continue to live? After having forsaken his robe he has
now besmirched his crest as well, so that the Cantus Firmus of the monk
has been converted into a piercing street song. I, for my part, will
spare the life of the worthless and fickle monk. However, I am unable
to control fate. If Astorre is destined to die by Germano's sword, then
I shall command the latter in vain to spare him. The monk himself will
seek and find the deadly blade. I know this. I have experienced it."
And he grew pensive.

Ascanio glanced aside shyly. He remembered a cruel story.

Once the tyrant had conquered a fortress and had sentenced the
rebellious defenders to die by the sword. One of his soldiers was to
be the executioner. A handsome youth whose features captivated the
tyrant knelt to receive the death-blow. Ezzelin believed that these
features resembled his own and questioned the young man about his descent.
He was the son of a woman whom Ezzelin in his youth had loved in sin.
He pardoned the condemned man. The latter, spurred by his own curiosity
and the envious insinuations of those whose sons or relatives had not
been pardoned, did not rest until he had solved the riddle of this
leniency. He tore the wretched secret from his mother at the point of
his dagger. The knowledge of his sinful birth poisoned his young soul. Again he conspired against the tyrant, ambushed him in the street and was killed by the same soldier who had been the executioner at the rebellious fortress and who perchance was the first to come to Ezzelin's aid.

Ezzelin covered his countenance with his right hand and relived the death of his son. Then he raised his head slowly and inquired, "What shall become of Diana?"

Ascanio shrugged his shoulders. "Diana lives under an unfortunate star. She has lost two men, one to the Brenta, the other to a lovelier woman. In addition there is her niggardly father. She will enter a convent. What else remains for her?"

Now they heard menacing voices in the square below shouting imprecations and threats. "Kill the monk!" yelled several voices, but the moment this cry was in every mouth, the rage of the people changed abruptly to amazement and admiration. "How lovely she is!" sounded everywhere. The tyrant and Ascanio could observe the whole scene through the window. The Saracens, on their beautiful chargers, encircled the monk and his young wife who rode on mules. The new Vicedomini was veiled. But when thousands of clenched fists threatened her husband, she threw herself passionately before him. Her veil was torn by this gesture of love. The multitude, which experienced today what the monk had felt yesterday, was not disarmed and inspired by the charm of her countenance or her youthful appearance alone, but also by the display of her soul and her intense love which seemed revealed in her every breath. The monk rode at the side of his impassioned captive like a
triumphant victor without the slightest fear, for he believed himself to be secure and invincible.

Ezzelin regarded this victory of beauty almost with contempt. But he glanced with compassion at a second procession which approached the square from another street. Three nobles, also accompanied by a large following, sought a path through the multitude. In the center walked the old Pizzaguerra whose snow-white hair enhanced his dignified appearance. To his left was Germano. The previous day the latter had been infuriated when the German brought him the news of the betrayal and had charged forth instantly to seek revenge. But he was hindered by the Saracen who summoned him, his sister and his father to the city tower for the next morning. Therefore, he was compelled to reveal to his sister the monk's wanton offence which he had intended to keep secret until his revenge was accomplished, and he had been astonished at her calm reception of the news. Diana rode at her father's side and appeared no different than usual, although her head seemed slightly bowed by sorrow. The crowd, still dazzled by the beauty of Antiope and beginning to comprehend the monk's action, murmured, "Unfortunate girl, always sacrificed," although earlier it would have greeted the mistreated girl with an impassioned ovation.

Now the five entered the empty hall where the tyrant was seated on a dais. Before him the accusers and the accused faced each other; here, the two Pizzaguerras with Diana standing somewhat aside; there, the monk and Antiope hand in hand, all of them in awe of the tyrant. Ascanio leaned against the tyrant's armchair as if to emphasize his impartiality by standing between the two companions of his youth.
"Ladies and gentlemen," began Ezzelin, "I shall treat your case as a pardonable family matter, not as an affair of state, where disloyalty is treason, and treason is an offense against the sovereign. Indeed the blood of the Pizzaguerras, the Vicedomini and the Canossas is as noble as my own, but the august Emperor has made me their prefect in these their lands." Ezzelin inclined his head as he referred to his sovereign; he could not bare his head since he was not wearing his helmet, and because, like the ancients, he never wore a hat regardless of weather. "Thus the twelve families form one large family to which I too am related through one of my ancestors. But how we have decreased in number because some among us have blindly and wretchedly conspired against the highest secular authority! If you believe in me, we shall make every effort to spare those who are left. With this in mind I shall prevent the Pizzaguerras from retaliating against Astorre Vicedomini, although, under the circumstances, I consider their quest for revenge justifiable. "If you are in disagreement with my benevolence," he turned to the three Pizzaguerras, "then hear me out and consider one fact. I, Ezzelino da Romano, bear the first, and therefore, the main guilt. Had I not exercised my horse at the Brenta on a certain day, Diana would be married according to her station, and the monk here would be mumbling his breviary. Had I not commanded an inspection of my Germans on a certain day and at a certain hour, then my Germano would not have lifted the monk upon a horse at such an untimely moment, and Astorre could have taken the ring from the woman whose hand he is now holding and who received it as a present from his evil spirit."

"From my good one," exulted the monk.
"Thus, ladies and gentlemen, do me the kindness and assist me in my attempt to untangle this complicated problem, for were you to insist upon severity, I should have to sentence myself before anyone else!"

This extraordinary speech did not upset the old Pizzaguerra in any way, and when the tyrant addressed him saying, "It is your right to state your accusations," he said briefly and laconically, "Your Grace, Astorre Vicedomini was betrothed to my daughter Diana publicly and according to custom. Then, however, although Diana committed no wrong, he broke his engagement without cause, illegally, sacrilegiously. This deed weighs heavily and demands, if not blood, which Your Grace does not wish to see shed, at least a grave penance," and he made a gesture like a peddler placing weight after weight upon his scale.

"Diana committed no wrong?" repeated the tyrant. "Methinks she did. Did she not confront a demented woman? Yet, Diana rails and strikes. For Diana is unreasonable and quick to anger when she believes herself wronged."

Here Diana nodded and said, "You speak the truth, Ezzelin."

"This is also the reason," continued the tyrant, "why Astorre's heart turned from her: he saw in her a barbarian."

"No, Sire," contradicted the monk, insulting the betrayed girl anew, "I never looked at Diana, instead I regarded the sweet countenance which had been smitten, and my soul was stirred to compassion."

The tyrant shrugged his shoulders. "You see, Pizzaguerra," he smiled, "The monk resembles a virtuous maiden who tastes a strong wine for the first time and who reacts accordingly... We, however, are old, sober men. Let us deliberate how to deal with this matter."
Pizzaguerra replied, "I should never hesitate to do you a favour because of the services you have rendered Padua. Yet, can insulted family honor be avenged other than by the sword?" Diana's father accompanied his words with a noble gesture which degenerated, however, into a striking resemblance to a beggar's outstretched hand.

"Make an offer, Astorre," said the prefect ambiguously. "Offer your hand or offer money and possessions."

The monk faced the tyrant with frankness and nobility, "Sire, I feel no anger toward you should you consider me dissolute and bereft of my senses, for a mighty god whom I denied, since I could not have known of his existence, wrought his vengeance and subdued me. Even now his fury is unabated. If I must pay with my life for my happiness -- what a feeble word, what an inadequate language -- for the apex of my life, I deem the price low. However, if I may live, may live with her, then I shall not haggle." He smiled happily. "Take my possessions, Pizzaguerra."

"I shall act as the guardian of this extravagant youth. Negotiate with me, Pizzaguerra. As you heard, I possess extensive authority. What do you think of the mines of the Vicedomini?"

The honorable old man remained silent, but his eyes sparkled like two diamonds.

"Take my pearl fisheries as well," exclaimed Astorre, but Ascanio quickly descended the stairs and placed his hand over the monk's mouth.

"Noble Pizzaguerra," urged Ezzelin, "take the mines. I know that you esteem the honor of your house above everything and that it has no price, but I also know that you are a good Paduan who values the peace of the city."
The old man remained obstinately silent.

"Take the lode, love be bestowed," repeated Ezzelin who loved a rhyme.

"The mines and the pearl fisheries?" inquired the old man as if he were hard of hearing.

"The mines, I said, and that is all. They will yield thousands of pounds. If you were to demand more, Pizzaguerra, I should have misjudged your convictions, and you would risk being suspected of bargaining for your honor."

Since the niggard feared the tyrant, and since he could obtain no more, he suppressed his anger and offered the monk his shriveled hand.

"In writing, to guard against the possibility of death," he said, took the pencil and notebook from a pocket of his sash, drew up the document with trembling hands coram domino Azzolino and had the monk sign it. Thereupon he bowed before the prefect and, although he was one of the twelve, he asked to be excused from attending the monk's wedding because of his age.

Throughout the trial Germano had been standing beside his father suppressing his rage with difficulty. Now he unfastened one of his iron gloves. He would have hurled it into the monk's face, had not an imperious gesture of the tyrant prevented this.

"Son, do you want to break the peace of the city," admonished the old Pizzaguerra. "My word includes yours and is binding upon you. Obey, or I shall curse you, disinherit you." threatened the old man.

Germano laughed. "Concern yourself with your dirty bargains, Father," he remarked scornfully. "Nor should you, Ezzelin, ruler of
Padua, forbid my revenge. It is a man's right and a private affair. If
I were to refuse obedience to the emperor or to you, his prefect, decap-
itate me; but, as just as you are, you will not prevent me from strangling
this hypocritical monk who has deceived my sister and me. There is not
enough room on this earth for the monk and myself. This even he will
comprehend when he regains his reason."

"Germano," commanded Ezzelìn, "I am your liege-lord. Tomorrow
the tuba may call you. You do not own yourself, you belong to the Empire."

Germano did not reply. He fastened his glove. "Formerly," he
said then, "among the blind heathens, there existed a god who avenged
breaches of faith. This could not have been changed by the angelus. To
this god I entrust my cause." He raised his hand.

"That is better," smiled Ezzelìn. "Tonight, in the palace of the
Vicedomini, we shall celebrate the wedding with masks, quite according
to custom. I shall give the celebration, and I am inviting you, Germano
and Diana. Without armour, Germano; short sword only."

"Cruelty!" moaned the warrior. "Come, Father, how can you pro-
long the spectacle of our disgrace." He left, dragging the old man with
him.

"And you, Diana?" inquired Ezzelìn, perceiving that only she and
the newly wedded couple were still present; "are you not going to accom-
pany your father and brother?"

"If you permit, Sire," she said, "I shall have a word with Antiope
Vicedomini." Looking past the monk, she fixed her glance upon Antiope.

The latter, who still stood hand in hand with Astorre, had suffer-
ed throughout the proceedings and was deeply aroused by the tyrant's
decision. Torn between love and guilt, she alternately blushed and paled as she recognized, despite Ezzelin's benevolent smile, the true nature of his sentence, which condemned her. One moment she experienced the exultation of a child who has escaped punishment, then again she was stirred by a new sense of self-assurance as the wife of a Vicedomini. Now, being addressed by Diana, she appeared both shy and hostile.

But the latter remained imperturbed by her attitude. "Look, Antiope," she said, "here, my finger" -- she held out her hand -- "bears the ring of your husband. This ring you must not forget. I am no more superstitious than others, but if I were in your place, I should feel worried. You have sinned against me grievously, yet I shall be kind and forgiving. Tonight, as custom demands, you will celebrate your wedding with masks. I shall be present. Approach me contritely and humbly and take this ring from my finger."

Antiope clung to her husband and emitted a cry of fear. Then, feeling secure in his embrace, she answered with vehemence, "I am to humble myself? What do you command, Astorre? My honor is your honor. I am nothing but your possession, your heartbeat, your very breath and soul. Only if you will and command it, shall I consent."

Astorre, while comforting his wife affectionately, turned to Diana, "She will do it. May her humility and mine conciliate you. Be my guest tonight and remain a friend of my house." Turning to Ezzelin, he thanked him for his benevolent judgement, bowed and left with his wife. At the threshold he faced Diana once more and inquired, "And in what costume will you appear in our midst, so that we shall be able to recognize and honor you?"
Diana smiled scornfully. Again she addressed Antiope, "I shall appear as the one whose name I bear, for I am Diana, the innocent virgin," she said proudly. Then she repeated, "Remember, Antiope, contrite and humble."

"Are you being sincere, Diana? You have no evil designs?" said the tyrant doubtfully as he faced her alone now.

"None," she replied, disdaining any asseveration.

"And what shall become of you, Diana?" he asked.

"Ezzelín," she retorted with bitterness, "before your tribunal my father haggled away the honor and revenge of his daughter for a few lumps of ore. I am not worthy of enjoying the light of the sun. For such a woman only the convent remains." And she left the hall.

"Most excellent Uncle!" exulted Ascanio. "You make possible the marriage of the happiest couple in Padua and turn a perilous story into a charming fairy-tale, with which I shall some day, as a dignified old man, delight my grandchildren, as they gather around the fire-place."

"Idyllic nephew," said the tyrant mockingly. He stepped to the window and looked down at the square, where, with feverish curiosity the crowd persisted. Ezzelín had given orders to release both parties through a rear door.

"Paduans," he addressed the crowd with his powerful voice, and thousands fell silent. "I have investigated the case. It was involved, and there was guilt on both sides. I forgave; for I am always inclined to be benevolent as long as the majesty of the realm is not involved. Tonight, Astorre Vicedomini and Antiope Canossa will celebrate their wedding with masks. I, Ezzelín, shall give the celebration, and I am
 inviting all of you. Eat and drink heartily, for I am the host. To you belong the taverns and streets. But none of you is to enter or endanger the palace of the Vicedominis, otherwise, by my honor, — and now everyone return to his home calmly, if you love me."

A vague murmur became audible and then trickled into silence.

"How they love you!" bantered Ascanio.

Dante took a deep breath. Then he concluded in rapid sentences.

Toward noon, after the tribunal, the tyrant rode out to one of his castles to supervise construction. He desired to return to Padua
in time to witness Antiope's humiliation.

But despite this intention he was to be detained at the castle which was situated several miles from the city. He was followed thence by a dust covered Saracen, who handed him a personal letter from the Emperor which demanded an immediate reply. The matter was of importance. Ezzelin had recently made a night attack on an imperial castle in Ferrara. He had captured it and had imprisoned the treacherous imperial commander, a Sicilian, whom he had suspected of treason. Now the Staufer called him to account for this prudent, but audacious usurpation of his sphere of influence. Supporting his forehead with his left hand, he began to write and became so engrossed in his letter that he let his mind wander from subject to subject. He thoroughly discussed with his august father-in-law the possibilities and goals of an impending or at least intended campaign. Thus hour after hour elapsed. Not until he sat in his saddle
did he recognize by the position of the stars. -- they sparkled in full clarity -- that he would hardly reach Padua before midnight. Fast as a ghost, he galloped across the nocturnal plain, leaving his retinue far behind. But he chose his way cautiously, even evading a shallow ditch which the bold rider would have crossed playfully on any other day. He prevented fate from causing his stallion to fall and from endangering his ride. Again his steed seemed to devour space, but Padua's lights would not come into sight.

There, before the spacious mansion of the Vicedomini, which was turning dark in the rapidly approaching dusk, a drunken crowd gathered. Licentiousness and drollery prevailed in the relatively small square. The crowded multitude was overcome by a wild and angry lust, a bacchanalian frenzy, to which the frolicsome university students added an element of mockery and wit.

Now the sound of a slow cantinea became audible in the style of a litany as our countrymen are wont to sing. It was a procession of peasants, old and young, from one of the numerous villages belonging to the Vicedomini. These poor people who, because of their remoteness, had learned nothing of the secularization of the monk and merely knew vaguely of the marriage of the heir had set forth before dawn carrying the customary wedding gifts and were now reaching their destination after a long pilgrimage through the dust of the highway. They timidly huddled together advancing slowly across the serried square, here a curly haired lad, almost a child, holding a golden honeycomb, there a diffident, proud young girl carrying a bleating, beribboned lamb. They all yearned to see the countenance of their new master.
Now they gradually disappeared through the vaulted gate, both sides of which were illuminated by blazing torches which opposed the last remnant of daylight. In the gateway stood Ascanio who was in charge of the festivities. The otherwise so amiable youth was yelling commands in a shrill and irritated voice.

The malice of the crowd grew hourly, and, when the distinguished guests arrived, they were shoved from all sides. The mob seized the torches carried by the servants and hurled them to the ground. The ladies were separated from their male escorts and were chaffed wantonly, unrevenged by the sword which on any other evening would have punished this insolence instantly.

A tall woman in the costume of Diana stood at the palace gate, struggling with a group of clerics and students of the lowest order. A haggard individual displayed his knowledge of mythology. "You are not Diana," he bleated amorously, "you are another. I recognize you. Here sits your little pigeon!" and he pointed to the silver crescent above the forehead of the goddess. The latter, however, did not show herself gentle like Aphrodite, but raged like Artemis. "Away you swine," she scolded. "I am a pure goddess and I detest clerics." "Coo, coo," gurgled the bean-pole groping with his bony hands. Suddenly he emitted a piercing scream. The whining wretch raised his injured hand which was pierced through and through. Blood gushed from the wound.

The enraged girl had reached for her quiver — her brother's hunting quiver — and had pierced the repulsive hand with a sharply pointed arrow.

Soon a new, equally cruel, but bloodless scene diverted the
attention of the mob. A chaotic music, replete with piercing dissonance and resembling the raving quarrel of the damned in hell, broke through the stunned and delighted crowd. The basest, worst rabble, pickpockets, procurers, prostitutes and beggars blew, scratched, banged, whistled, squealed, bleated and grunted before and behind a bizarre couple. A tall, depraved woman of faded beauty walked arm in arm with a drunken monk in a tattered robe. The latter was Serapion, who a week ago had fled from his cell by night, spurred by Astorre's example, and had been debauching himself in the gutter ever since.

The horde halted before a lighted turret room which protruded from the dark wall, and the woman yelled with a shrill voice and the gestures of a town crier, "Hear ye, hear ye, ladies and gentlemen, the monk Astorre will soon slumber beside his spouse Antiopoe."

Boisterous laughter accompanied this promulgation.

Now Gocciola's tinkling cap and bells nodded from the narrow arched window as his melancholy eyes viewed the street.

"Be still, good woman," he complained whiningly, "you impair my morality and offend my chastity."

"Dear jester," replied the shameless wretch, "don't take umbrage. We merely call by name what the nobles do. We put the labels on the vials of the apothecary."

"By my mortal sins," exulted Serapion, "that we'll do. Until midnight the announcement of the wedding of my little brother shall ring out in every square in Padua. Forward march, hey, hey!" As he raised his sandaled foot his bare leg showed through the hanging rags of his sullied robe.
The frenzied applause of the mob reverberated from the steep walls of the dark palace.

Most of the windows of the palace overlooked the inner courtyard. In a quiet secluded room Antiope was being dressed by her maids, Sotte and another girl, while Astorre, standing at the top of the staircase, greeted the endless flow of guests. She looked at the reflection of her anxious eyes in a silver mirror, which was held by an envious maid with brazen, bare arms.

"Sotte," whispered the young woman to the maid who braided her hair, "you resemble me in face and figure. Change clothes with me if you love me. Go and take the ring from her finger. Contritely and humbly. With crossed arms bow before the Pizzaguerra like the lowest slave. Fall on your knees. Roll on the ground. Throw yourself at her mercy. Only take the ring from her. I shall reward you royally," and, noticing Sotte's hesitation, she implored, "take and keep all the finery I wear," and the vain Sotte could not resist this temptation.

Astorre, who neglected his duties as host for a moment in order to visit his beloved, entered the room and found the two women exchanging clothes. He guessed the truth. "No, Antiope," he forbade. "Do not evade your responsibility. You must keep your word. I demand it of your love. I command you." He kissed her beloved neck and changed the harsh words into a caress. He was interrupted by Ascanio who dragged him from the room explaining that the peasants desired to present their gifts without delay so that they could leave for home during the cool hours of the night. When Antiope turned to respond to Astorre's caress, her husband had already left.
Now she had herself dressed hurriedly. Even the frivolous Sotte was alarmed at the paleness of her mistress' countenance. Nothing seemed alive in this face but the fear in her eyes and the gleam of her clenched teeth. Her white forehead was marred by a red mark where Diana had struck her.

Her toilet concluded, Astorre's wife arose. With hammering pulse and throbbing temples she left the security of her chamber and hastened through the halls in search of Diana. She was driven by the courage of despair. After regaining the ring, she intended to hasten jubilantly to her husband, hoping to spare him the sight of her humiliation.

Soon she recognized the tall goddess of the hunt among the masks, and, perceiving in her the enemy, she followed her murmuring angry words through trembling lips. Diana strode slowly from the main hall and graciously entered one of the dimly lit side chambers. The goddess seemed to prefer humility of the heart to public humiliation.

Now in the semi-darkness Antiope bowed before Diana.

"Give me the ring," she said through clenched teeth, groping for Diana's strong finger.

"Humbly and contritely?" asked Diana.

"How else, Mistress," replied the unfortunate girl feverishly.

"But you are toying with me cruelly. You are bending your finger, now you are curling it!"

Did Antiope merely imagine it? Did Diana really play this game with her? How insignificant is a curled finger? Cangrande, you have accused me of injustice. I shall not decide.
Enough, the Vicedomini straightened her supple body and fixed her blazing eyes upon Diana's severe countenance. "Are you trying the patience of a woman, girl?" Again she bent attempting to tear the ring from Diana's finger with both hands. Then a flash shot through her. Diana, disregarding Antiope's hold of her left hand, had used her right to take an arrow from the quiver and had killed her rival. The latter sank to her left and then to her right hand, turned and lay on her side with the arrow in her neck.

The monk, having dismissed his rustic guests, hastened back to search for his wife. He found her dead. With a muffled cry he threw himself beside her and pulled the arrow from her neck. A jet of blood gushed forth. Astorre fainted.

When he regained consciousness, Germano stood before him with his arms crossed. "Are you the murderer?" asked the monk.

"I murder no women," replied Germano sadly. "It was my sister who sought justice."

Astorre groped for the arrow and found it. He leapt up, and in a blind rage he attacked the companion of his youth. He handled the long arrow with the bloody point like a sword. The soldier shuddered slightly at the sight of the pale ghost in black with his hair standing on end and the arrow in his fist.

He receded one step. Drawing his short sword, his only weapon, he parried the arrow and said compassionately, "Return to your monastery, Astorre. You should never have left it."

Suddenly he perceived the tyrant who stepped through the door directly across the room. Ezzelin was followed by all the guests, who
had rushed to the gate to meet him.

Germano respectfully lowered the sword before his lord who commanded peace by raising his right hand. The raving monk seized this opportunity and plunged the arrow into Germano's chest. But he also was mortally wounded, pierced by Germano's sword, which the latter had raised again at the last instant.

Germano collapsed mutely. The monk, supported by Ascanio, stumbled toward his wife, and, assisted by his friends, he lay down beside her and placed his lips on hers.

The guests surrounded the couple. Ezzelini viewed the presence of death. Afterwards he knelt to close first Antiope's and then Astorre's eyes. The stillness was broken by discordant sounds from the outside. Now the words could be understood in the dark room. "Now the monk Astorre slumbers beside his spouse Antiope." Remote laughter.

Dante rose. "I have paid for my seat at the fire," he said, "and shall seek the happiness of sleep. May the Lord of Peace protect us all." He turned and strode through the door, which a page had opened for him. All eyes followed him as he slowly ascended the torch-lit staircase.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


