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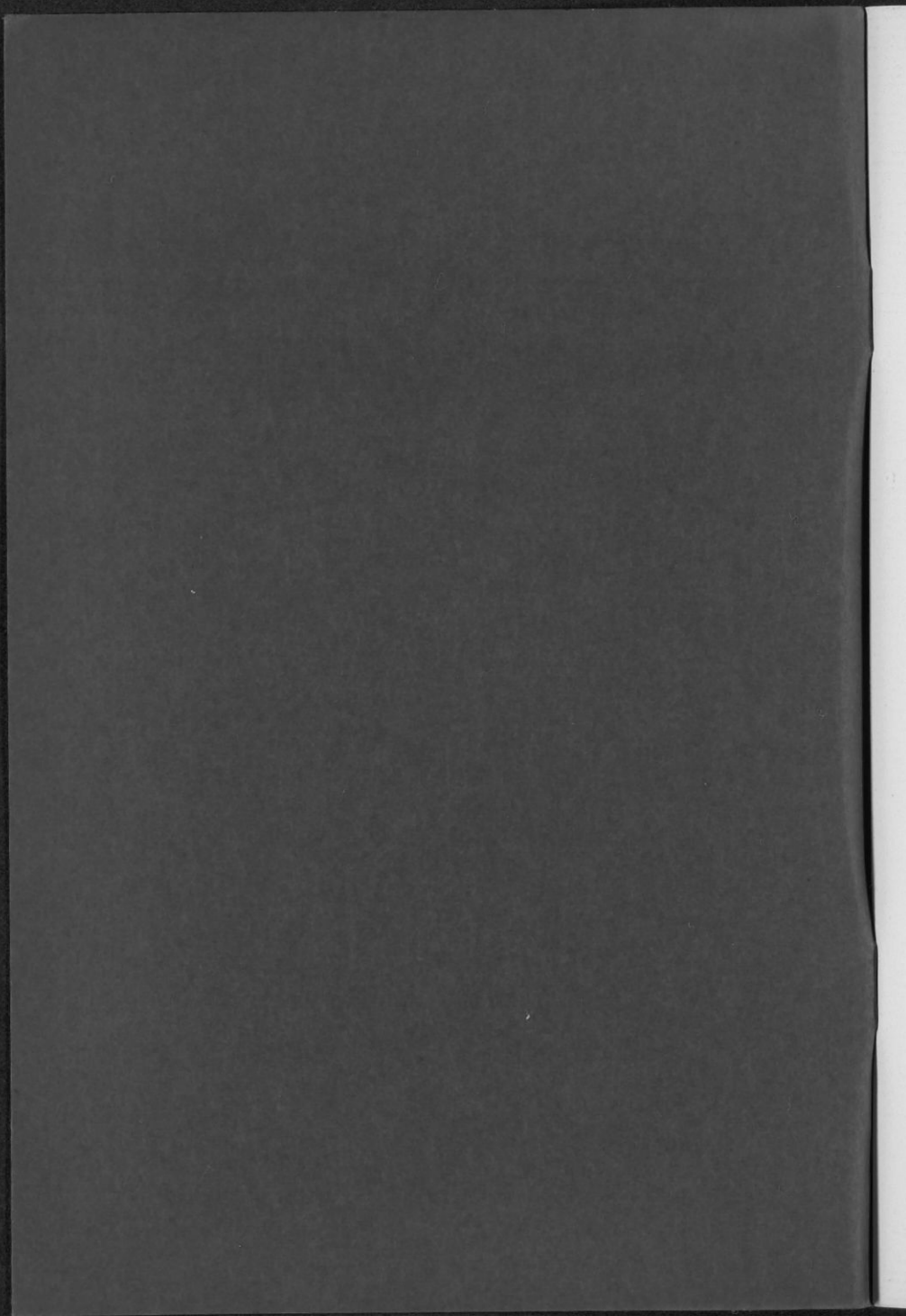
The
Demon Preacher



A DRAMA OF THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY
BASED ON AN OLD
FRANCISCAN LEGEND

BY

COLUMBAN DUFFY, O.F.M.



The Demon Preacher

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THE DEMON PREACHER

by

Columban Duffy, O.F.M.

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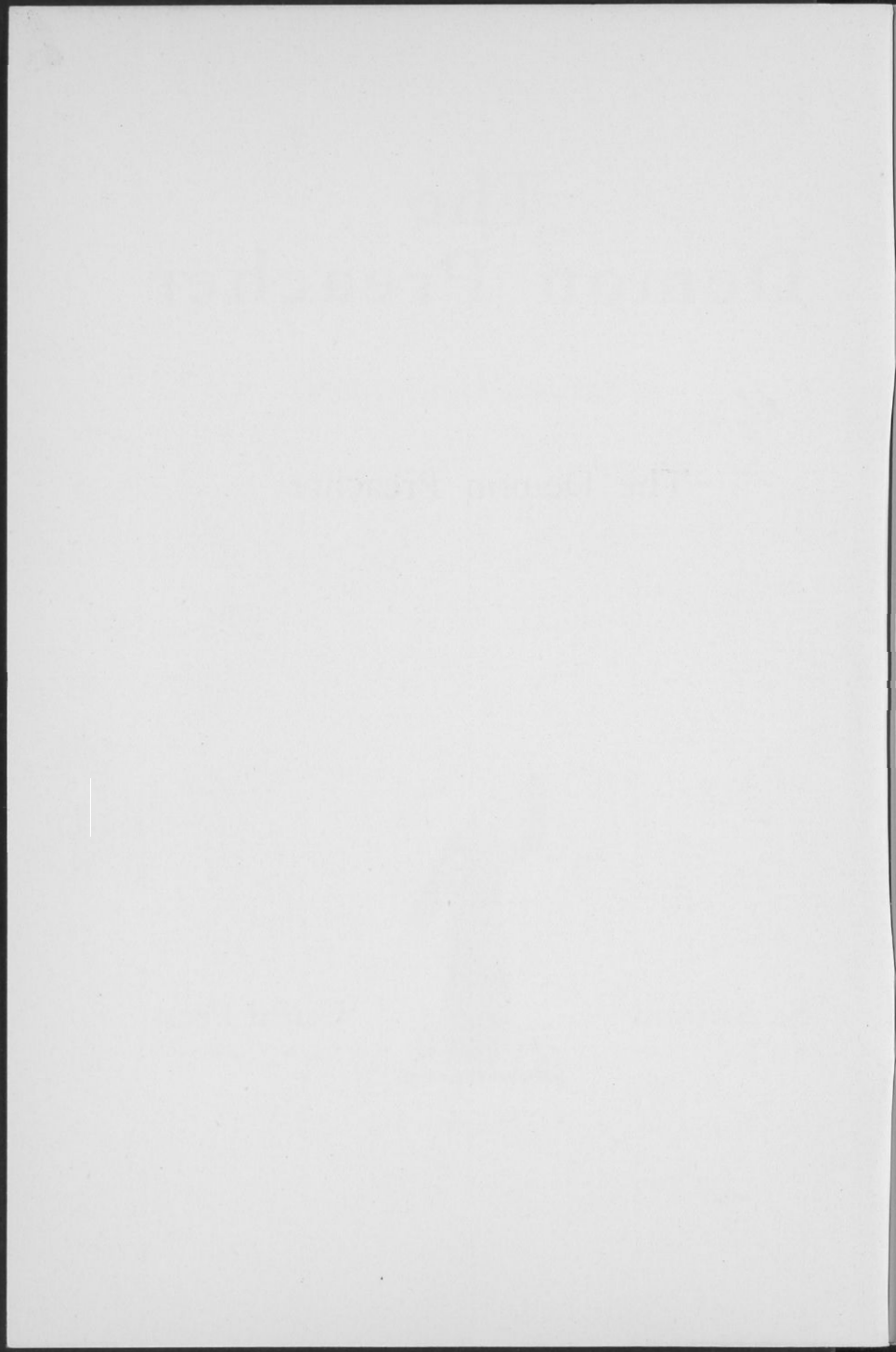
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The Demon Preacher

by Columban Duffy, O. F. M.



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To
BOTH MY MOTHERS:
SUSAN ELIZABETH WOODS DUFFY
AND
MARY
THE DAUGHTER OF JOACHIM
OF THE FAMILY OF DAVID

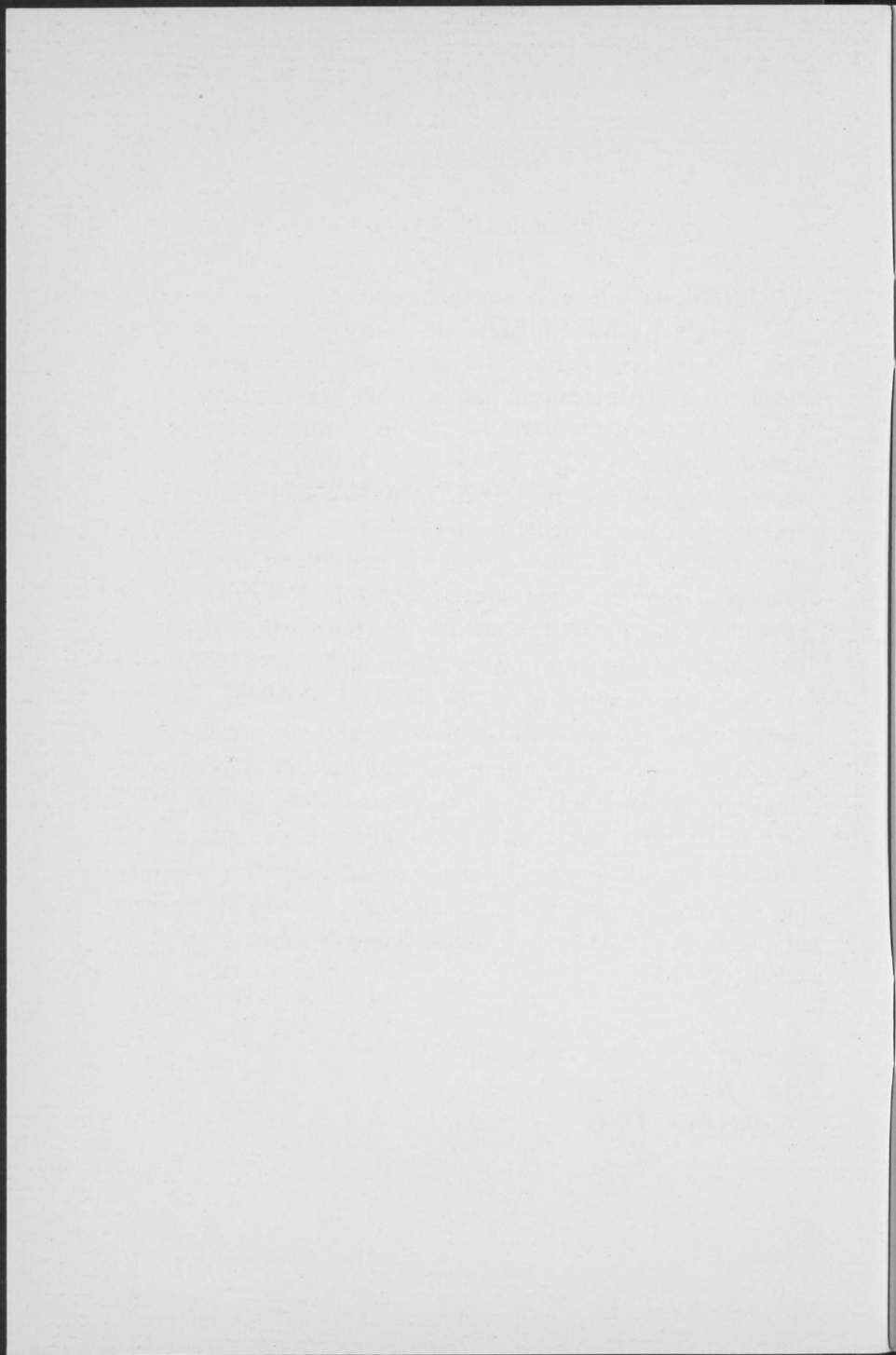


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PROGRAM NOTE

WHEN the sun has vanished beneath the horizon in a velvet murk of violet shot with gold, when the long, hot Italian day has come to an end in the gorgeous beauty of a Mediterranean sunset, when the tired reapers who have returned from the fecund, autumn-smelling Tuscan wheatfields crowd close to the hearth in a dreamy contentment of rest and quiet, then is whispered softly and at first unconnectedly the legend of the Evil One who strove with all his dark power to destroy the work of Francis. How he garbed himself as a son of *Il Poverello* vainly to exact a price in souls for his endeavors; and how the constant vigils and prayers of the Little Brown Brothers banished him again to the land of darkness. Then these simple peasants throw more faggots on the fire to dissolve in the burning light the lurking and suggestive shadows; the mothers in great, heart-leaping surges of love clasp their babes closer to their breasts; and the children cross themselves in awe and lisp the prayer which has delivered many a devil-ridden soul from the clutches of the Prince of Hate: "O buono Santo Francesco, prega Iddio per noi!"

Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1941
Holy Name College
Washington, D. C.



The Demon Preacher

PLACE: The town of Lucca in the Italian province of
Tuscany.

TIME: The fourteenth century.

CHARACTERS

The Father Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery
Father Guido, the Novice-master
Father Bernardino
Brother Dominico
Brother Enrico
The Brother Porter of the Monastery
Messer Luigi Alfani, a rich merchant
Brother Angelo
Satan, alias Brother Obedientius Obligatus
The Voice of St. Michael
The Governor of the city
Giuseppe, a peasant
Pietro, a peasant
Margarita, the wife of Giuseppe
Brother Agostino
Giovanni, a peasant
A poor woman
Lady Octavia, the wife of Luigi Alfani
Doctor Alessandro Riccioli
Benno, a peasant boy, the servant of Lady Octavia
Father Francis of Assisi
Friars and peasants

THE DEMON PREACHER

ACT I

(The refectory of a monastery. At center, toward back, is a table with some dishes and part of a loaf of bread on it. Several rough stools are in the corners. A large crucifix hangs on the wall. The friars are heard finishing Compline. Enter the GUARDIAN and FATHER GUIDO. The GUARDIAN is grave and grey; GUIDO is gaunt and gloomy.)

GUARD.: Has Brother Angelo returned, Guido?

GUIDO: No, Father Guardian.

GUARD.: Why, what can be keeping him? He left at mid-morning, and none of the Brethren has heard of him since.

GUIDO: It is very strange. He well knows the rule that the begging friars should be back here for vespers. I shall take good care that he is reminded of it.

GUARD.: Now, Father, there is no necessity for severity. He is not one to go rambling all over the countryside.

I have always admired his strict attention to duty.

GUIDO: But he is young, and youth is prone to distraction. He may have seen a fair or a traveling juggler, and judged that he needed amusement.

GUARD.: I cannot believe it of Angelo. He is detained somewhere by a mishap. I only hope that he has not fallen foul of the townspeople. They are quick to make mischief, especially now when they have con-

ceived some cause of complaint against us. It is strange. The other friars did not run into much trouble today, nothing but the usual insults and blasphemy. A few of them were pelted with mud, but they followed the instructions I gave them to carry themselves in all humility, and the populace soon tired of the sport. Can it be that Angelo forgot himself, talked back, and was soundly thrashed? Why, he may even now be lying in a ditch, seriously injured and unable to crawl home.

GUIDO: In that event we would have heard of it. The people would consider it too great a triumph to forego coming here to boast about it. No. I insist that friend Angelo is gawping open-mouthed at a game or sport. He won't do it again.

(Compline ended, the friars file in led by FATHER BERNARDINO, a fat, jolly, roly-poly friar whom neither hunger nor penance will ever make gloomy.)

BERN.: Hello, Guido, who's dead?

GUIDO: Dead?

BERN.: Yes; you have a face as long as though you were attending a funeral.

GUARD.: We are worried about Angelo. He hasn't returned from begging yet.

BERN.: Tut, tut. Don't worry about that. He's sitting down to a meal of capon and larks and white, white bread; and then he'll fill his bag with the fragments and we shall have something to eat. Trust a young cock-o'-the-roost like Angelo to come out on top all the time.

(A few of the friars who have been standing in the background look into the dishes on the table, find nothing there and pantomime the absence of food as well as their disappointment.)

GUIDO: But he knows that he must be back for Vespers.
That is a rule that I have impressed upon him.

BERN.: Would you be back for Vespers if some good-wife offered you a meal fit for a king? Don't blame Angelo.

GUARD. *(noticing the friars examining the empty dishes)*:
I fear, Brothers, that this is another night of penance. We have nothing but that small portion of bread and some water. But don't become depressed. No friar has as yet starved to death. Remember, Brothers, that whoever gives anything in Christ's name will receive it back a hundredfold. We have given all we possessed; do you think that God will be less generous? Perhaps another little prayer is needed. The important thing is not to let Satan tempt us by discouragement.

BERN.: And the quickest way to overcome discouragement is to amuse ourselves. Look you, a gay measure thumped out by a stout pair of lungs will hearten the most woebegone hermit in Egypt — even you, Guido. It will fill us all with some cause for laughter, and incidentally the devil with some cause for grief. Something like *(chanting in a monotone and marking the beats with his finger)* dum DUM, dum DUM, DUM, dum DUM. *(Turning to GUIDO.)* Come, Guido, a song.

(The other friars know that GUIDO cannot sing two tones in tune and they grin expectantly. DOMINICO speaks to ENRICO aside.)

DOM.: The people came to Guido's last High Mass with wax in their ears!

ENR. (*aside*): He sounds like a crow in the corn!

(GUIDO stands petrified in astonishment.)

BERN.: Come, come; don't be bashful. (*To the GUARDIAN.*) How about it, Father Guardian? Must we all mourn and not be comforted because the Novice-master is a shrinking violet?

GUIDO: It's preposterous! Outrageous!

BERN.: If Guido doesn't sing the day is lost and we'll all be gloomier than ever.

GUARD.: Well —

BERN.: Sure; hear that, Guido? Father Guardian orders you to sing.

(GUIDO looks at the GUARDIAN, who hesitatingly nods.)

BERN.: Courage, courage! (*He prompts GUIDO in ascending tones.*) Da, da, da, da.

(GUIDO gulps, startled, then buries his chin in his neck and begins the "Alma Redemptoris Mater" in a cracked, raucous voice. He is completely off key, and after the first few words his voice fizzles out in midair.)

BERN. (*imitating a dog baying at the moon*): Wow, wow, wow!

(He slaps his thigh and doubles up with laughter. The GUARDIAN grins. The other friars try to conceal their snickers, but GUIDO turns on them in outraged dignity and they relapse into a silence in which they almost suffocate.)

BERN.: That was magnificent! A little more practice, Guido, a little more practice, and you will sound like a love-sick donkey. But you should have started the song lower and put more stomach into it. *(With both hands he raises his own stomach, which is indicative of a high degree of corporeal perfection.)* Like this —

(He sings the first few words of the "Alma" in a voice that shakes the rafters, and waves his hands around like a Wagnerian baritone at a fortissimo moment. He is interrupted by a noise of jeering and yelling outside. Three loud knocks are heard on the door. He stops suddenly with his arms and body in a grotesque position. All are surprised. They look to the GUARDIAN.)

GUARD. *(motioning to one of the friars)*: Porter!

(The PORTER opens the door and LUIGI ALFANI comes in dragging ANGELO after him by the arm. He halts just within the entrance and glares around. The crowd of townsfolk is seen through the doorway. Their noise comes to a gradual stop.)

GUARD. *(advancing a step toward LUIGI)*: Peace be with you, Messer —

LUIGI (*angrily*): Peace! Bah! You and your peace and your hypocritical long faces! The sooner this town is rid of you dogs, the better. Here you are standing around like a pack of curs waiting to be fed, and you expect this fellow to bring back enough to fill your lazy bellies. Not only that, but I must pay for it; good food from my table to feed wastrels and spendthrifts who are too lazy to work for their own living. Here's your beggar — take him. (*He pushes ANGELO to the floor.*) I want it understood that you will get no food from my house. My wife has been fooled by your sappy piety, but from now on she is forbidden to open the door to any of you.

GUARD. (*raising ANGELO from the floor*): Do not mind, my son; this is only another trial. How have you fared today?

ANGELO (*very young and very frightened*): Father, I walked and walked and walked all over the town, and everyone I asked for alms laughed at me and called me an impertinent upstart. At long last I grew tired and frightfully hungry. So I went to ask the Lady Octavia for some bread so that I would not return empty-handed. She has always been very generous in the past. But her husband here, Messer Alfani, caught me as I was going through the gates and began to swear and blaspheme. He collected a group of loungers and they dragged me back here. I am home at last but have nothing to show for the day's weariness. (*He holds out the empty almsbag.*)

GUARD. (*consolingly*): You are singularly blessed, Brother, with the grace which our Father Francis

desired for himself, the grace of being despised as was the Lord Christ upon the Cross. The pain and contempt which you suffered today brings you ever nearer to our Almighty Guardian. It is a source of great merit for you if you bear it as Christ did, humbly and willingly. As for your empty almsbag, let us forget it in our rejoicing that one of us has been so signally honored. Let your body rest now; it has served you well this day —

LUIGI (*impatiently and contemptuously*): Rest! Why should he rest? Has he done his share of work today? Work! Hah! He tramped all over the city like any drunken loafer, caring little that better men should sweat to support him. You encouraged him in this, you with your sanctimonious face and pious cant about suffering and poverty. (*The GUARDIAN listens humbly.*) And what do you do for a living, priest? Nothing! You sit here up to your neck in the good things that these poor fools beg for you; and before they get even a smell of their own returns, you take the best. (*DOMINICO and ENRICO start forward abruptly with indignant ejaculations, but GUIDO stops them. Neither LUIGI nor the GUARDIAN takes any notice.*) Take shame to your grey hairs, you disreputable wretch, for teaching these men the elements of laziness and incompetence. Much better were they out working in the fields, and you in your grave. Well, you will stop all this pietistic rubbish or I'll see to it that you are run out of town. Keep away from my house; don't expect to have your sluggard bellies filled with the bread of my labor. Neither I

myself nor any of my family will have anything more to do with you. The people are disgusted with your shiftless whining and are ready to burn this place to the ground and you with it. The Governor shall hear of the industrious habits of this nest of parasites; and he'll destroy you as he would a nest of vermin. (*He strides toward the door.*)

GUARD.: My son, reconsider your words. (*LUIGI stops in midstride and turns around.*) Surely you cannot leave here with such bitterness in your heart. Some day you will be lying on your deathbed, and you may want a friar beside you to pray for your soul as it passes into the silence.

LUIGI: When I die, my soul will take care of itself rather than be the prey of a beggarly shavepate. I would rather have the devil at my bedside —

(Previously the crowd had been giving their hearty approval to LUIGI's denunciations, but this last remark of his is too much for them to swallow.)

ONE OF THE CROWD (*interrupting*): Messer, messer! Think what you say! In God's name call back your words —

LUIGI (*turning furiously*): Silence, dog! I repeat, I would rather have the devil at my bedside.

(He goes out slamming the door behind him, and so shutting out both himself and the crowd of townspeople.)

DOM.: This is outrageous, Father! How dare he talk like that to you?

GUARD. (*wearily*): Yes, yes, I know, Brother. But you will find that most men will dare any outrage when they have lost their faith.

DOM.: Father, all this trouble comes of trying to live the Rule too strictly. Surely Francis did not mean that we should have nothing and thereby put our bodies in peril. (*Murmurs of assent and agreement from all except BERNARDINO and GUIDO.*)

ENR.: Yes, the Rule cannot be stretched to fit these changed times. We would have done better to have accepted lands like the other communities. Our Father Francis did not mean that his children should perish for their keeping of the dead letter.

DOM.: Suppose we sell the silver vessels of the church? This trouble probably comes upon us for over-richness in our church furniture. If we be sons of poverty, wooden vessels will serve our turn and befit us best.

GUARD.: Do you not know, my children, that we may neither retain lands nor sell any goods for our own maintenance without mortal sin? Remember that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility. God has promised His help to us; can you question His word? You must have such utter confidence in God that nothing can interrupt that song of rejoicing and thanks which sings in the quiet of your hearts. If we let these misfortunes incite us to sin — the crimes of distrust, suspicion and despair — we deliver ourselves into the hands of the tempter. Trust in God, then; trust in Him even when the grip of the tempter is at your throat; for Satan himself in his own realm of terror

must obey the eternal decrees of his Maker. Make yourselves strong, Brethren, by accepting these trials as a soldier accepts his armor: which is surely heavy and a torment to the flesh, but in which he finds his only protection.

DOM.: That's all very well, Father, but the important question now seems to be whether or not we are to starve to death here in the midst of plenty.

ENR.: Aye; and how about the hate of the citizens? Must we put our lives into danger? I insist that in trying to keep the letter of the Rule we are attempting the impossible. We ought to abandon this house and go somewhere else and have lands to support ourselves. After all, our greatest duty is to pray, not to scurry about the town after food like a pack of hungry rats.

GUIDO: Brother, your language is becoming unrestrained. That speech of yours was not worthy of our profession of humility.

DOM.: I know, Father; but our backs are against the wall. What is the use of staying here in the midst of hatred and scorn? Did not Francis himself forbid his children to remain in a place where they are not wanted, even for the persecution of their bodies?

BERN.: Yes, but you must remember that that command was laid upon us only if due authority should banish us. So far no authority has told us to get out. When it does, I shall be the first to leave; in fact, the only thing you will be able to see of me will be a pair of fast heels disappearing in a cloud of dust. And thus shall I both keep the instructions of our Father

and at the same time make my own life worth living.
Hasten the day!

GUARD.: Bernardino is right, Brother. We are not the cause of our own misfortunes; to go away now would be a confession of guilt and the abandonment of a place of trust. No, we must stay here and continue our strict manner of life. In the meantime — pray.

ENR. (*disgustedly*): Pray, pray, pray! That's all I ever hear —

GUIDO (*to ENRICO*): Brother, your insolence passes my understanding.

GUARD.: Let be, let be, Guido. We cannot scold anyone weaker in trust than ourselves —

ENR. (*turning abruptly to the GUARDIAN*): Yes, "let be!" You have let things be for so long now that we are in danger of our lives. Is prayer going to fill an empty stomach?

BERN.: It might.

ENR. (*turning to him angrily*): Will it save my body from being beaten and thrown in the ditch?

BERN.: It has saved better men than you from worse things than that.

GUARD. (*sternly to ENRICO*): Silence! How can you stand there and berate your Maker because at times the goad becomes aggravating? I have told you, Brother, that prayer is the only means for banishing these temptations. We shall go to the chapel now and pray for peace to reign in our hearts. Come.

ENR. (*stubbornly, insultingly, with the implication in his voice that the GUARDIAN doesn't know what he's*

talking about): If I do any praying, it will be for food.

GUARD. (*softly and gently*): Enrico, my Brother, you are being sifted as wheat. (ENRICO *is shamefaced.*) Pray for what you wish, but pray; and remember, the world is well lost if we gain Christ.

(*The GUARDIAN places his arm over ENRICO'S shoulder and leads him out. The others follow. The light dims gradually. SATAN enters. He is tall, dressed all in sooty black, and wears a black mantle. He walks proudly, his whole bearing indicating his great pleasure and glee.*)

SATAN (*delightedly*): A victory! a victory! (*He laughs.*) I've stirred up hate and rebellion in these poor fools' hearts; and before long I'll have their souls. (*He turns and sees the crucifix on the wall. It seems to glow in the darkness. He shrinks back and addresses the crucifix.*) Hah, Prince of Supreme Folly, Thou canst not save them, eh? Bah! We of hell are avenged on Thy human race. These friars are as good as damned.

(*A crescendo of prayer is heard from the chapel; pianissimo*): Holy Archangel Michael, (*piano*): defend us in battle, (*mezzo forte*): that we may not perish (*forte*): in the tremendous judgment.

SATAN: What's that?

(*The prayer continues from the chapel, loudly, then dying away; fortissimo*): Holy Michael the Archangel, (*forte*): defend us in battle, (*mezzo forte*):

be our protection (*piano*): against the malice (*pi-
anissimo*): and snares of the devil. . . . (*When the
voices are silent there comes a flash of lightning and
a tremendous crash of thunder. SATAN falls to the
floor.*)

SATAN: Who is there?

VOICE OF ST. MICHAEL: O Fallen Star of the Morning, I
am Michael, one of the seven who stand before the
throne of the Most High. I come to drive thee hence
and once more to humble thy pride.

(SATAN looks up diagonally at the heavens;
throughout the while he answers to the VOICE OF
MICHAEL.)

SATAN (*laughing hatefully, triumphantly*): Bah! Thou
mayest do thy will. I have scored a victory over thee
despite thy sword and the legions of angels at thy
call. Thou art scored, thou proud, braggart servant!
Thy will? Nay, but I have had mine. There is not
one of all these friars but has done me a good service
this day, for they have doubted God's word and mis-
trusted His promise. A thousand times did I buffet
them with temptations; temptations of the will — to
rebel against the commands of a mere man, to rise
and mock the authority of the Church. Temptations
of the flesh — to yield to the burnings in their en-
trails, to succumb to the fascination of vile fantasies.
And I failed. But at last I have them. I struck at their
empty bellies, at their scorned pride, and they fell.
They are mine. I turned the minds of the people to

hate, and they are mine. Thus have I conquered. (*He rises to his feet and his voice rings out in triumph.*) When the time comes and they drudge out their last breaths, they shall go to swell the mass of damned souls already stewing in the broken-hearted despair of hell. They are mine. I am well content to go and leave them thus.

VOICE OF MICHAEL: Fool! Knowest thou not that what thou dost is done only with the permission of the Almighty? Knowest thou not that thou art leading the Brethren in the path of grace? For thou hast brought them poverty and they yearn for poverty. Thou hast brought them blows and they ask for blows in the name of Christ. That is their life and their treasure: to offer to God as a sweet incense, for their own redemption and for the help of mankind. The work of Francis is strengthened in the land, and thou, fool, claimest a victory! Where is thy victory?

SATAN: Is it so? And must I fail? No, no! (*He lashes himself into a fury.*) No! Other plans — other stratagems! Starving avails not: then I shall fatten them. They accept poverty: then will they accept riches as gladly, and the venom of the snake hidden among the coins. Ah, I have them! They shall lie upon silk and grow fat on the fleshpots of hell and their bodies shall suffer no want —

VOICE OF MICHAEL: What thou dost is done with the permission of God. Their souls thou shalt not harm.

SATAN: Their souls they shall themselves harm, for they shall trade them to me for the pieces of silver I bring them.

VOICE OF MICHAEL: Thus doth God give thee leave: all that they have is in thy hand; only put not forth thy hand upon their persons.

SATAN: What care I for their persons except as a way to their souls? Their persons will be pampered; and I shall be there dressed as one of them to preach a deadly charity to the citizens and a damning laxity to them. Yes, I shall take on their dress of a beggar, the meanest of mankind, that mankind which is lower than myself, and preach the hated Gospel to mine own ends. Shall Francis be served, that Francis who was ever my deadliest enemy? No! Rather would I stir up hell to vomit its hatred into the stars, and shake the foundations of the universe itself, and pull down creation into loathsome nothingness!

(The voices from the chapel are heard; forte): . . . defend us in battle, (mezzo forte): be our protection (piano): against the malice (pianissimo): and snares of the devil. . . (The voices fade to silence.)

VOICE OF MICHAEL: Begin the trial, then; but forget not that thou art only an instrument —

SATAN: An instrument, bah! I am the prince of the world and of hell, no instrument of heaven; nor can heaven itself curb my might.

VOICE OF MICHAEL: Put thy power to the test. But remember the command laid upon thee, which can be changed by nothing. Obey!

(A flash of lightning. Thunder. SATAN screams in hate and vanishes. The refectory is gradually

lighted again. Enter the GUARDIAN, GUIDO, BERNARDINO, DOMINICO, ENRICO, and the other friars.)

GUARD.: I hope these prayers have changed your hearts, my Brethren.

ENR.: Father, I am ashamed of — of the way — I —

GUARD. (*gently and smilingly*): Yes, I know, Enrico. You have been tried in a white-hot flame. Remember though that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed to us.

(There comes a knock on the door. The PORTER opens it and the GOVERNOR of the city, a fat, pompous man, walks in.)

GUARD.: Peace to you, Your Excellency.

GOV.: And to you, peace. I come — ah — on a very strange errand — ah — Father. You know that I have always befriended you, but — ah — things have come to such a pass that I am — ah — constrained to — ah — ask you to go away and abandon this monastery. Now — ah — but a short time ago there came — ah — some citizens to my palace to complain of a riot that one of your community caused, and I was forced to arrest a few of the — ah — ringleaders. So — ah — to avoid all trouble in the future and to insure the peace of the city, of which I am the most — ah — responsible guardian, I must ask you to — ah — go; yes — ah — to, in short — ah — go.

GUARD.: But, Your Excellency, this is unjust! We were not the causes of the riot. It was —

Gov. (*bored*): Yes, yes, I know. One blames the other, and the other blames — ah — another, and so it — ah — goes until justice is all confused, and — ah —

GUARD.: But at the same time we must refuse to leave unless under orders from the bishop.

(*The GOVERNOR is astounded. His eyes pop. He pushes his chest forward like a pouter pigeon and acts quite the "miles gloriosus."*)

Gov.: Haw! Do ye flout my orders, sirrah! Do ye refuse to go away when I, the Governor, banish you! I'll drive you out with the condottieri! I'll burn you alive! I'll have your heads for it! I'll — I'll —

BERN. (*tapping the GOVERNOR on the shoulder*): Your Excellency —

Gov. (*swirling round in even greater indignation*): Now, what the devil's this? What do you want, you beggarly lout?

BERN. (*placatingly*): Did you — have you — would you like to hear Guido sing?

Gov. (*becomes purple with rage*): I'm damned if I ever heard of such insolence! Sing! Who said anything about singing! You filthy tramp —

GUARD. (*severely*): Bernardino, will you hold your tongue? Haven't we enough to endure without suffering your ill-timed jokes?

BERN. (*going away apart, shrugging his shoulders*): Well, it was a good idea, anyway.

Gov. (*speaking in sententious numbers from the imperiled height of his governorship*): Another example of the unparalleled impertinence that dared to provoke the

peace-loving townspeople and endanger the tranquillity of the city. (*To the Guardian.*) Listen here, you fool; all of you be out of my province within three days or I'll have you dragged out by my soldiers. I can't have any more of this lazy, shiftless living right under my nose. Get out! I don't want to see any more of your kind again —

(*He is interrupted by a knock on the door. The GUARDIAN signs to the PORTER to open. SATAN enters dressed in the rough habit of the Order, with mantle and raised cowl. A singular majesty of bearing is discerned even through that poor, despised garb of poverty — an air of command. The grandeur and nobleness of his aspect, and the bright flash of his eyes gleaming beneath the thick hood shadowing his face, compel respect. His face looks elongated, unearthly. The friars edge forward with surprise and interest, while the GOVERNOR is struck in spite of himself, and also hugely disgusted.*)

SATAN: Deo gratias, my Brethren. (*His voice is singularly musical and resonant. They show by their demeanor that the sound affects them strangely.*) I would speak with the Guardian.

GUARD. (*in astonishment*): Mother of God! Who are you, Brother, and whence do you come?

SATAN: I come from very far, and I was led here by the hand of — God. (*He has difficulty in saying the divine name.*) So very far away was I when it was laid upon me to come hither, that doubtless were I to name the place you would not know it; for it is a

country little spoken of, and the sun itself shines not on it as on yours.

GUARD.: And your name, good Brother? You are of our Order?

SATAN: I am called Obedientius Obligatus; and I wear your habit, as you see. In the old days before I put it on, they called me Cherubino.

GUARD.: Well, good Brother, you are surely welcome. I would we had aught to offer you, but the times go hard with us, and you have chosen an untoward moment for your visit. The men of this city have risen up against us and will do nothing for our support. Even now we are being threatened with banishment or death.

OBLIGATUS (*as we shall call him for a while*): Who threatens you?

GUARD.: His Excellency, the Governor, who stands before you.

OBL.: The Governor, eh? (*He eyes the GOVERNOR up and down.*) Do you threaten to drive us out?

GOV.: I shall certainly have — ah — them dragged out of town if they are not gone in three days.

OBL. (*musingly*): So you will drive us out! (*To the GUARDIAN.*) Ask the Brethren to go over to that side of the room. (*The GUARDIAN accompanies the friars to one corner of the room. OBLIGATUS takes the GOVERNOR by the arm with an air of secrecy.*)

OBL. (*confidentially*): Your Excellency, do you remember what happened to the ten thousand ducats you collected for the Duke in taxes, when you sent him only a thousand? (*The GOVERNOR starts in surprise.*) And

why did you have those four men executed last month? Was it to serve the interests of justice or to seize their property?

GOV. (*in surprise and disquiet*): How in God's name knew you that?

OBL.: And do you know, Your Excellency, why the corpse of little Maria, the shoemaker's daughter, was found in the river?

GOV. (*in absolute terror*): Who are you?

OBL.: Have you quite matured your plans to betray this province into the hands of the Duke of Milan?

(*The GOVERNOR shrinks back, staring at OBLIGATUS with terror-stricken eyes.*)

GOV.: I know you now! I know you now!

OBL. (*evenly*): I am not so unrecognizable. You and I, Excellency, have been quite good bedfellows before this; no?

(*The GOVERNOR slinks backward, then edges toward the door, all the pomposity oozing out of him. His hands tremble. He moistens his lips constantly. When he arrives at the doorway he stares back at OBLIGATUS and then goes out hurriedly. OBLIGATUS thereupon gazes at the friars for a while before he speaks, in a contemptuous, even, cool voice, with the suspicion of a sneer.*)

OBL.: Are these the soldiers of their Lord, the sons of him who wore the wounds of the Crucified, the children of the saints and the followers of the martyrs? A few days of want have come upon you, and where is your

confidence? You trusted and prayed — when God gave you abundance; and were ready with pious speeches and brave words when the alms-boxes came home full; and now, after a few days of trial, your faith and courage have all fled away, and you are ready to believe that God's word, which He promised to your fathers, is about to fail! Therefore do you err grievously, inasmuch as you do wrong to the truth and fidelity of the — Most High. (*As he speaks these final words he turns away, and across his face comes an agony of suffering. He wrings his hands. Meanwhile the other friars have been listening in fascination.*)

ENR. (*to another friar*): Saw you that? He is surely a saintly soul whom it grieves even to speak of sin. I well believe that the secrets of our souls are manifest to him.

OBL. (*turning swiftly upon ENRICO*): Yes, they are manifest. And you, who so lately gave your vows to God, stand now before Him half-resolved to break your faith and dally with the gifts and lands of the lovers of this world, lest you suffer too hard an abstinence for your delicate frame. (*To all the friars.*) O fools, and slow of heart! did you not know that sooner than one word of His should fail, the angels themselves would bring you food? Nay, the very demons would be forced to serve you and minister to your needs.

GUARD.: My Father, you are all unknown to us, yet we can well see that you speak by the spirit of God. We cannot resist or gainsay your words, for they have a strange power with them; and for my part I feel

that, come what may, I will now die a thousand deaths before I infringe one letter of the Rule of Francis.

DOM.: You have conquered, Father, and are to us even as an angel of God. (*OBLIGATUS turns away and covers his face with his hands.*) Do with us as you will, for we know verily that He speaks by your mouth.

OBL. (*after a pause*): My Brethren, God has been very angry; but He will be appeased by your prayers and humiliations. As for me, the task is mine now to provide in His name for all your wants.

GUARD.: But what of the Governor? Will he not return to make good his threats?

OBL.: He will not return. I answer for it — he will not return. Fear nothing now, but let us go to our rest. I assure you that the morning will dawn upon a new order. This night ends the reign of jealousy and envy and pride.

(*Curtain*)

ACT II

(Two weeks later, outside the monastery toward evening. A group of peasants, men and women, enter headed by GIUSEPPE, and meet another group led by PIETRO, entering from another direction. They have just returned from market and are carrying baskets of provisions, sacks of flour, corn, etc.)

GIUS. *(a powerful, muscle-bound, clumsy body allied to the smallest possible amount of brains consistent with movement and a low cunning to enable him to live; with the high color of a persistent engulfer of food, a toothsome smile for everyone, a blanketing personality, and a good opinion of himself):* Well met. What bargains have you?

PIET.: Good ones. And how went your buying?

GIUS.: No cause to complain. I go home no poorer in goods than I came in money. Ah, what thieves are those merchants! See. *(He pulls a live chicken from his basket and holds it up.)* This I got for almost nothing. Feel. The fat on the breastbone! The size of the legs! A true bargain! Guess how much I paid for it. Come, guess.

PIET. *(shaking his head):* I don't know; three crowns?

GIUS.: Bah! *(turning to another.)* How much did I pay, eh? *(But the other doesn't know and neither do any of the four or five whom GIUSEPPE requests to guess.)* Hah! Nobody knows. I am one smart man, eh? I tell you. For this chicken I paid — only — three

— pence! (*Sounds of admiration and wonder from his listeners.*) What you think now of Giuseppe, eh? (*He nudges PIETRO with his elbow.*) I went up to a stall and I said, "I want a big chicken and I want him cheap." My woman, Margarita, was right behind me and she heard everything; eh, Margarita?

MARG. (*stepping forward*): Si, si.

GIUS.: And I said, "I want him cheap." And the keeper was a Jew, and he rubbed his hands and grinned and said, "I haff joost de t'ing." So he pulled out a little chick which wasn't much bigger than the egg it came from, and he said, "Sooch a nice, fat, big bird, and all for t'ree crowns." So I said to him like this (*rapping himself on the chest*), "I am Giuseppe, and I am not to be cheated"; eh, Margarita?

MARG.: Si, si.

GIUS.: And so he saw he couldn't fool Giuseppe and he pulled this out from a coop and said, "Four crowns." So I laughed and started to walk away. Not that I would go away, of course; but I know how to handle these thieves, eh, Margarita?

MARG.: Si, si.

GIUS.: So he yells after me, "Three crowns"; and I turn round and say, "It isn't any bigger than the first one. Think you that you can fool Giuseppe?" And he says, "Sooch a fat, chunky fowl; choost two crowns and den I can shut up the booth and go home." And I say, "I can buy all the chickens in the market for two crowns." And he says, "Make me an offer. Go on, joost make me an offer." So I say, "Three pence." And he started to tear out his hair and cry, "I'm

ruined, I'm ruined!" So I talk to him fast, and when I stop to take a breath my woman here, Margarita, she talks fast, and when she stops to take a breath I talk fast — eh, Margarita?

MARG.: Si, si.

GIUS.: And then she talks, and I talk, and at last the Jew he leans his head on the counter and says, "Take heem away, I'm going deaf!" So I planks down three pence and takes the bird and comes away. What you think now of Giuseppe? He's one smart man; eh, Margarita?

MARG.: Si, si.

(A hum of approval and comment arises from the crowd.)

PIET.: Hah, yes, you are clever; but there is one cleverer than you, Giuseppe.

GIUS.: What! What! Who? Where?

PIET.: Obligatus, the new friar who came here a fortnight ago.

(At once the group gives utterance to another outburst of wonder, praising OBLIGATUS with such remarks as): What a holy man! — His sermons are like honey. — Nay, but he speaks so of hell that I tremble when I hear him. — What a change he has made in the townspeople! — Aye, the friars are beggars no longer, with their new monastery and all. — I hear it is almost finished. — And enough money to buy all of Tuscany!

PIET.: Yes, Giuseppe. I fear we did wrong before Obligatus came. He has shown us the real way to heaven.

GIUS.: I agree. The friar preached one time on hell, and I, even I, was frightened, and the hair stood up on my head, and the goose pimples were all over me as big as eggs; eh, Margarita?

MARG.: Sì, sì—I think so.

(Enter BROTHERS DOMINICO, ENRICO and AGOSTINO. AGOSTINO has a huge market basket covered with a cloth from which protrude fruits, a bottle, etc. He is tall and strong and carries the basket with ease.)

PIET.: I can well believe it. Here are some of the Brethren now. A welcome to you, good friars.

GIUS. (*pushing his bulk through the crowd and speaking effusively and exclamatorily, a greasy smile draped over his face*): A welcome surely! Well, well, well! What a big basket! Someone was good to the friars, eh?

AGOS. (*as loudly as GIUSEPPE, meeting him smile for smile*): Yes. We were coming home through the market and this is what we collected, or rather this is what was forced upon us, for we weren't looking for alms.

GIUS.: No, you have plenty these days, I hear. As rich as so many dukes! Ah, the poor friars live highly these times. What's in the basket? (*He folds back the cloth covering without so much as a by-your-leave, but AGOSTINO lets him have his way good-humoredly enough.*) What's this? (*He holds up each article as he exclaims over it.*) Eggs! Butter! Grapes! A chicken! (*To MARGARITA.*) Not so big as the one I

got though, eh? (*He returns to his prying.*) Wine!
Hah, the Brothers live like princes! And here we are,
content with bread and water.

MARG.: And chicken.

AGOS.: Well, 'tis what was given to us and we did not refuse it. But take my word for it that we do not eat like this all the time.

GIUS.: Ah, the friar's life! No work to do — full stomachs — no fear of losing your home!

AGOS.: Don't you call praying work?

GIUS.: Praying! I wish — yes, I, Giuseppe, wish — that all I had to do was to pray and get fed for it. It's the easiest thing anyone can do.

AGOS.: Oh, is it?

GIUS.: Yes, it is. Flop down on your knees, and gabble, gabble, gabble, "Give us foodibus, give us foodibus"; then go to the refectory and what do you find there?

DOM.: What?

GIUS.: Food! That's what.

(He snaps his fingers and struts a few steps, well satisfied that he has the better of the argument.)

AGOS.: Well, if it's so easy, then you must have the courage to back your opinion.

GIUS.: I? Courage? Know you then, friar, that I, Giuseppe, never lack courage.

AGOS.: Have you enough to make a wager?

GIUS.: Wager? Come, what is it?

(The others draw closer surprised at the idea of a friar betting.)

AGOS.: This basket of food against a Pater and Ave.

GIUS. (*only half comprehending*): What?

AGOS.: If you flop down on your knees now and say a Pater and Ave without interrupting yourself, I will give you this basket.

GIUS.: The eggs and the butter and the grapes and the chicken?

AGOS.: Precisely. The eggs and the butter and the grapes — and the chicken.

GIUS.: And all for one Pater and Ave?

AGOS.: Yes.

(GIUSEPPE *doubles up in laughter. He staggers over to PIETRO and slaps him on the back.*)

GIUS.: Here's where I get the better of a friar. They've always had me by the neck. One Pater and Ave, and I eat for a month!

PIET. (*to AGOSTINO*): Don't go through with this, Brother. Every bit of food you get you have to beg for, and I know that sometimes you have hard enough going. For my part I hold that you are entitled to a good basketful. Everyone knows what the food in the monastery is like.

DOM.: And what will Father Guardian say when you report you lost all this food in a wager?

PIET.: Think of the explaining you'll have to do.

AGOS.: Father Guardian seems too disturbed these days to bother about a basket. He is evidently worrying about something.

GIUS. (*anxious to conclude the bargain*): No, no, no! He made the proposal and must see it through. The eggs

and the butter and the grapes and the chicken and everything.

AGOS.: They are all yours for a Pater and Ave.

GIUS.: Good. Give the basket to my wife. (*He falls to his knees.*)

ENR. (*privately in AGOSTINO's ear*): If he wins we'll have our fingernails for supper!

AGOS.: We'll see.

GIUS. (*with eyes fast closed*): Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee — (*He falters and stops. Then he rises to his feet and runs over to AGOSTINO.*) Do I get the wine, too? (*He suddenly realizes what he has done and is utterly dumbfounded. The others are delighted at his discomfiture. MARGARITA takes him by the ear and leads him aside.*)

MARG.: For an old fool, you are the prize of all Tuscany.

(*After the gay tumult has subsided, PIETRO speaks to AGOSTINO.*)

PIET.: You have afforded us a pleasant moment this day, Brother.

AGOS.: Was this meeting of yours the usual gossiping after the market?

PIET.: What would you? 'Tis only on market-days that we have the chance to meet and crack a word to-

gether. At other times it is nothing but plow and hoe and reap, plow and hoe and reap, from before light till after dark, and the night does not give enough rest.

GIUS. (*thrusting himself forward*): And I, Giuseppe, plow and hoe and reap more than anybody. And between times, so hard do I work, I never talk; do I, Margarita?

MARG.: Yes, you do: too much.

GIUS.: Eh? What?

PIET. (*pushing him back*): Now, now, now. You make up for it on market-day. But, Brother, how goes it with the good Obligatus?

ENR.: Very well. He is busy overseeing the building of our new home. It is indeed almost finished.

PIET.: It was begun only a week ago! It is a miracle!

AGOS.: So we think it. But he has a knack for making the workmen do their best.

PIET. (*becoming confidential*): Do you think that if you asked him, he would come here and give us a little sermon? Here we are all together and we want to hear his words before we depart.

(*A hum of approval rises from the crowd.*)

ENR.: Why, I think so. I will ask him. (*Exit.*)

GIOVANNI (*another of the peasants, secretly*): Is it not strange, gossips, that so big a building should be raised in so short a time? Do you think that he has come from heaven with a power above nature in order to help the poor friars? Could not God have

sent him for that purpose? Suppose he were some great saint! Suppose he were St. Francis himself!

PIET.: St. Francis! (*To the crowd*). There may be something in that.

MARG. (*coming forward*): Trust a woman to know the truth. How can he be Francis with his proud walk and the fire flashing from his eyes? Was not Francis a little, poor man, and meek, and humble? No, this Obligatus is a great man truly, and a mighty one, but he is not so great as Il Poverello.

GIUS. (*elbowing his way through the crowd*): Yes, and I think —

MARG. (*interrupting him*): Shut up. Don't make a bigger fool of yourself than you have to. (*She turns to AGOSTINO.*) What think you, Brother?

(*There sound in the distance faint mutterings of thunder.*)

AGOS.: I think you speak truly. He has force and power, but lacks Father Francis' gentleness and kindness.

PIET.: Hist! Here he comes. (*Enter OBLIGATUS.*) Welcome, good friar.

OBL.: I received your summons and have hastened.

PIET.: We thank you. We wished before going to our homes to hear some little word from you to ponder till the next time we are in town.

OBL.: There is a storm coming this way. Do you think you ought to delay?

PIET.: Only a few words, Brother. The storm will hold off.

OBL.: Well then — (*He mounts a huge stone and stands for a little while in thought. The faint growlings of*

the approaching storm are heard throughout the sermon, and it grows so dark that when he finishes, night has fallen.) Evening is upon us, my children, the time to begin our rest. During this day we passed through a little lifetime: the beauty of the morning and the stirring life of it is the innocence and the sleeping power of childhood and youth. The whole world was before us, a beautiful world of laughing emerald and inspiring silver and challenging crimson. Our world — to be embraced and cherished and loved and made our own. A world bursting with the promise of fascinating things which were to reward us merely for living. We reached eager hands toward them and called to them in laughing bubbles of speech. They in turn ever escaped us, shyly avoiding our ardent pursuit, luring us farther and farther through the soft temple-green of buoyant childhood.

Till at last a shimmering ruby glow presages the end of youth, and we plunge fulltilt into the fiery noon of manhood. The pursuit has not ended: it derives greater eagerness as we realize gradually that these things of fascination are not to be seized thus easily. Our energy redoubles. We hurl ourselves in a fury of passion along the course. Our bodies are taut and our faces grim as the strain of the race begins to exact a price. The violent crimson manhood in our veins incites us to greater endeavors in the quest for the promised goals. We are borne along in the flux of madness, while far ahead, as unattainable as ever, yet seemingly accessible, glide the fantasies of our desires, laughing us on, renewing our strength. And

then we stumble over some unevenness in the track; we waver, and, as our strength seeps from us like the life-fluid from a wounded forest oak, we collapse, gasping, into the purple sombreness of age.

(The GUARDIAN enters and stands listening almost hidden by the crowd.)

We lie there in a stupor, numbed by the mad straining of the race, swallowing great mouthfuls of rest. We are bathed in languor, content with inactivity, scornful of the frenzied rush of the runners who pass us by so closely. We hear as in a dream the low mutter of an approaching storm, and heed it not. The rumbling increases, spreads like a swelling wave until it beats upon our exhausted bodies with doomsday thunderous roars. It warns us of the nearness of the Queen of Night — of Death — the mother of all, out of whom we come and to whom we return. She spreads over us her midnight cloak, kisses us with pallid lips into the silence, and bears us on whirlwind wings to the judgment. And the goals we had set for ourselves in the golden radiance of youth, which we pursued so passionately through the cardinal mist of manhood, and lost in disillusion in the amethyst murk of age — these goals remain unattainable, lost to us, forever lost. There remain only the Kingdom and its Justice.

Thus it is ended. Hold this day before you as a pattern of your life. Remember this coming storm as a figure of death advancing upon each one of you. Keep yourselves in readiness, so that in your final de-

scent into the blackness you will have nothing to regret, nothing to repent; and may you endure without fear the searing lightning of judgment. (*He steps down from the stone.*) Go now to your homes; go in peace.

(*It is now wholly dark. The storm still threatens in the distance.*)

ALL: Bravo! Bravo!

GIUS.: I couldn't do better myself.

MARG.: Quiet!

PIET.: We thank you, Brother, for your kindness. And now in token of our appreciation and love, here is some of the food I bought at the market. Please take it.

ALL (*shoving themselves forward and holding out various articles*): And mine. — Here, Brother, here is mine. — And mine. — And mine.

OBL.: Thank you, my children, thank you in the name of — God. But I cannot carry all these things alone. You must bring them to the monastery. Here, these Brothers will help you.

(*The two friars burden themselves with part of the load. The crowd shoulders the rest. A poor woman steps forward shyly and offers a small coin.*)

WOM.: It is all I have, Brother, but I must give you something for those sweet words.

OBL. (*drawing himself up fiercely*): A penny! A single penny! (*The WOMAN shrinks back.*) How far do you

think, wench, that a penny will go toward the new monastery? It would belittle me to take it —

GUARD. (*stepping forward and interrupting*): Wait, Obligatus. (*To the WOMAN.*) My daughter, this is probably the most valued alms we have ever received. I take it with thanks in the name of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, Who will surely bless you in this life, and at the judgment will remember the great sacrifice you have made today. Peace be with you, and a thousandfold reward for your charity. (*He makes the Sign of the Cross over her.*) Now depart to your homes and pray for us.

(*The people exeunt carrying their baskets, etc., accompanied by the two friars.*)

GUARD. (*having in the meantime led OBLIGATUS aside*): I wish to speak to you, Brother. (*OBLIGATUS tries to avoid his glance, endeavors to keep his face turned away.*) Brother, how goes the new convent? Is it well advanced?

OBL.: It is finished.

GUARD.: How? Finished! Why it was begun but seven days ago!

OBL. (*bitterly*): And they have been seven years to me. Nevertheless, had I been so permitted, I could have done it in a day.

GUARD. (*musingly*): In a day? (*Coldly.*) God does not work miracles without necessity. Or — is — it — the — work — of — God?

OBL. (*turning slowly to the GUARDIAN*): You know me?

GUARD.: Yes.

OBL.: How did you find it out? Tell me. How?

GUARD.: God sent a wolf once to prowl about the enclosure of a flock of sheep, in order to point out to the shepherd the many weaknesses in the wall. But He revealed His plan to the shepherd so that due precautions could be taken and not a lamb be harmed.

OBL.: Meaning — ?

GUARD.: Meaning that God revealed to me that you were loosed for a time from hell to try our defenses of prayer. At first you sought to beat our souls into despair, and then to smother them into listlessness under choking heaps of treasure. But we proved strong, not with our own strength but with the steel of God's grace and the iron of His forgiveness.

OBL. (*fiercely and impatiently*): God, always God! Did I not build you a convent? And can I not raise up for you a city or even a nation? I am powerful enough for that, of my own right!

GUARD.: I know your power and I know its limitations.

OBL.: Bah! It is limited by no being.

GUARD.: It is limited by God. He permits your presence here for a time only, and beyond that time you cannot stay.

OBL.: I came here to do a task for mine own ends, and it is now finished. That is evidence of my power. But I'll have my pay. I stay here until I am paid in souls, the souls of all your smirking Brethren. And I shall carry them down to hell with me as I have so often carried this last fortnight the miserable alms to your convent.

GUARD.: When the tower chime rings midnight tonight
you must leave this world.

OBL.: Midnight tonight! Nay, worthy Father, how can I
go back to that misery? This world with its mealy
piety and its talk of God, God, God, lashes me with
a hundred whips; but in hell I am scourged with a
thousand serpents. The anguish of hell! The frightful
torture of it! (*Pleadingly.*) Do not plunge me into
it! You know not what your condemnation means.

GUARD.: I do not condemn. You were judged and damned
and lost before the beginning of time. It is the justice
of the Most High. You depart at midnight.

OBL. (*savagely*): Do you match your might against mine?
Your feeble power cannot even raise your hand un-
less that God of yours wills it.

GUARD.: Your power! You with your boasted power are
less strong than our Father Francis.

OBL.: Yes, when he prays — a poor sort of power that is!
Mine at least is mine own.

GUARD.: And yet but a while since you were pleading with
me not to send you back to hell. You, the king of
hell, pleaded with a mere man who cannot raise his
hand unless God wills it. Where was your power
then? Had you forgotten about it?

OBL. (*fiercely*): I still have it and you will feel its bitter-
ness before long. I defy you to banish me.

GUARD.: It is not I, but God, Who banishes you. (*Taking
him by the arm.*) But silence. Here comes one of the
Brothers, and I forbid you in the name of Christ to
put scandal in his way.

PORTER (*entering excitedly*): Father Guardian, Father Guardian!

GUARD.: Yes, my son?

PORT.: A messenger has just come from the Lady Octavia with word that Luigi is dying. She asks that Brother Obligatus be sent to exhort him and save his soul.

GUARD. (*after thinking a while*): Tell the messenger, Brother, that Obligatus will be there.

PORT.: Yes, Father. (*Exit.*)

GUARD.: Here is a test for that vaunted power of yours. See if it be greater than the God-given free will of man. Luigi's heart is like a stone. If you melt it, you are indeed greater than God. Both of the schemes you spawned in the foulness of hell are still-born. Here is a task for your strength. Preach and rant at his bedside; call up a vision of hell. Then when you stand in abjection before the stone ramparts of a man's will, look and see what the gentle grace of God can do. Go, then, and try to convert the merchant Luigi from his gold. I command you to this attempt in Christ's name. Go.

(*As OBLIGATUS slinks out, GUIDO and BERNARDINO enter by another way. Both have well-filled alms-sacks over their shoulders.*)

BERN. (*lowering his bag to the ground*): A good day, Father, a good day. I am always delighted to have a good begging day, because the better the day, the better the supper; and the better the supper, the better the night's rest; and the better the night's rest, the better the health; and the better the health, the

heartier the praying; and the heartier the praying, the higher the place in heaven.

GUIDO (*tartly*): The eating is only incidental, then?

BERN. (*pondering this*): No-o-o-o-o. The eating is conducive to the night's rest, to the health, to the praying, to the place in heaven. Ergo, eat and go to heaven. Simple?

GUIDO: Too simple. What of the fasting?

BERN.: Bad, bad. I never could understand, Guido, why I, who like to eat, must fast; while you, who wouldn't grow any less gloomy or any fatter if you ate an ox, are excused from the obligation.

GUIDO (*indignantly*): Do you think I enjoy being an exception?

BERN.: You ought to. I would. (*To the GUARDIAN.*) Was that friend Obligatus who whisked away in such a hurry? Why did he not wait and try a crack with me?

GUARD.: He has been called on a very important errand, Bernardino. Luigi is dying, and the Lady Octavia summoned Obligatus to try to save her husband's soul.

BERN.: Dying? We heard somewhat of that in town, Guido.

GUIDO: Yes, but thought it was an exaggeration. As soon as one has the rheum, the gossips have him buried.

GUARD.: I'm afraid it is true.

GUIDO: Cannot we do something for him?

GUARD.: Nothing but pray. He is stubborn in his resolve not to be a child of Holy Church, and I fear that

unless he shows definite evidence of repentance, he will die and be thrust into the ground like an animal.

BERN.: Prayer then it must be. But trust Obligatus to bring him round. He has a most persuasive way with him.

GUIDO: Do you remember, Father, what the last words of Luigi were when he came to the monastery that time with Brother Angelo?

GUARD.: His last words? No, I cannot recall.

GUIDO: As he was going out he said, "I would rather have the devil at my bedside."

GUARD.: "The devil at my —" And he has his wish! It is a judgment!

BERN.: A judgment?

GUARD.: Yes. Do you know who Obligatus is?

GUIDO: What has he to do with it?

GUARD.: Look back at the time during which he was with us. He never wore a rosary. We could never hear his voice reciting the psalms in choir. In his sermons he always had difficulty in saying the name of God. He seemed to be working under an immense strain. Are these things not peculiar?

BERN. }
GUIDO } (*expectantly*): Yes?

GUARD.: And then it was revealed to me who he is; how he was permitted by God to try our patience and love, and be a means for us to lay up more treasures in heaven. He is the very person of evil and pride, the enemy of heaven and mankind. Brothers, he is the incarnate Prince of Hate himself!

GUIDO (*in horror*): Satan!

BERN. (*with a long whistle*): Satan! And here I ate, slept and lived with the devil and I didn't know it!

GUARD.: His mission ends at midnight tonight. Then he goes back whence he came.

BERN.: But before he goes, Father, let me kick him just once in the backside. I have always wanted to kick the devil.

GUARD.: You will have nothing to do with it. I must go to Luigi's house and see that this "Obligatus" works no harm there to innocent people. Luigi will be saved, but I must be there to point the way and you must aid with the only thing you have — prayer. Can Satan send a man to heaven? Gather the Brethren together and bring them out into the fields far from our new house. There you will fashion a cross of two sticks and pray through the night. But go not into the monastery, for tonight Satan's work will perish.

GUIDO: Let me go with you, Father.

GUARD.: No. My office as your shepherd carries special graces which will guard me from danger. Of what use is a Guardian if he doesn't guard his children?

BERN.: But you must let us go with you for companionship at least.

GUARD. (*sharply*): I forbid you or any one of the community under Holy Obedience to come near that house tonight. (*GUIDO and BERNARDINO bow submissively and put their hands in their sleeves. Then the GUARDIAN speaks more gently.*) Pray, my sons; and then I shall know that I have more powerful weapons than all the legions of hell. Depart now; and once again I say, pray. Pray that I receive a

strength that will prove greater than the strength of darkness. For, Brethren, I am afraid — afraid!

(As the GUARDIAN pronounces these last words, his voice breaks. Exeunt in opposite directions, the GUARDIAN on one side and GUIDO and BERNARDINO together on the other. During the foregoing the storm has increased.)

(Curtain)

ACT III

(A double scene comprising the room in which Luigi lies dying and the courtyard outside the house. Luigi is in bed, attended by OCTAVIA and ALESSANDRO RICCIOLI, the doctor. A group of peasants are in the courtyard on the other side of the wall, reciting the rosary in Latin in low, murmurous voices.)

OCT.: Is there no chance?

DOCT.: None. He has not much longer to live; only a few minutes.

OCT.: Oh, and what of his soul? If his heart were only softened to repentance, even in these last moments! Would to God that the holy friar Obligatus were here. *(She walks toward the door.)* Benno!

BENNO *(entering from the group outside the door)*: Yes, madonna?

OCT.: Are you sure that Friar Obligatus said he would come?

BENNO: Yes, madonna; he was already on the way when I left him.

OCT. *(wringing her hands)*: What keeps him, then? What keeps him?

OBLIGATUS *(entering, passes through the courtyard group and on into the room)*: I am here, my daughter.

OCT.: Thank God!

OBL. *(regarding Luigi intently)*: He is indeed in need of prayer and holy words, for his hour is come at last.

OCT.: Speak to him of repentance and save his soul.

LUIGI (*weakly*): Is it you, friar? Ever haunting deathbeds like the rest of the beggarly crew, to snatch the pennies from the eyes of the corpse! Away, away! You'll get nothing from me.

OBL.: I want nothing but your soul.

LUIGI: It is mine own, and I'll damn it or save it as I see fit.

OBL.: Aye, you'll treat it like a dog! That soul of yours, that immortal treasure, will be forever buried in hell. Will you save it with riches, with the money you have piled up in the darkness of avarice? Will you save it with the treasures of lies and slander you have hoarded up in your quest for gold? Will you save it with the riches of ambition, greed and vice? You will be buried in a coffin of molten glass, devoured by fire. You will feed upon acrid sulphur and your tongue will flame and glow like a live coal. Your eyes will writhe in sockets of fire; and your desires will rend and tear at your soul in their futile passion to work evil. Remorse will seize upon your heart with iron claws. You will pray for a second death with the knowledge that it will never come, that this anguish will reach into eternity, that, when millions of years have passed and future worlds are already growing old, this same pain will pierce your living bowels, this same remorse will claw your anguished heart, this same hate will devour the torn mass of your soul. Eternity! An eternity of endless agony. Ever to be shut off from the presence of God; ever to be eaten with flames, gnawed by vermin, goaded with burning spikes; ever to be the prey of conscience;

ever to cry out of the abyss of fire to God for an instant, a single instant, of respite from such awful agony; ever to suffer, never to enjoy; ever to be damned, never to be saved; ever, never; ever, never. Repent, my son; repent before you pass through this yawning door of death. A movement of the will gives you the beauty of God, the glory of heaven. What are your riches now but so much dung. You must leave them —

LUIGI: No, no! (*The storm increases. The GUARDIAN enters and goes to the bedside, opposite OBLIGATUS.*)

OBL.: Yes, you must leave them and go naked into the darkness. Even your will is as nothing, once you depart this life. Repent, repent; and look to God!

LUIGI: What success I have had I have gained through my own powers.

OBL.: But this worldly success is of no use now. Outside there, in the blackness of extinction, lie two paths, one to God, one to hell. Choose!

LUIGI: I cannot! I cannot!

(*With a terrific effort LUIGI raises himself, a look of stark terror imprinted upon his face, and cringes away from OBLIGATUS. This brings him closer to the GUARDIAN, who falls upon his knees and enfolds LUIGI in his embrace.*)

LUIGI (*staring rigidly at OBLIGATUS, and speaking in a hoarse whisper*): My God! My God!

OBL.: The two paths! Choose!

LUIGI: I cannot!

(*The GUARDIAN has been praying silently all this time. Now he speaks aloud the continuation of his prayers.*)

GUARD.: . . . May Satan most foul with his wicked crew
give way before thee; may he tremble before thee
and the Angels that attend thee, and flee into the
vast chaos of eternal night. . . . (*OBLIGATUS shrinks
back a few steps.*)

LUIGI (*who has become a little child again, haunted and
full of fear*): Save me, Father, save me!

GUARD.: Do you repent?

LUIGI (*speaking through the pregnant bush; his words
bold as in a chalice all the misery and hope, defeat
and victory, of life*): I do.

GUARD. (*jubilantly*): Then — EGO TE ABSOLVO AB
OMNIBUS CENSURIS ET PECCATIS IN NO-
MINE PATRIS, ET FILII, ET SPIRITUS SANCTI.
Depart, O Christian soul, from this world in the
name of God the Father Who created thee. (*LUIGI
grows limp, and the GUARDIAN lays him back rever-
ently upon the bed. He crosses the lifeless hands upon
the heart, saying the while*): May the Angels lead
thee into Paradise and may the Martyrs and the Choir
of Angels receive thee. With Lazarus mayest thou
have eternal rest.

(*OCTAVIA begins to weep and the DOCTOR draws
the sheet over LUIGI's face. The rosary ends.*)

OBL. (*springing back and speaking triumphantly*): Mine!
Mine own at length! Michael, thou art baffled now!

(OCTAVIA *shrinks back into the corner with a look of horror. The DOCTOR is startled, the people in the courtyard astounded.*)

FIRST PEASANT: He is mad! His speaking has tired his strength!

SECOND PEASANT: Stop! What is this!

(*For OBLIGATUS seems to be wrestling with some strong power which is forcing him against his will. He stares straight ahead, wringing his hands, crying out broken sentences.*)

OBL.: I cannot — nay, I will not! . . . He is mine, I say. . . . His damnation is upon him, and I *will* have him! (*He dashes from the room into the courtyard and commences to speak to the people surrounding him. In the meantime the DOCTOR leads OCTAVIA away through another door. The GUARDIAN rises to his feet and stands watching intently.*) Hear me, ye people! (*The peasants become still, expectant.*) Thus dies avarice. Thus do sin and greed and shame and cruelty crawl out of life, dragging their wounded selves into the murk of death. Here is a man who died impenitent (*the GUARDIAN leaves the deathbed and hurries toward OBLIGATUS*) and who is even now being carried by demons down into hell!

GUARD.: Silence, wretch! Would you lead these to despair? (*He gestures toward the people.*)

OBL. (*without taking any notice of the interruption*): He faced death and mocked the Master of Death. (*The storm increases to the end of OBLIGATUS' speech.*) Behold his end! Behold the wretch who drank from

the gutters of cruelty and greed during his lifetime!
See how he struggles on the brink of hell —

GUARD. (*seizing OBLIGATUS by the shoulder*): False! All false! His soul was cleansed by the words of mercy. (*But OBLIGATUS is carried away by his proud self-delusion. He throws the GUARDIAN off and continues his tirade at a rapid tempo as though he were fighting against time*): See him being pulled down, down, down into everlasting agony! Hate triumphs. Hate, his king and lord, devours him —

(*A jag of lightning in the distance, followed by leaping flames and the crash of a collapsing building. All stand rigid. Then gradually as the storm subsides a little, the crowd of peasants, which has become greatly augmented, begins a murmur which rises to a shout*): Gone! The monastery! Lightning has burned the monastery!

(*The GUARDIAN steps forward and holds up his hand. The tumult subsides to comparative quiet. Then there is heard far off the sound of the first chime from the tower clock.*)

GUARD.: Thus perishes the work of hell. (*Turning to OBLIGATUS.*) And now, your course is finished.

OBL.: Finished! The end! To go back and be plunged anew into that seething cauldron of blackness and hate! (*Second bell.*) Screams, howling, filth poisoning the ears; filth, a deadly stench in the nostrils. And I must hasten back to that! At whose command? At whose command, I say! Hah! I know your answer. But who is He? I hurled my strength against Him;

and were justice done — true justice — I would now be reigning with Him over this wretched creation of a world. (*Third bell.*) Aye; ring, bell, ring. Call, till your brazen belly coughs out its last chime. I go not back. Here I stay, and level another rebellion against Him and against His scurvy apostle, Francis, who holds my place in heaven. Must I worship the Being I hate? Bah! (*Turning to the peasants.*) You stand all agape as though at something strange. Do you not recognize the struggle you have suffered in your own flesh? (*Fourth bell.*) What, do you not know me, your prince? (*He tears the habit from his body and stands clothed all in black.*) Behold me, then and fall down and worship. (*The peasants shrink back.*) Ah, ye shun me, ye pitiful cowards! Have ye too not rebelled by my command and besmirched the glory of that God of yours? Nay, I am your god; and ye must obey. You hear me? Ye must obey, or I drag your cowardly bodies down to the pool of hate. Obey, ye fools! (*Fifth bell. The storm increases.*)

GUARD. (*starting forward*): Stop! The Lord only shall they serve. (*He holds up a crucifix.*) Behold His sign! Behold the Cross of the Lord! Fly, ye powers of darkness! The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath conquered.

SATAN (*as we shall now call him, falling backward to the ground*): Aye — conquered. As once, ages gone, He conquered; and as once in the land of blood and tears He was held aloft by all my powers and all my legions, and in the end He burst the door of night and — conquered. I prowled the world for an eternity

of years, unhampered and free, consulting mine own desires (*sixth bell*), and luring the subjects of the Almighty King from lives of faith to groves of lust and plenty. How changed am I from him who in the happy realms of light outshone the myriads of heaven! How changed am I, engulfed in misery and plunged in ruin to the ruined land of rage forever hopeless! Rage? Aye, and hate. Relentless, implacable hate — burning, always burning, and nourishing the old seeds of rebellion. To reign in hell is better than to serve in heaven. But then, why not reign in heaven? Is His power greater? Is the power of the Nazarene to overcome mine? (*Seventh bell.*) And you, priest; you stand there and think to vanquish me with a piece of wood? A sign only, devoid of power! And you match that senseless thing against my will! My will, that fought with the Almighty, and forces His creatures to abandon Him! (*He springs to his feet. The storm increases.*) Away with it, priest! Still I prevail! Crash it to the ground, trample it, spurn it into the mud! It has no power, for only I am powerful! (*He runs forward and is stopped abruptly by the uplifted cross. Eighth bell.*)

GUARD.: Behold the Cross of the Lord! Fly, ye powers of darkness! The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath conquered!

SATAN (*wringing his hands*): Oh, for ten thousand legions of devils, priest, to tear your body, to grub out that soul of yours and drag it to the death, to null that sign and lose it in the abyss where these dupes of yours no longer can find it! (*Ninth bell.*) Aye,

cling to it, priest, cling to it; and let these poor fools look upon their dead God. Dead (*triumphantly*) — and I killed Him! (*Turning to the peasants.*) What avails it to you to adore an image of wood? Where is its power? What does it bring you but suffering, pain and shame? It is the image of shame. What do you see? (*The storm increases in fury.*) A body hung between heaven and earth, with twisted limbs, and bloody head, and anguished face, and the cold sweat of death, and a heart already pouring out its last drop of life. Shall I tell you what I saw a thousand years ago on a Hill of Skulls? (*Tenth bell.*) A torn body, already carrion, and the life still in it. A rabble spitting out their hate into the glare of a pitiless sun. Bearded priests making mock of the Thing there, crying out, as I now cry out (*turning to the crucifix*), "Vah! If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross!" Who was the master then? Who reigned over the people's hearts then? Was it that powerless Madman Whom *my* laws had slain? No. I was the master, I the king — I, your prince, the prince of this world! I stood behind the jewels of the nobles. I filled the fat bellies of the rich. I reigned. (*Eleventh bell. On hearing it, SATAN pauses for an instant, a sculptured image of hate. He speaks introspectively.*) One chime is left to knell me back to torment! Bah, He is dead and dead is His power. (*He resumes speaking to the mob of terrorized people.*) I killed Him; I, the lord of creation, your king, your prince, your master; and I command you now as I commanded ages ago — serve me; obey me; adore

me! All things shall be yours. What can He (*pointing to the crucifix*) give you? What has He given you? All power on earth is mine, and all the earth is yours in exchange for obedience. (*The storm redoubles in fury.*)

GUARD. (*loudly*): Behold the Cross of the Lord! Fly, ye powers of darkness! The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath conquered!

SATAN (*hiding his face and shrinking back*): Away with it! It is torture and defeat to me! Once more it has conquered! I am lost and nothing and crushed and damned! (*Twelfth bell.*)

(*During this last speech SATAN'S voice rises to a shriek. Upon the sound of the twelfth bell he disappears and his shriek diminishes gradually, to be lost in the distance. Little by little the storm subsides. When all is silent, FRANCIS appears, bathed in light. He is dressed in the garb of poverty, ragged yet somehow etherealized. His beautiful, almost translucent hands show the insignia of our Redemption, as do his bruised feet. His face, gaunt and racked by suffering, is filled with a celestial joy. He is the FRANCIS of this earth, the unchanged FRANCIS, suffused with the beauty of heaven but yet bearing the signs, so familiar to us all and without which we would hardly recognize him, of his long and ardent penance of love. He raises his arms in benediction. The peasants murmur, Francis! It is Francis!, and they and the GUARDIAN kneel in awe at his feet.*)

FRANCIS: It is well done. Know then, my people, that prayer and the Cross of Christ will defend you from all evil. May you be forever free from sin, and hold yourselves in readiness to enter the Kingdom. The grace of God be with you. The Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and have mercy upon you. May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace. (*He makes the Sign of the Cross in the air.*) The Lord bless you.

(*Final Curtain*)

The next page contains suggestions for the lighting effects desirable in stage productions of THE DEMON PREACHER.

NOTES ON STAGE LIGHTING

The lighting effects in this play are most important. The following suggestions are made:

ACT I. Ordinary lighting. When the friars exeunt (page 14), the lights are dimmed gradually in preparation for the entrance of Satan, who is more effective *in propria persona* on a darkened stage. The crucifix should be phosphorescent. The Voice of Michael is heard through an amplifying hook-up, and the loud speaker should be placed in the flies to give the illusion of the Voice's coming from above. A baby spot fitted with a colored filter is played down from the flies to give location to the Voice and to lend effect of reality. At Satan's scream (page 17), all the lights in the house are put out at the main switch. Absolute darkness holds sway, though for no more than three seconds—while the operator counts 1, 2, 3—during which time Satan leaves the stage. A longer period of time than three seconds for all these vanishing scenes will destroy the illusion of sudden disappearance. The flash of lightning (page 17) is caused by an accessory bank of photo floodlights behind the scene. It is better to silhouette the action against unequal flashes and leave the actual stage lighting undisturbed.

ACT III. Luigi's chamber is lighted by a seven-branch candelabrum as the apparent source and by dim footlights or soft wing spots as the real source. The court has the bluish shade of night. Too bright a light will spoil the effect. At the very end of the play (page 54), when Satan disappears with a decrescendo shriek, the same manoeuver with the lights is performed as in Act I, but with this addition: when the main switch is closed after the three seconds of darkness, a spotlight bathes St. Francis in radiance. This is a joint disappearance and appearance—the disappearance of Satan and the appearance of St. Francis, all within three seconds.

The storm begins shortly before the sermon in Act II, and continues in a low mutter till Act III. After the death of Luigi it strengthens, goes through a powerful crescendo during the exorcism scene, and just before the final disappearance of Satan, its fury is overpowering. It has three seconds to diminish in violence, and during the speech of Francis it ceases altogether. The illusion of lightning may be secured by a bank of lights behind the scenes to silhouette the action on the stage, as in Act I.

