

The Devil's Elixirs

E.T.A. Hoffmann

Translated by Ronald Taylor



ONeworld
CLASSICS

ONEWORLD CLASSICS LTD
London House
243-253 Lower Mortlake Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 2LL
United Kingdom
www.oneworldclassics.com

The Devil's Elixirs first published in 1816

Translation © John Calder (Publishers) Limited, 1963
First published in this translation from the German 1963 by John Calder
(Publishers) Limited
This edition first published by Oneworld Classics Limited in 2008

Typeset by Alma Books Ltd

Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd

ISBN: 978-1-84749-084-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be resold, lent, hired out or otherwise circulated without the express prior consent of the publisher.

Contents

Introduction	v
Chronology	ix
<i>The Devil's Elixirs</i>	1
Notes	276

Introduction

AMONG THE INTENSE, often contradictory passions released by the Romantic movement in European literature at the turn of the eighteenth century, was an obsession with the hidden, apparently uncontrollable forces acting upon the human mind, above all in moments of powerful mental stress. It is with the portrayal of the grotesque, bizarre forms of experience produced by such moments that the name of E.T.A. Hoffmann has come to be primarily associated. Hypnotism, somnambulism and telepathy are the phenomena which fascinated him; delirium, persecution mania and schizophrenia are the mental states with which he invested his characters; fright, fear and terror are the emotions released by these forces and experiences. From such elements his influence spread to writers as diverse as Gérard de Nerval and Gogol, Dostoevsky and Edgar Allan Poe; on such sources the librettists of Offenbach's best-known opera drew; and chiefly for the literary progeny of such interests he is remembered today.

But this is not the only, nor perhaps even the most important Hoffmann. For the last eight years of his life he was a much-respected judge at the *Kammergericht* in Berlin; he had been artistic director and producer at the Bamberg theatre and music-director to an operatic company in Leipzig and Dresden; he was a composer with nine operas, two masses, a symphony and a considerable quantity of choral, vocal and instrumental music to his name; above all he was a theorist and critic who has left a body of perceptive and stimulating writing, both in the form of music reviews and of literary essays, on the aesthetics of music, its relationship to the other arts, and its focal significance as the centre of a Romantic metaphysic. Many of these writings are of considerable importance in the history of musical aesthetics, while composers of opera in particular, such as Wagner and Busoni, have acknowledged their indebtedness to him in matters of both principle and practice.

When his first story, *Ritter Gluck*, appeared in 1809, Hoffmann was thirty-three. In the thirteen years that were left to him he wrote over seventy literary works – novels, short stories, allegorical fantasies, essays – apart from a great deal of music and numerous music-reviews. This fecundity is the more striking in that at hardly any period of his life did he devote more than a fraction of his energy to creative artistic activity or preparation for it. The tardy emergence of his literary powers and the almost incidental nature of his literary success are due mainly to a stubborn and rather desperate belief, which stayed with him until within a few years of his death, that it was as a composer that he would make his mark on the world. Not until his final return to Berlin and to the service of the Prussian law-courts did he embark on his long series of popular spine-chilling stories.

Apart from works such as *Über alte und neue Kirchenmusik* (*On Church Music, Past and Present*) and *Der Dichter und der Komponist* (*The Poet and the Composer*), which are in reality critical essays set in a fictional narrative context, it is through his portraits of the artist in society that Hoffmann gave expression to that domination which music held over his mind. And with the very first of these portraits, *Johannes Kreislers, des Kapellmeisters musikalische Leiden* (*The Musical Agony of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler*) we make the acquaintance of that most complete creature of his fantastic imagination, that eccentric, disturbing, yet somehow pathetic spokesman for the artist in society – Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler, the lone, unhappy figure who lurks behind the lines of so many of Hoffmann's stories, even those in which he does not appear by name, and who finally, in the unfinished masterpiece *Kater Murr* (*Murr the Tom-Cat*), stalks into the centre of the now completed scene and openly establishes himself as the supreme, all-absorbing symbol of his creator's thoughts and attitudes.

Part One of *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (*The Devil's Elixirs*) was written in 1814, Part Two the following year, and the whole work published in Berlin in 1816. With a characteristically fanciful gesture – he also employs it in *Kater Murr* – Hoffmann presents himself to the reader as merely the editor of an unpublished manuscript upon which he

has chanced and to which he is therefore free to add his own glosses. Its aim, he wrote to a friend, was “to reveal, through the strange, perverted life of a man who from his birth had been tossed to and fro by the forces of heaven and hell, those mysterious relationships between the human mind and the higher values enshrined in Nature, values whose meaning we glimpse in those rare moments of insight which we choose to call the products of Chance”. The work thus exists on two planes: the one carries the sequence of lurid adventures with which the story makes its initial impact, the “strange, perverted life” of the monk Medardus, who renounces the monastery for the sinful pleasures of the world and is led by the Devil into the depths of treachery and lasciviousness, into incest and murder; the other bears the complex of moral, psychological and mystical principles which constituted for Hoffman the *raison d’être* of the whole book, the “mysterious relationships” which designate the course of man’s actions but of which he is at the time unaware, and the “higher values” from which derive, and on which rest the central truths of human existence.

Many of the external trappings upon which Hoffmann relies in the exposition of his story are the common property of nineteenth-century German writers: the employment of a fateful dagger, for instance, and strange chronological coincidences between the lives of certain characters, recall works such as Grillparzer’s play *Die Ahnfrau* and the fate dramas of Zacharias Werner and Adolf Müllner. The device of the *Doppelgänger* itself – the eerie wraith evoked here by the schizophrenic mind under the stress of guilt and persecution – had already been exploited, albeit in terms almost trivial in comparison, by Jean Paul, and reappears in various forms in the work of Heine, Wilhelm Hauff and others who had found stimulation in the discoveries of Mesmer and the pseudo-metaphysical speculations of G.H. Schubert.

But Hoffmann’s concern went far beyond the spectacular presentation of a series of sensational events and coincidences. The course of Medardus’s life is determined by the sins of his forbears. Ironically, he thinks that by ridding himself of the irksome restrictions of monastic life, he will find the freedom in which to indulge to the full the earthly desires welling up within him. Fate,

however, has decreed otherwise: to him has fallen the charge of redeeming the sins of his degenerate line, and after the vicious temptations and wanton brutalities have run their course, salvation finally comes with the transfiguration of his love for Aurelia in the moment of her death. This is the deepest meaning of Hoffmann's novel: Redemption through pure, transcendental Love – the Romantic doctrine proclaimed by German artists and philosophers from Schelling to Richard Wagner.

In the year 1824 a quaint and much shortened version of the story took its place among the many English translations from the German which were appearing at that period. It made little lasting impression, however, and not until now, so far as I am aware, has there been any further attempt to present it to English readers. The astonishing intricacies of the plot, and above all of the personal relationships within it, are the inevitable accompaniment to Hoffmann's insistence on identifying every overtone in the motivation of action, and the primary meaning is sometimes hidden in a flurry of subsidiary themes. In this translation, however, there has been no abridgment of the original text, and Hoffmann's novel is presented in its entirety as one of the most complex, most fascinating and most grotesque manifestations of the Romantic spirit.

Ronald Taylor

Chronology

- 1776 Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann born on January 24 in Königsberg.
- 1792 Matriculation at the University of Königsberg as a student of law.
- 1795 Entry into the Prussian Civil Service.
- 1799 *Scherz, List und Rache*, a *Singspiel* on the morality by Goethe.
- 1800 Appointment to the Law Courts in Posen. During the succeeding six years he also held legal positions in Plozk and Warsaw.
- 1802 Marriage to nineteen-year-old Michalina Roarer, daughter of a Polish local government official in Plozk.
- 1808–13 Kapellmeister and theatrical producer in Bamberg. these years mark the emotional climax of his life – his love for Julia Marc, the thirteen-year-old daughter of a patrician Jewish family in Bamberg, who inspired the heroines of many of his works, among them Aurelia in *Die Elixiere des Teufels* – and the emergence of his characteristic literary gift. At this time also he changed his third name from Wilhelm to Amadeus in reverence for Mozart.
- 1813 Bankruptcy of the Bamberg theatre. Appointment as music director to the operatic company of Joseph Seconda in Dresden and Leipzig.
Beethovens Instrumentalmusik (essay). *Der goldene Top!* (allegorical tale).
- 1814 Hoffmann's final break with the life of a professional musician and return to Prussian government service as a deputy judge at the *Kammergericht* in Berlin, a post he retained until his death. Completion of the opera *Undine*, with libretto by Fouqué.

- 1814–15 Publication of Hoffmann's first collection of essays, sketches and short stories: *Fantasiestücke in Callois Manier* (containing *Ritter Gluck*, *Don Juan* and two books of *Kreisleriana*). Composition of *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, published the following year.
- 1816 *Nachtstücke I* (a collection of short stories, including *Der Sandmann*).
- 1817 *Nachtstücke II* (including *Das Majorat*).
- 1819 Volumes I and II of *Die Erzählungen der Serapiensbrüder*, containing thirteen tales, among them *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* and *Die Bergwerke zu Falun*. Part One of the unfinished novel *Kater Murr*.
- 1820 Volumes III and IV of *Die Serapiensbrüder*, including *Das Fräulein von Scudéri*, *Die Brautwahl* and fourteen other items.
- 1821 Part Two of *Kater Murr*; the projected third part was never started.
- 1822 Onset of the paralysis which eventually spread over his whole body. June 25: Death of Hoffmann from *tabes dorsalis*.

The Devil's Elixirs

Editor's Preface

*(From the posthumous papers of Brother Medardus,
a Capuchin Friar)*

DEARLY WOULD I TAKE YOU, gentle reader, beneath those dark plane trees where I first read the strange story of Brother Medardus. You would sit with me on the same stone bench, half-hidden in fragrant bushes and bright flowers, and would gaze in deep yearning at the blue mountains whose mysterious forms tower up behind the sunlit valley which stretches out before us.

Then you would turn and see scarcely twenty paces behind us a Gothic building, its porch richly ornamented with statues. Through the dark branches of the plane trees, paintings of the saints – the new frescoes in all their glory on the long wall – look straight at you with bright, living eyes. The sun glows on the mountain tops, the evening breeze rises, everywhere there is life and movement; strange voices whisper through the rustling trees and shrubs, swelling like the sound of chant and organ as they reach us from afar; solemn figures in broadly-folded robes walk silently through the embowered garden, their pious gaze fixed on the heavens: have the figures of the saints come to life and descended from their lofty cornices? The air throbs with the mystic thrill of the wonderful legends which the paintings portray, and willingly you believe that everything is really happening before your eyes. It is in such surroundings that you would read the story of Medardus, and you might come to consider the monk's strange visions to be more than just the caprice of an inflamed imagination.

Since, gentle reader, you have now seen the monks, their monastery, and paintings of the saints, I need hardly add that it is the glorious garden of the Capuchin monastery in B—* to which I have brought you.

Once when I was staying at the monastery for a few days, the venerable prior showed me Brother Medardus's posthumous papers, which were preserved in the library as a curio. Only with difficulty did I overcome his objections to letting me see them; in fact, he considered that they should have been burnt.

And so, gentle reader, it is not without fear that you may share the prior's opinion, that I place in your hands the book that has been fashioned from those papers. But if you decide to accompany Medardus through gloomy cloisters and cells, through the lurid episodes of his passage through the world, and to bear the horror, the fear, the madness, the ludicrous perversity of his life as if you were his faithful companion – then, maybe, you will derive some pleasure from those glimpses of a *camera obscura* which have been vouchsafed to you. It may even be that, as you look more closely, what seemed formless will become clear and precise; you will come to recognize the hidden seed which, born of a secret union, grows into a luxuriant plant and spreads forth in a thousand tendrils, until a single blossom, swelling to maturity, absorbs all the life-sap and kills the seed itself.

After I had with great diligence read through the papers of Medardus the Capuchin – which was extremely difficult because of his minute and barely legible monastic handwriting I came to feel that what we call simply dream and imagination might represent the secret thread that runs through our lives and links its varied facets; and that the man who thinks that, because he has perceived this, he has acquired the power to break the thread and challenge that mysterious force which rules us, is to be given up as lost.

Perhaps your experience, gentle reader, will be the same as mine. For the profoundest of reasons I sincerely hope that it may be so.

Part One

1

Childhood Years and Life in the Monastery

MY MOTHER NEVER TOLD ME of the circumstances in which my father lived, but when I call to mind the stories she told about him in my childhood years, I cannot help thinking that he must have been a man of great experience and profound knowledge. From these stories, and from various remarks which my mother made about her earlier life and which I only later came to understand, I know that my parents sank from a life of plenty to a state of the most abject poverty. I learnt too that my father had been led by Satan to commit a heinous crime, a deadly sin. When, in his old age, the grace of God shone upon him, it became his desire to do penance by making a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Holy Linden in cold, far distant Prussia.

During the wearisome journey my mother felt for the first time in the many years of her marriage that she would not remain childless, as my father had always feared. In spite of his poverty he was overjoyed, for now the vision would be fulfilled in which Saint Bernard had promised him comfort and redemption through the birth of a son.

In the monastery of the Holy Linden he fell sick, but in spite of his weakness he would not relax the rigorous devotional discipline imposed upon him, and his condition became more and more serious. He died, at peace in the knowledge of his salvation, at the moment I was born.

The first conscious impressions that dawn in my mind are of the monastery and the wonderful chapel of the Holy Linden. The dark woods still rustle around me; the rich flowering grass and bright flowers, which were my cradle, still shed their fragrance about me. No hostile beast, no harmful insect lives in the sanctuary of the blessed; neither the buzzing of flies nor the chirruping of crickets

disturbs the holy silence. The stillness is broken only by the devout chanting of the priests who, together with the pilgrims, file past in long lines, swinging golden censers from which ascends the odour of sacrificial incense. I still see in the centre of the church the silver-covered trunk of the linden on which the angels set the healing image of the Holy Virgin. The shining figures of saints and angels still smile down upon me. The stories which my mother told me of the wonderful monastery where she received grace and comfort for her deepest suffering, have so entered into my mind that I seem to have seen and experienced everything myself. Yet my memory cannot possibly reach back so far, for my mother left that holy place after a year and a half.

Thus I feel as if I had seen in the deserted chapel that strange, solemn figure, the mysterious painter whose language nobody could understand, who came there in those distant days when the church was being built, and with skilled hand decorated it with remarkable speed in the most glorious colours, only to vanish again without trace.

I also recall an old, oddly-dressed pilgrim with a long grey beard who used to play with me and carry me about on his arm, searching for coloured mosses and stones in the woods. Yet I am sure that the vivid impression I have of him only springs from my mother's description.

Once he brought with him a handsome young boy the same age as myself. I gave him my coloured stones, and he laid them out on the ground in all sorts of shapes, but in the end they always came together in the form of a cross. My mother sat beside us on a stone bench, and the old pilgrim, standing behind her, watched our game with a grave yet gentle expression. Then a group of youths sprang out from behind the bushes; to judge from their clothes and their general attitude they had only come to the Holy Linden out of curiosity. One of them noticed us and cried laughingly:

“Look over there! A holy family! That's something for my book!”

And he actually took out paper and pencil and prepared to sketch us. The old pilgrim raised his head and cried in wrath:

“Miserable scoffer! You call yourself an artist, but the flame of faith and love has never burned in your heart. Your works, like

you yourself, will remain dead and lifeless. You will despair like an outcast in the wilderness, and perish in your own wretchedness.”

The boys hurried away in confusion. Turning to my mother, the pilgrim said:

“Today I brought with me a marvellous child in order that he might kindle the flame of love in your son, but I must now take him from you, and you will probably never see either him or me again. Your son is richly gifted, but the sin of his father still festers within him. Yet despite this he can rise to become a soldier of Christ. Let him enter the service of the Church.”

My mother never tired of telling what a profound impression the pilgrim's words had made upon her. In spite of my natural inclination, however, she decided to bring no kind of persuasion to bear on me, but to await quietly what providence held in store.

My clear recollection of personal experience begins with the occasion when, on the journey home, my mother came to a Cistercian convent where the Abbess – by birth a princess – who had known my father, received her kindly. From the time of that encounter with the old pilgrim, to the moment when my mother first took me to the Abbess, I have not the slightest memory.

I remember that one day my mother had brushed and cleaned my suit as best she could in preparation for my first visit to the Abbess. She had bought new ribbons in the town, and trimming my tousled hair, she made me as smart as possible and enjoined me to behave to the Abbess with the utmost courtesy. At last, holding my mother's hand, I mounted the wide stone steps and entered the high, arched chamber adorned with paintings of the saints, where we found the Abbess. She was a majestic, handsome woman whose religious habit gave her an awe-inspiring dignity. She turned her grave, penetrating gaze upon me and asked:

“Is this your son?”

Her voice, her whole aspect, even the strange surroundings, had such an effect on me that I felt frightened and began to weep. The Abbess, regarding me more kindly and gently, said:

“What is the matter, little boy? Are you afraid of me? What is your son's name, good lady?”

“Franz,” replied my mother.

The Abbess cried in tones of deep emotion:
"Franciscus!"

And she lifted me up and pressed me tightly to herself. At that moment I felt a sudden pain in my neck and gave a loud cry, so that the Abbess became frightened, and let me go. My mother, in great consternation at my behaviour, jumped up at once to take me away. But the Abbess would not allow her to. The diamond crucifix she wore on her breast had so hurt my neck when she clasped me to her, that the place was red and bruised.

"Poor Franz," said the Abbess, "I have hurt you, but we shall still become good friends."

One of the sisters fetched biscuits and sweet wine. My shyness was leaving me, and without further ado I began to nibble the delicacies which the noble lady, who had drawn me on to her knee, put into my mouth. After I had tasted a few drops of the new drink, I regained the cheerfulness and vivacity which my mother said had always been characteristic of me since my earliest childhood. By my chatter and laughter I greatly delighted the Abbess and the other nuns who had stayed in the room.

I still cannot explain how it was that my mother urged me to tell the Abbess about the beautiful place where I had been born, nor do I recollect how it came about that, as though inspired by a divine power, and as though I had understood their deepest meaning, I was able to describe to her the glorious pictures which the mysterious artist had painted; for I recounted in detail the wonderful legends of the saints as though I were already fully conversant with the writings of the Church. The Abbess, and even my mother, stared at me in amazement as my enthusiasm grew and grew. Finally the Abbess asked me:

"Tell me, child, how do you come to know all this?"

Without reflecting for an instant, I replied that a handsome boy whom a poor pilgrim had brought with him to the monastery had once interpreted the meaning of all the paintings in the chapel; he had even made mosaics with coloured stones, explaining to me what they signified and relating many other holy legends besides.

The bell sounded for vespers. The Abbess rose and said to my mother:

“Good lady, I regard your son as my protégé, and from now on I will provide for him.”

My mother was unable to speak for emotion. Sobbing violently, she kissed the Abbess's hands.

Just as we were about to go out of the door, the Abbess came after us, lifted me up again and, carefully moving the crucifix to one side, embraced me. As her burning tears fell on my brow, she cried:

“Franciscus! Be kind and good!”

I was moved to the depths of my heart and could not help weeping myself, without really knowing why.

* * *

With the Abbess's support my mother's little household, on a small farm not far from the convent, began to take on a better aspect. The period of hardship was over. I now had better clothes to wear and took lessons from the priest, for whom I acted as cantor when he celebrated mass in the convent chapel.

The memories of that happy childhood linger like a faerie dream. My home lies far, far behind me – a distant land where abide the unclouded joy and happiness of an innocent, childlike mind. But when I look back, I face the yawning gulf that has for ever separated me from this land. More and more I am seized with an ardent desire to know the dear ones whose voices I seem to hear, and whose forms I see beyond that gulf, walking as in the purple shimmer of early dawn. Yet is there any gulf which love, with its strong wings, cannot bridge? Do time and place mean anything to love? Does not love live in the mind, and is not the mind boundless?

But dark figures rise up, crowd closer and closer together and advance menacingly upon me, cutting off my view and entangling my thoughts in the afflictions of the present, so that even the yearning which used to fill me with indescribable rapture now turns to cruel, paralysing torment.

The priest was kindness itself. He knew how to control my lively mind and adapt his instruction to my temperament, with the result that I enjoyed my lessons and made rapid progress. More dearly than anyone else I loved my mother, but I revered the Abbess like a

saint, and the days on which I was allowed to see her were solemn occasions for me; each time I was resolved to show off my newly-acquired knowledge, but whenever she came up to me, addressing me in kindly tones, I could scarcely stammer a single word – I had eyes and ears only for her. Her every word struck deep into my soul. I remained in a strangely exalted mood throughout such days, and her vision went before me wherever I walked. As I stood before the high altar, swinging the censer while the deep, moving tones of the organ rolled through the chapel in a gradual crescendo, I heard her voice raised in a hymn of praise, and my heart was filled with intimations of a divine providence.

The most glorious of days, however, an occasion to which I looked forward for weeks and which sent a tremor of excitement through me whenever the thought of it entered my mind, was the feast of Saint Bernard, father of the Cistercian order, which was solemnly celebrated with a general dispensation. On the day beforehand people were already streaming to the convent from the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, and camping in the flower-covered field which adjoined the convent building, making it a hive of activity day and night. Saint Bernard's Day falls in August, and I cannot recall the weather ever proving unfavourable in that most favoured of seasons; devout pilgrims walked to and fro, chanting hymns, village lads made merry with their pretty maidens, priests gazed heavenwards in silent contemplation, their hands folded in reverence, families sat on the grass and ate the food which they had unpacked from their well-filled baskets. Cheerful songs, hymns, the deep sighs of the penitent, the laughter of the well-content, lamentation, rejoicing, jubilation, jesting, prayer – such were the sounds borne through the air in strange, confused concert.

Then the convent bell began to toll. The tumult suddenly died away, and the congregation fell on their knees; row upon row, as far as the eye could see, they knelt close to each other, the reverent silence broken only by the murmur of prayer. As the sound of the final stroke died away, the crowd began to mingle with each other again, and the rejoicing which had been interrupted only for a matter of minutes broke out afresh.

On Saint Bernard's Day itself the Bishop came from the nearby town, attended by the lesser clergy, to celebrate High Mass in the convent chapel, and the episcopalian choir, for whom a platform draped with rich tapestry had been erected at the side of the high altar, performed the music. I can still re-live the emotions which filled me on these occasions, and they return to me whenever I call to mind that blissful time which passed all too soon. Vividly I recall a Gloria which was performed several times because the Abbess found it so moving; the Bishop intoned the opening phrase, and when the majestic voices of the choir rang out – "*Gloria in excelsis deo*" – it was as though the heavens above the high altar opened, as though the paintings of the cherubim and seraphim came to life, beating their wings and hovering above the congregation, praising God in song and in the music of instruments. In silent amazement at the devotional intensity of the celebrations, I felt myself transported across the shining clouds to the familiar, yet distant land of my childhood; soft, angelic voices were wafted towards me from the fragrant woods, and the wonderful boy stepped out from behind the tall lilies and said: "Where have you been all this time, Franciscus? I have many beautiful flowers which I shall give all to you if you will but stay with me and love me for ever."

After mass the nuns, led by the Abbess, who was wearing the infula and carrying her silver crook, walked in reverent procession through the corridors of the convent and through the chapel. What godliness, what dignity, what supernal majesty shone from her every glance, emanated from her every movement! It was the Church triumphant itself which pronounced the benediction over the congregation of pious believers. Whenever her eyes lighted on me, I wanted to throw myself in the dust at her feet.

When the service was over, the clergy, together with the choir, were entertained in a large hall in the convent. Benefactors, minor dignitaries and merchants from the town also came, and I too was allowed to be present, since the choirmaster had developed an affection for me and liked to have me with him. As my mind, inspired with holy devotion, had earlier been filled with celestial thoughts, so now the joys of life, in a pageant of glorious colour, took hold of me. Merry tales, anecdotes and jests evoked hearty

laughter, and wine was drunk with great gusto. When evening came, the carriages arrived to take the guests home. When I was sixteen years old, the priest declared that I was now qualified to begin higher theological studies at the seminary in the neighbouring town. I was quite resolved to enter the priesthood, a decision which filled my mother with the greatest joy, as she saw in it the fulfilment of my father's mysterious vision. As a result of my decision she was able to believe for the first time that my father's soul would be redeemed from the tortures of eternal damnation. The Abbess, too, warmly approved of my intention and repeated her promise to help me in any way necessary until I attained the status of priest.

Although the town was so near that its spires were visible from the monastery, I found it very hard to bid farewell to my good mother, to that wonderful lady I so deeply revered, and to my teacher. It is indeed true that a single step outside one's family circle seems to bring the same sorrow at departure as does a journey to the ends of the earth.

The Abbess was particularly moved, and her voice trembled as she spoke comforting words of exhortation. She gave me a finely-worked rosary and a little prayer book with wonderful illuminated pictures. Then she handed me a letter of introduction to the prior of the Capuchin monastery in the town and advised me to seek him out at once, as he would readily offer me whatever advice and assistance I required.

It would certainly not be easy to find a more attractive district than that in which the Capuchin monastery lies, just outside the town. The lovely garden, with its views up into the mountains, seemed to shine in fresh splendour each time I walked down the long avenues, stopping now here, now there among the luxurious trees.

It was in this very garden that I met Prior Leonardus when I first visited the monastery to present my letter of introduction. His natural kindness grew even greater as he read the letter, and he had so many delightful tales to relate about that wonderful lady, whom he had met in Rome in his young days, that on this account alone I was attracted to him from the start. He was surrounded by the brethren, and it was not hard to appreciate the nature of the relationship between him and them, and of the whole mode of life

in the monastery. The peace and serenity of spirit which so plainly characterized the prior's features had spread to all the brethren. Nowhere was there a trace of discontent or of that consuming self-centredness so often seen on monks' faces. For all the strictness of the rules of the order, devotional duties were for Prior Leonardus more a need felt by the religious spirit than an ascetic atonement for the inborn frailties of human nature, and he had been able to stimulate this attitude towards devotion in the brethren to such an extent that everything they had to perform in satisfaction of the rule became imbued with a serenity and a natural geniality which had virtually brought about a higher mode of existence within those earthly confines.

Prior Leonardus even knew how to maintain a discreet contact with the outside world which could not but be beneficial to the brethren. Generous bequests to the monastery, which was held in universal esteem, made it possible to entertain the many friends and patrons in the refectory. On these occasions a long table was set in the middle of the room and Leonardus took his place at its head. Whereas this table was neatly laid out with china and glass, the monks remained at their own narrow board by the wall and used the simple utensils which the rule prescribed. The cook was skilled in the art of preparing dainty maigre dishes which the guests found extremely tasty. The guests themselves provided the wine, and these feasts thus became a pleasant meeting-ground where the sacred and the profane came together in convivial intercourse to their mutual benefit and to the benefit of life itself. For by penetrating the walls of the monastery, in which everything reflected the totally different life of the monks, those whose lives were governed solely by earthly concerns were moved to confess that peace and happiness were also to be found in ways other than those which they themselves had followed; and that the mind, by lifting itself above earthly things, might even be able to create for man a higher form of existence here on earth. The monks, for their part, gained wisdom and breadth of experience, for what they learnt of the dealings of the outside world stimulated in them reflections of the most varied kinds; without ascribing any false value to the things of earth, they yet came to perceive that the various modes of human existence, the

product of an inner determinism, represented a kind of refraction of the spiritual principle, without which everything would be without colour and without sparkle.

The prior had always far outshone the other brethren both in spiritual and in worldly wisdom, for besides being an acknowledged master of theology, in that he elucidated the most complex subjects with ease and was often asked by the professors of the seminary for advice and assistance, he had a greater experience of worldly affairs than one would expect of a priest. He spoke Italian and French with fluency and elegance, and his ability had led to his being sent, in his younger days, on many important missions. At the time I came to know him he was already advanced in years, but despite his white hair, which testified to his age, the fire of youth still burned in his eyes, and the gentle smile which played on his lips added to his expression of contentment and peace of soul. The elegance which marked his speech also characterized his movements, and even the shapeless habit of his order moulded itself to his well-built frame. There was not a single brother who had not taken the cowl from free choice, in response to an inner calling, but if some unhappy man had ever sought refuge in the monastery from angry pursuers, Leonardus would have comforted him; his penance would have been the brief transition to a state of harmony, he would have made his peace with the world, heedless of its trivialities, and his life would have taken on a higher significance. Leonardus had penetrated these unusual aspects of monastic life in Italy, where the rite, and with it the whole attitude towards the spiritual life, is less grave and sombre than in Germany. Just as Classical forms of architecture have been preserved in the churches, so a ray of light from the joyful age of Antiquity seems to have shone into the dark mysticism of Christianity, bringing with it something of the radiant glory which surrounded the ancient gods and heroes.

Leonardus became very fond of me. He taught me Italian and French, but my mind developed chiefly through the many books he gave me and through his conversations. Almost the whole of the spare time that my studies in the seminary allowed was spent in the monastery, and all the while I felt a growing inclination to take the cowl. I revealed my wish to the prior, but without actually dissuading me he advised me to wait a few years longer, and to use this time

to look about me in the world more than I had done hitherto. Although I had no lack of friends, most of whom I had met through the choirmaster, who gave me music lessons, I felt an unpleasant embarrassment in the company of other people, particularly when women were present, and it was this, together with my natural tendency towards a life of contemplation, that seemed to determine my vocation as a monk.

The prior told me many remarkable things about the life of the world. He delved into matters of a most equivocal nature, but treated them with his accustomed lightness of touch and thus never gave the slightest offence. Finally he took me by the hand, looked me straight in the face and asked me whether I was still innocent.

I felt my face go red, for as Leonardus asked this embarrassing question there sprang to my mind a vivid picture which had not entered my mind for a long time.

The choirmaster had a sister, who, though not quite meriting the description of beautiful, was a most attractive young woman, in the full glory of her sex. She displayed above all a well-developed body of the purest contours, with the most beautiful arms and the most beautiful breasts, both in form and complexion, that one could imagine.

One morning when I was going to the choirmaster for my music lesson, I caught his sister by surprise in a light negligee, her breast almost completely bare. She swiftly covered it up, but my prying eyes had already seen too much. Words failed me. New, unknown feelings welled up within me and drove the red-hot blood through my veins so that my pulse beat out loud for all to hear. My heart was held in a convulsive grip and nearly bursting, until I eased my torment with a gentle sigh.

The girl approached me innocently, took my hand and asked what was agitating me. This only made things worse, and it was my good fortune that the choirmaster happened to enter the room at that moment and release me from my anguish.

Never had I played so many wrong chords or sung so out-of-tune as on that occasion. I was pious enough to see the whole affair later as a vicious attack by the Devil, and I counted myself fortunate to have defeated the enemy through the ascetic discipline which I undertook.