

MARCIA'S MADONNA.

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For the Carmelite Review.

HERE had been predictions of a green Christmas in 188—, but as it happens sometimes with unauthorized prophecies, they “went by contraries”—as dreams are said to do. Up to the last moment, however, things were looking well for the meteorological sooth-sayers. The bare streets of the city with their borders of shrivelled grass, the dry, hard roads, the dusty icicles, and out of town the frozen, rugged fallow-land, the bleak fields of unploughed stubble, the seared hedges and the chill river, waited vainly for the all-levelling and enhancing mantle of the “beautiful.” On the night of the twenty-third, after old Rime had made clean the way with a day's boisterous blowing of his frost winds, the snow fell thick and fast in a wild impetuous whirl, celebrating with elfin glee its triumph over the forecasts of the weather-wise. On the platform of a country station in one of the sea-coast provinces, a lone passenger muffled in a panoply of unplucked beaver was stalking impatiently, waiting for the I. C. R. express going west. He was the sort of passenger that porters dive at, that station masters treat with an intuitive and quasi-diplomatic courtesy, that young ladies looking wearily out of car-windows brighten perceptibly to discover; the sort of passenger that by the unquestioned right of a faultless and attractive appearance has the difficulties and discomforts of every journey, that of life itself not excluded, reduced to a minimum for him by the obsequious attentions of his fellow-men.

The train arrived panting its apologies and explanations, just as this distinguished passenger had lighted a second cigar. The country station was redolent of it for several minutes after the express had disappeared,

and the telegraph-operator inhaling the whiffs with greedy, envious nostrils, went back into his dingy office and wished that he was rich.

The train conductor knew this passenger, and helped to brush the snow from his shoulders and his beaver trimmings as he boarded the car. “We are going to have an old fashioned Christmas, Mr. Walton,” he said in what might have been an over cordial tone, at any other time, and to any other gentleman of Mr. Walton's aspect, but considering that it was the season of universal good will, and that the conductor was one of the constituents by whose suffrage Mr. Walton represented a neighboring county in parliament, the greeting was not unwarrantably friendly.

When the porter had hung up his cap and great coat, and the news boy had brought him the papers, and somebody had looked after the ventilators beside his seat, and things were made as pleasant generally as they have a right to be when a popular legislator rides on a government railroad, Mr. Walton threw himself wearily into the chair allotted to him, and made a rapid survey of the other occupants of the coach. He was relieved to see no one to whom his personal feelings or his professional or political interests constrained him to extend his hand, for he was not in a sociable or complaisant mood, and when a man is not, it is good (for everybody else if not for himself) that he should be alone. He took up the pile of papers that had been left beside him and began to open them listlessly, but one by one he threw down again with a gesture of weariness and irritation. “Christmas, nothing but Christmas in them all!” He turned his chair round to the wall, kicked the footstool into position, pulled his pocket cap down well over his eyes, and telling himself that he was tired to death of these hackneyed old platitudes, he lapsed without effort or protest into a train of Christmas thoughts himself. He began