

THE MIRACULOUS VEIL.

By O. M. O'HARA.

Memorate! O Maria,
That it never hath been known
Earthly pleadings, Sister! A.
Rise unheeded to thy throne!

One of the loveliest nooks along the shores of the Mediterranean is the bright little village of Hyeres, situated a few miles from Toulon, on the coast of Provence.

Like most places of interest in France, this picturesque little town possesses a sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin, and in all the bright realms of "Mary's Land" there is no brighter shrine than that of Notre Dame de Grace of Hyeres.

More than a century ago, in a quaint little villa that nestles among the olive groves at the base of the hill, lived a good old couple named Durand. They rejoiced in an only daughter, Marie Agnese, whose birth they looked upon as an answer to their fervent supplications to Our Blessed Lady. In gratitude for the gift of love and sunshine that had come to their home, the Durands consecrated the little Marie to Notre Dame de Grace, vowing her to wear the virginal blue until her sixteenth birthday.

Beautiful, happy, innocent as a flower of her own sunny land, Marie grew into gracious girlhood, a model of piety and virtue, and remarkable, even at her tenderest age, for her loving devotion to Notre Dame de Grace. Hardly was the glorious Southern morning full and radiant over the waters ere the girl might be seen wending her way toward the gilded portals on the hill; and again when the sanctuary was blushed and mellow in the dreamy twilight, the young, slight form in white robe and flowing blue mantle was kneeling before the Madonna de Grace, something of the rapt unearthly beauty of the statue reflected on the upturned face of the maiden at its feet!

The good Cure of the sanctuary, delighted with the girl's piety, made her unutterably happy by giving her full charge of the altar, and all floral decorations pertaining to the chapel. From that day Marie seemed to live in it, and every spare moment was devoted to the embellishment of her beloved charge. Rich, rare exotics from the gardens of Italy, glowing blossoms hidden in fragrant dells among the hills, all were brought and twined by Marie's loving, skillful fingers in garlands for the Shrine "de Grace."

But Marie longed to make some gift more precious and lasting than flowers to her favorite sanctuary. After much deliberation, she decided on working a lace veil for the statue. She had learned cunning devices in the art from her mother, and this talent she was delighted to employ in the service of the Queen of Heaven.

The idea was no sooner conceived than executed; and day after day Marie sat at her task, until a fair, white transparent cloud lay on her lap, and lily-buds, and delicate gossamer-like leaves grew under her clever fingers.

The veil was destined to be finished for the 1st of May, Marie's sixteenth birthday, when she sighed to think she must abandon the consecrated colors and take her place among the marriageable maidens of Hyeres.

Much curiosity existed among these same maidens as to the object of the wondrous veil, for Marie had playfully kept the purpose of her work a profound secret.

"It is the bridal veil!" said one; "Pierre, the Notaire's son, is getting impatient, and wishes all things ready for the sixteenth birthday."

"No!" asserted another, "it is for the reception toilette of Cousin Leonie who has entered the convent of St. Claire."

Marie paid little heed to the questions and inquiring glances of her

companions. Sometimes when pressed too closely on the subject, she would say that the beautiful veil was for a bride, but the words were accompanied with a smile and a rapt, far-away look in the deep, pure eyes, that left her friends incredulous, and convinced them that some unfathomable meaning lay beneath her answer. However, her "intimates," shrewder, or better informed than the others, would insist that Marie Agnese seemed too angelic for any bridal on earth, and they would not be at all astonished if her thoughts were turning to the cloister—it was the fittest nest for such a bird!

The latter surmise was the correct one. Another and a higher thought than earthly espousals or human love was in the girl's mind and making its sweet calm beat of happiness at her heart. But the course of Marie's vocation was not destined to run smoothly. Her parents, proud of her beauty and sweetness, and anxious to keep the sunshine of their old age near them, had quite other views for her and were delighted when the opportunity presented itself of having her happily "established" in the village. An exceptional alliance was offered to them, and it was with no little pleasure they accepted the advances of Monsieur le Notaire, when he came to them on behalf of his tall, bashful son Pierre.

In vain Marie begged and entreated, in vain she pleaded the call of God, her desire for a religious life; her parents were inexorable, even her mother, usually so loving, so sympathetic, was dead to all entreaties.

"No, no," she would say, "thou wilt marry, my darling, and make thy home with us—thou and this good Pierre will minister to our old age and close our eyes in death."

So Marie at last gave a reluctant consent, merely insisting that the proposed marriage should not take place until after the coming month of May, which concession her parents willingly granted. Meanwhile the girl had enlisted a divine and irresistible influence on her side.

With all the fervor and confidence of a true child of Mary, she had laid her little troubles and anxieties at the feet of her good mother, beseeching her to take her client's case in hand, and obtain for her the realization of her desire to be consecrated to God. And when did the cry of a holy desire ever rise to Mary's ear in vain?

The first day of May in Provence broke amid a glory of bloom and sunshine, exceptional even in that land of cloudless skies and swift, sweet, luxuriant flower life.

It was the patronal feast of Notre Dame de Grace, and as such was celebrated with a magnificence and devotion apparently unknown in these days of French infidelity and irreligion.

Mary Agnese and a few chosen companions had been busy in the chapel from early morning arranging fresh blossoms, "cut with the May dew on their lips," and giving to the decorations generally all the improving touches that love and delicate artistic taste could suggest. The little church was filled to overflowing. The feast was a favorite one of the good people of Hyeres and its environs, and they flocked to the shrines in hundreds, with the double object of honoring Notre Dame de Grace, and inaugurating with special devotions the Catholics' ever beloved month of Mary.

The voluminous and much-admired lace veil had been completed in triumph the evening before, and Monsieur le Cure insisted that its presentation should be made the subject of a graceful little ceremony. The "Enfants de Marie," robed in white, and singing an appropriate cantique, slowly defiled up the aisle, each one bearing her offering of flowers, or any gift her piety and taste had procured. Still singing their thrilling hymn, they entered the sanctuary, and, placing their gifts on

the steps of the altar, knelt round it in a circle, while Marie, who had brought up the rear, bearing the beautiful veil—whose purpose was not revealed to her friends—advanced and laid her offering, according to the Cure's instructions, at the foot of the statue. The good priest then, as was sometimes done in those days, blessed the gifts, and, mounting behind the altar, threw it over the head of the image, whence it descended in rich, cloud-like folds, almost to the ground. The chaplet, as the third part of the Rosary is called in Catholic countries, was then recited, and at its conclusion the guardian of the sanctuary addressed a short exhortation to the young clients of Mary.

The functions in the chapel were over, the lights were extinguished—some of the floral decorations were put away—the sanctuary was still and empty, but Marie Agnese remained in prayer before her beloved shrine.

The hours passed on—the sun was high in the heavens, flooding the land in the white intolerable light of the Southern noontide—the mid-day meal was prepared in the home of the Durands, but Marie Agnese was still absent, and her parents began to grow anxious and look at each other questioningly.

"She forgets everything when she is at Notre Dame, that child!" muttered her mother, peeping out for the hundredth time at the side of the drawn "persiennes;" but it was not wise for her to delay so long to-day, and she fasting, too. *Mon Dieu!* what heat! she will be quite faint walking home. She must rest all the day, in order to look bright and happy this evening when she dons her worldly toilette and celebrates the betrothal with this good Pierre!"

The Durands determined to accomplish the project on which they had set their hearts, had more or less in secret arranged a little feast for that evening to which they had invited, for the first time, Pierre, the Notaire's son.

"I will leave the flowers to Marie to arrange," she went on, as the servant brought a huge basket of spring blossoms and left them in the hall. "She has so much taste!"

But no Marie came, although the sun was slanting slightly, and the glare of the day had become less intense. At last, thoroughly alarmed, they dispatched messengers to the shrine, and to the town lest their daughter should be visiting friends—and were awaiting their return with feverish impatience, when the door was dashed open, and Pierre, the Notaire's son, burst in, his face livid with a great anguish, and the name "Marie" trembling on his lips.

"—ad! dead, dead, slain, murdered; how I know not, but dead," was his only answer to the flood of questions and exclamations that pressed upon him; "I can tell you nothing," he cried, "I know nothing; but come I will show her to you," and they went out into the glorious day, whose light and balm and perfume-laden atmosphere had nothing akin with death. The stricken parents wept, following with difficulty the long, swift strides of Pierre. He led them in silence up a sequestered path—Marie's favorite way home—until they came to a tiny rustic bridge, which spanned a deep chasm near the summit of the mountain. One glance at the bridge broken in the middle, told the sorrowful parents all, and with a wild, heart-rung cry, the mother staggered, and would have fallen but for Pierre's prompt aid. With a strong effort she controlled her emotion and prostrating herself on the ground beside her husband and Pierre, gazed down into the dark dizzy abyss, and saw in its rocky depths a mass of white, glimmering like a bed of lilies!

"My God! My child! my child!" wept the old man.

"Marie!" was Pierre's unceasing cry, but the mother did not speak. Life seemed to have suddenly stopped at her heart, and her lips could not utter a word or cry—yet she realized it all. She recognized at the first glance that the fair, still form was her darling dead.

Yes, white and pure as the lamb whose name she bore—her hands folded in the usual fashion on her bosom, and her consecrated robes composed gracefully around her.

Marie Agnese lay at the base of the terrible cliff, *dead*. Dead, but without a wound, or hurt or trace of injury, and oh! miracle of miracles—over her, so near as to almost touch the waxen brow, floated the white lace veil, which they which all the world had seen that morning placed on the statue of Notre Dame de Grace. As if upheld by invisible hands, the fair shimmering cloud lay lightly above, shrouding her from the glare of the sun and almost from the eyes of the beholders, symbolic of the bridal veil for which she had prayed—the bridal solemnized that day in full fruition at the "Feast of the Lamb."

Assistance was procured from the town, and lovingly and reverently her mourning friends carried Marie Agnese to the chapel, and laid her in death where she had so often knelt in life—at the feet of Notre Dame de Grace.

From far and near the villagers and peasants, who had loved her so well, came to bid a last adieu to her whom they fondly called the "Angel of Notre Dame." Mothers brought their babies to lay their warm little faces on hers, and kiss the wonderful veil; and strong men, moved to tears, knelt beside her and prayed, not for, but to her.

During all the days and nights the fair remains lay at the altar, the Miraculous Veil floated over them, but at the Requiem Mass on the morning of the interment, the people—according to tradition—suddenly observed it on the statue again. Venerated as a relic, it remained there for years, until sacrilegious plunderers broke into the chapel and carried it away for its value in gold!

The lonely, heart-broken old parents were soon laid beside their darling in the quaint, acacia-grown cemetery, where their graves may still be seen, the sunshine flashing on the time-worn crosses at their head, the blue sea that laves the land of Rome singing its tireless dirge at their feet!

Burglars entered the St. Stanislaus Convent at Shamokin, Pa. while the inmates attended mass and stole \$250 in jewels and cash.

The Peruvian government has accepted the offer of the Pope to mediate in the dispute between Peru and Ecuador. Both countries however continue to augment their military force.

In a liberal education the end aimed at is not to impart to the student a vast number of accumulated facts, but to stimulate the desire to acquire knowledge for himself, to furnish him with the means of doing so, and to enable him to make a good use of the information when acquired.—*Father Clark, S.J.*

Something is amiss in education when the desire for knowledge does not survive school days. At school the mind is trained in the method of acquiring knowledge, the knowledge itself comes from later reading and study, when the mind begins to think for itself and the judgment is more mature.—*London Tablet.*

Benziger's Catholic Home Annual, 1891.

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