

Stories of City of Arras

By E. E. Erb

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The marvels accomplished by the protection of Notre Dame des Ardents had made such a stir in the world that its fame had crossed the sea and penetrated even to Ireland. The inhabitants of that country invoked it in a moment of peril and obtained assistance.

On September 17th, 1636, Ferdinand of Spain, lieutenant and governor-general of the lower countries and of Bourgogne, was in Arras and went with his followers to hear the Mass. During the service the Holy Candle was lit and some of the drops of the wax were presented to the Prince. The ceremony was carried out with great pomp.

During the siege of Arras in 1640 by the French, a bomb fell near the chapel, a second fell behind the monument and hurled to the ground the beautiful image of Mary, which was placed in a niche above the altar. The niche and the table of the altar were broken, the wall was damaged, but the image was found unhurt. Nothing else in the chapel remained intact. At the sight of this destruction the officers of the Confraternity hid the Holy Candle under the pavement for safety.

The town surrendered on the Feast of St. Lawrence, the 10th of August, and in the capitulation, given on the 12th by the French, the Holy Candle was especially mentioned in clause III. (3) "The Holy Candle and all the other relics are not to be taken out of the city."

The tower and chapel were rebuilt in 1655.

During the revolutionary period all religious monuments and churches were destroyed. The beautiful chapel of the Holy Candle was the first to fall. In June, 1791, they proceeded to demolish it under the pretext that it threatened to become a ruin. The pyramid was yet so solid that it was necessary to attach cables to which they harnessed horses to make it fall. When that act of vandalism was accomplished the most terrible calamities fell on the town of Arras. The following year hundreds of its inhabitants lost their lives under the knife of the guillotine, and it did not cease to do its deadly work during all the months of the revolution.

In the meantime the wardens had difficulty in concealing the Holy Candle and other precious relics. Madame Watelet, the wife of one of the wardens of the Confraternity, concealed these in her house in the Rue de Tripot, burying the jewelled casket which contained the Holy Candle in her cellar.

The Revolutionary Tribunal, with the object of finding the Holy Candle and all other religious relics, made a house to house search of the town. The Watelet family, knowing the danger of being found in possession of these relics, threw the precious casket into a well on the Rue des Chanoines. That other persons had placed objects there for

safety was discovered the next morning when a censer was brought to the surface in a vessel of water. This caused the Revolutionists to search the well, and the Holy Candle, along with many other precious relics, was recovered. The discovery made a great stir in the city and the searching of houses was for a time suspended.

It is not known why the Revolutionists did not destroy the Holy Candle, but it is certain that after the establishment of order and when the exercise of worship was authorized, the Holy Candle was handed over to the Mayor of Arras by M. Grimbart, who sent it to him in February, 1803. It was then given along with many other precious relics to the clergy of the cathedral. These various articles formed the decorations of the chapel of the Holy Virgin in the church of St. Jean Baptiste.

There are various documents proving the movements and resting places of the Holy Candle after its removal from its own chapel.

At this period there was so much to be rebuilt and arranged that it was not until thirty years later when the devotion to Notre Dame des Ardents commenced again to take its place in the hearts of the people. Then the Dames Ursulines d'Arras, so honored by Christian families for the services which they rendered to the young, had constructed the beautiful pyramid of the Holy Candle according to the plans of M. Grigny.

On the occasion of the procession which took place on July 15th, 1860, a new candle, at the base of which had been placed a considerable portion of the old, was carried in a small Gothic spire, an imitation of the original pyramid on the Petite Place. This object of art shining with gold and rich embroideries, had been decorated in the Convent of the Ursulines and was carried by the pupils of that establishment.

As a proof of the veneration in which the Holy Candle was held by the citizens of Arras the following article from the Lion d'Arras is convincing:

From the "Lion d'Arras," August 5, 1916.

The Destruction of a Great Work

The Chapel Des Ursulines of Arras

In 1867 Napoleon III. visited Arras. All at once the sovereign stopped in rapture before a monument which to him seemed to be a pure work of art. He looked with surprised enthusiasm at that jewel of architecture, which is the chapel of the Ursulines.

The emperor asked the name of the architect. He was told that he was Grigny, the author of the cathedral of Geneva, of the church of Notre Dame du St. Cordon at Valenciennes, of the monastery of St. Sacrament, of the church of St. Gery, and the Hotel Deusy at Arras. Grigny, the mason's apprentice, in whom was soon awakened irresistibly the genius of architecture and who very soon became an incomparable master. Grigny who, after having covered all the north and Pas-de-Calais with splendid buildings, died poor and without honor, because always he had put the worship of art before that of his own interest.

In the name of all the town of Arras the prefect claimed a decoration for the great artist. Alas, when that Cross of Honor, so merited, arrived, Grigny was at the gates of the tomb. He soon expired at the age of only fifty-two years. The opinion of all architects is that the chapel of the Ursulines was the most perfect work of this master.

It was also the most difficult, because the work was double. It was necessary to reproduce the Holy Candle of Arras, venerated monument of our ancestors, and to harmonize it with a church born in the meditations of a builder of the nineteenth century.

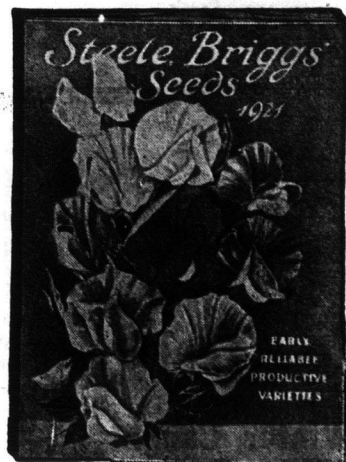
But Grigny's genius soon overcame difficulties. The church that he conceived, inspired by the art of the thirteenth century, is of a style so pure, so correct, that it is difficult to believe it to be modern. It is truly a medieval

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Destruction of the tower and chapel of the Holy Candle by revolutionists, in 1791. This tower stood in the Petite Place, in front of the Hotel de Ville.

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