

STE. ANNE D'AURAY.

(Concluded)

At length, triumphing over every difficulty, and after having been subjected to severe examination by various ecclesiastical superiors, Nicolazic obtained the permission of the Bishop of Vannes for a suitable chapel to be built and endowed. This sanctuary containing the original ancient statue of St. Anne soon became an object of profound veneration, and the devotion to the august Mother of Mary assumed larger and larger proportions. The learned Bollandists give a lengthy list of the wonderful miracles that were here performed, and mention that many persons were punished in a remarkable manner for speaking lightly of the devotion to St. Anne. As at our own beloved "Good St. Anne's" of Beaupré, these miracles were not only of a temporal or physical nature, but even more frequently were miracles of grace, hardened sinners obtaining their conversion, and afflicted souls being strengthened and comforted.

The Carmelite Fathers were entrusted with the charge of this sanctuary of Ste. Anne d'Auray in A. D. 1627, and they considerably embellished the church. In the year 1639, Louis XIII., King of France, still further embellished it, bestowing on it a considerable relic of the Saint. In 1638 we find Pope Urban VIII., by bulls dated Sept. 22nd, granting great indulgences to pilgrims as well as to the confraternity of "Ste. Anne d'Auray."

During the French Revolution, in the year 1792, the Religious were driven away from Auray, their convent and church pillaged and sold, and the treasured statue broken up and burned. But one small piece, a part of the face, escaped destruction, and this fragment is now placed in the pedestal of the new statue.

In the year 1815 the convent and church were bought back and entrusted to the Jesuit Fathers who established a "Petit Séminaire" or college for boys, but these Fathers were expelled in 1828. The college, however, has been administered by other priests and professors, and is still the ecclesiastical college of the diocese of Vannes. From 300 to 400 boys are educated here, and those among the boys who have a vocation for the priesthood pass on to the "Grand Séminaire" at Vannes.

The present church is of modern construction, the first stone of it having been laid in January 1866. Unfortunately much of its beauty is hidden by the many small houses and shops which are grouped about it.

This splendid Basilica is built of granite in the Renaissance style. It is of imposing proportions and elegant form, and its summit is crowned with a statue of St. Anne which can be seen from afar. An elegant modern writer (Miss Anna Hervé) thus speaks of this statue. "It is this statue that the Breton pilgrim seeks with eager eyes, when on his toilsome way from his island home in the stormy sea, or his cottage on the wild and lonely moor. It is to this statue he turns and gives his last as well as his first salutation. At the point where, once past, he knows he shall no longer see the spire of his beloved church nor the statue of his cherished mother, he kneels, and with bared head and reverent mind, offers his last prayer and makes his last supplication to her who is so dear to the Breton heart."

The church itself is in the form of a Latin cross. The interior is divided into three naves, and we might almost say there are two other naves which spring from the transept and surround the choir; and opening on these naves are the numerous chapels situated in the apse. The choir itself is a marvellous masterpiece of taste and richness. It is all of polished brass and precious marbles. It is paved with fine mosaic work. Within the sanctuary a tablet is set in indicating the exact spot where the famous statue was found by Nicolazic as we have related.

The high altar is monumental and was the princely gift of Pius IX. The dais (or canopy), the reredos, the tomb or body of the altar, the steps leading up to it, are all hewn out of purest white marble, which marble had been taken to Rome from far-off quarries during the reigns of Titus and Domitian, as is attested by an inscription. The altar is adorned by statues of the four Evangelists sculptured by the celebrated Falguière, and a St. Joachim, by the same artist, is sculptured on one of the piers supporting the sub-arch of the choir.

The chapel specially dedicated to St. Anne is a marvel of art, and here, as in all parts of the church, are an incalculable number of *ex-votos*. In an elegant niche, surmounted by a richly

chiselled dome, is the miraculous statue of St. Anne which dates only from the year 1823, but in the pedestal of which there is to be seen the only fragment, the left side of the face, which escaped from the fury of the revolutionists.

In the painted windows which surround the church are depicted the various scenes of the wonderful circumstances we have already related concerning the building of the first church by Nicolazic.

We will now speak of the *Scala Sancta* or Holy Staircase. This is situated in the "Champ de l'Épine" (Field of the Thorn), a field of an oblong form, and is nearly opposite to the front of the church or rather Basilica, at only a short distance from it. This Holy Staircase is a remembrance of the Passion of Our Lord, of that Staircase which He ascended at Jerusalem. Great indulgences are attached to this devotion, and it is much practised by pious pilgrims.

This Holy Staircase consists of two long flights of twenty-eight steps each, connected at the top by a large platform on which there is an altar. Both steps and platform are roofed over, so that devotions may not be interrupted by bad weather. It is at this altar that Miss is said at the time of the great pilgrimages, when the church, although capable of holding three thousand persons closely packed, is not large enough to contain the multitudes which flock to St. Anne on these occasions.

The pilgrims making this devotion go up the flight of steps on the north side of the staircase, on their knees, meditating on the different stages of the Passion of Our Divine Lord, and saying a short prayer on each step, until they arrive at the top, where, at the foot of the altar on the platform, they make their concluding prayer. Then they walk down the flight on the south side and their devotion is finished.

It is from the platform of this Staircase that the evening sermon is given when the crowd of pilgrims is unusually large, and even Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is here given, amidst the blaze of torches and tapers which mingle their brilliant light with the milder rays of the moon and the sweet pale effulgence of the stars.

Around this oval inclosure, too, passes the procession called by the Bretons "la retraite aux flambeaux." One of the immense multitude of pilgrims bearing a lighted taper, protected from the wind by a gaily-coloured cup shaped envelope, and in serried ranks the pious crowd proceeds to the Basilica, passing along the streets, under the trees, around the oval, singing their hymns to well-known airs, with a fervour and soul-stirring accent that is contagious. Cold must be the heart that is not warmed to fervour on beholding the devotion of these pious supplicants.

Beside the *Scala Sancta* there is what is called the *Cloître*, a place much frequented by pilgrims. The Seminary, of which we have already spoken, is connected with the church by an ancient cloister forming the four sides of an uncovered square. Some of the doors of the Seminary open on this cloister, and on its walls are the Stations of the Cross. In the centre of the square there used to be a large Calvary where the pilgrims knelt to begin the Stations, but this Calvary has now given place to an enormous plain wooden cross brought by pilgrims from the Holy Land.

Ste. Anne d'Auray has its miraculous fountain, which, as is the case with our own Ste. Anne de Beaupré, is the instrument of many miraculous cures. In the days of the Revolution Ste. Anne d'Auray suffered severely from the barbarous and reckless conduct of the mobs who pillaged and ruthlessly destroyed so many venerable treasures of the past.

The country immediately around Ste. Anne d'Auray is flat and uninteresting. Unlike Lourdes, no mountains look down upon this sanctuary which is approached by a road passing over a barren moor called a "lande." At no considerable distance, however, there are many spots of historic interest and many traces of past wars.

From Canada the easiest way of access would be by French steamer to Havre, whence there is direct railway communication to Rennes, and thence by way of Redon to Auray or to Ste. Anne itself. From Paris also the route is an easy one.

The pilgrimage of Ste. Anne d'Auray being a sort of mother pilgrimage to that of our own "good St. Anne," we have thought that these few words concerning the mother might be acceptable to the pious clients of the daughter, the readers of the English *Anna's of St. Anne de Beaupré*

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