

THE MIRACLE OF NAPLES.



THE recent recurrence of the first Sunday of May recalls to mind the great miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius—that wondrous phenomenon which, occurring as it does, year after year, within the walls of the great Cathedral of Naples, annually attracts thousands of curious tourists, puzzled scientists, and devout pilgrims to the brilliant Southern Capital.

St. Januarius, whom Heaven is pleased thus to honor by a miracle unique in the annals of the Church, was occupying the See of Beneventum, when, in the year 305, he was seized by the minions of the Emperor Diocletian, and with six companions cast into prison. All efforts to induce these heroic Christians to abjure their faith proving futile they were thrown to the wild beasts. But here a second disappointment awaited their persecutors, for these beasts, wild, ferocious, ravenous though they were, not only refused to harm the little party of Christians, but crouched and licked the feet of their intended victims. The enraged prefect, Timotheus, then ordered the captives to be beheaded, and the command was but too readily obeyed. The martyrs-elect were led to the summit of a neighboring hill which overlooked the magnificent bay so famed for its surpassing beauty, and the smiling vine-clad country encircling the fair and favored city of Puzzuoli.

The sword accomplished what the wild beasts refused to do: St. Januarius won the glorious crown of martyrdom. His body was secretly removed by the Christians to the southern shore of the Bay of Naples, and there interred between Mt. Vesuvius and the Sea, upon the farm of a Christian named Marcian. As was customary, a portion of the martyr's blood, enclosed in glass vials, was deposited with his body in the tomb.

The day of persecution at length passed away, and in 385, the remains of the Saint were removed to the "Church of San Genarro extra muros," situated, as its

name indicates, just outside the walls of Naples. Afterwards, the head and the vials of blood were removed within the city. The body of the martyr, however, still remained in the Church of San Genarro, but at a later period was transferred to Beneventum, afterwards to the celebrated monastery of Monte Virgine, and finally in 1487, was brought back to Naples where it was interred in the subterranean chapel beneath the Sanctuary of the Cathedral. To what church the head and the vials of blood were borne upon their translation within the city, is not known, but most probably, they were deposited in the Cathedral itself, since, as we know, eight hundred years ago they were there reverently and jealously guarded in the Tesoro or Treasury, as was called the vault-like chapel in which they were preserved. In 1646, was completed the new Tesoro, commenced by the city in 1608, in fulfillment of a vow. Here in separate recesses are now preserved the life-sized bust containing all that remain of the bones of the martyr's head, and the reliquary containing the vials of blood. Each of these recesses has two locks, the key of one of which is kept by the Archbishop of Naples, that of the other by the city authorities, so that, unless both parties or their representatives are present, the relics must remain untouched.

On the first Sunday of May, with its vigil and octave, is commemorated the translation of the Saint's body to Naples. But the 19th of September is the feast proper, the feast *par excellence* of St. Januarius, commemorating as it does, his saintly life and glorious martyrdom. Then it is that thousands of tourists and pilgrims from every clime gather within the walls of the venerable church. The hearts of all are stirred by varying emotions, all turn their eyes toward the Sanctuary, as slowly and solemnly, the relics of St. Januarius are borne in procession to the altar, and placed thereon, during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Mass ended, the crowd pushes eagerly forward into the sanctuary, encircles the altar and even mounts the steps,