

AS 'Twas Told in Old Albano.

Perhaps, after all, I was the melancholy one, for around and about me lay glistened in the sun the clear bright waters of Lake Albano.

"Like any fairy lake that the breeze is upon. When it breaks into dimples and laughs in the sun."

My companion, the good old Father Secchi, kept me well posted on the surrounding and pointing to Rocci di Papa smilingly said, "you know that the Pope's Rock, and our 'passaggiata' would not be canonically complete unless we paid His Holiness a visit."

But such was not to be, as the following events will show. We continued our walk through the avenue of trees that shade the road from Genzano to the town of Albano and halted for a few moments in front of a monastery which belonged formerly to the order of St. Benedict but now to a cloister built in its ruins, where the virtue and austere of ancient days flourish under the shelter of modern walls, which are hallowed by the memories of the past.

A few little children were playing at "tamborella" and talking and laughing, but whenever they came near a nun reclining in a large cushioned easy chair they lowered their voices, and I caught the sound "piu piano Gabriella" and "zita tu Bianca." "Easy now Gabriella, and keep quiet you, too, Bianca."

She was evidently an invalid, and had been brought out to enjoy the warmth and luxurious beauty of an Italian evening.

Her cheeks were of the palest, her body emaciated and her delicately shaped hands of a transparent whiteness—yet although now a victim of a long and incurable disease, one could readily discern the traces of fascinating beauty which neither time nor illness had been able to efface. Her deep dark eyes, although sunken, were still brilliant, and seemed ever to be searching for something quite unattainable, for after gazing a long while into space she would draw her loose robe carefully around her and sigh—that deep sigh that is born of sadness.

Her voice was soft and pleasant when she spoke, but it was not the voice of a real Italian. "Maybe I was mistaken; it might be that soft Venetian ring to which I was unaccustomed. For there is no language like the Italian, 'it is a thousand things in one word and one in a thousand.'"

Each city and province will have its own dialect, and a Milanese will fume and swear if he has to converse with a Neapolitan, for the difficulty in understanding is decidedly marked. A Florentine will tell you that his tongue is par excellence the one to learn, while a Roman will simply shrug his shoulders and say "ch'importa, signore," "what difference does it make anyhow," "la lingua e bellissima," "the language is the most beautiful," and as for my opinion, well, "la lingua Romana, nella bocca Toscana," "the Roman tongue in the Tuscan mouth," changing the proverb to suit himself.

But this is only a digression, and my story awaits me. As we passed her she made a slight effort to move and return the salutation of Padre Secchi, and I could plainly see that the land she was longing for was not far distant, and before that golden sun had set she would have passed over life's troubled waters into the haven of rest.

She made a motion as if to speak, and as we approached she beckoned Padre Secchi to come. I withdrew and waited until what ever was to be said was over.

"You will come again, Father." "Yes, Sister Francesca, I will come this evening and bring you the letters myself, and till then good-bye and God be with you."

"Good-bye, Father, and thank you; I think I feel better now."

Two Sister attendants came softly to where she was sitting and as we turned we could see them helping her into the house.

"Do you know, caro mio," said Padre Secchi, "that this life of ours is the greatest study, and that amid the meretricious buffetings and boiling surges of the furious waves we sometimes find one who on its lone and stormy voyage escapes the treacherous quicksands, but only through that persevering belief and hope in God's assistance."

"How true," said he, "has our own great Augustine spoken, 'Behold how much I have wandered about in my memory seeking Thee, O Lord! and I have not found Thee outside of it. . . for where I have found the truth, there I have found my God, the truth itself.'"

"Ah, yes, hers has been a long life in a short time; she might have been the Abbess had she wished it, but her charge was a more sublime one. You will hear it soon, perhaps, yes, to-morrow."

"Here we are in the Piazza, and I must say adieu until after Mass." With that he left me, and it being a kind of festa in the town, I wandered around, now listening to an "aria" from "Il Trovatore," and watching the little children dancing and clapping their hands for joy when some one let loose a toy balloon, now interested in the outbursts of enthusiasm displayed by the "passanti," when something new and novel struck their fancy; a flashily dressed contandina and contandino engaged in a popular dance, both holding out to tire each other down, and the shouts that greeted their progress. Viva! Viva! Come brava! etc.

Next morning I dressed hurriedly and made my way to the principal church where solemn high Mass was to be celebrated. The beautiful edifice was already filled with devout souls who had come from miles around to partake in this solemn function and show their honor and love for their dear Madonna. Everything within presented a scene of holy splendor and even the most critical and skeptical must needs be impressed. The old bell tolled and

"Each priest adorn'd was in a surplice white. The bishops donn'd their albs and copes of state."

I knew after the service I should see my dear friend the padre, so I waited until all was over and the majority had departed. Sure enough, I saw him advancing and with a "buon giorno, figlio mio," we sauntered along arm in arm over the road to the cloister. We were admitted by an aged nun, who said to the priest, "she awaits you, Father," "Bene," he answered, and we entered.

"Sister," said Padre Secchi, "you know the Contessa d'Armini?" "Si Padre, yes, very well indeed." "Send for her at once, as I think she is now in 'Villaggiatura' at the Villa Marcella near by."

"It will be as you wish, Father." "Go, my child," said the priest, "to Sister Francesca, and hand her this letter," and the Countess, with a slight bow, took it and went with her companion to an adjoining room. The Countess d'Armini was a beautiful woman of that Italian type which causes the artist no end of trouble to depict, for she possessed an almost indescribable beauty, varying, fascinating, subtle and strong.

She ascended the staircase that led to the cells of the nuns, and passing through a long corridor, came to a little door over which was written "Memento homo quia pulvis es." Remember man that thou art dust. On opening it she found herself in the infirmary, a quiet little room looking out on the court and garden below, and from which could be seen the Alban mountains.

The Countess noiselessly approached the humble little white bed whereon the dying Sister lay and drew back the curtains. She was sitting up supported by pillows and her eyes were fixed on the cross of her rosary.

She turned when the Countess spoke, and fixing those searching eyes on her said, "Marie, Marie, I have something to say to you. You have never heard any one of your family speak of me?" "Never," answered the Countess, somewhat surprised.

"I have known something of your family, dear, your brother, but O, it was so long ago, when you were at school in Paris."

"Your mother received me into her home as a ladies' companion, for I was poor, and at that time such a position was rarely accorded one of my station. There I met your brother, who was then a young soldier and filled with ambition to rise in his country's estimation. He wished me to marry him. Your mother was bitterly opposed, but he insisted. I saw he would disobey his mother. I was afraid of him and afraid for myself. So I prayed earnestly and fervently to our good God. He did not reject my afflicted

and desolate heart, but, Divine Consoler as He ever is, called me to this home and placed this holy veil as a barrier between the world and myself. I have found rest and peace here, although at times purchased with bitter and hard suffering."

"God knows I loved him dearly and was ready to meet all sacrifices for his advancement. 'Here I was able to see in that clear light which streams from the joys of this life and how false and empty are all earthly pleasures. After a few years I came to consecrate myself with irrevocable vows to God's holy service, but public report, which sometimes finds its way even to the cloister, told me of the only thing which still had power to affect me. For, Marie, your brother, angry at my departure, and grieving for me, the poor creature that I am, sought forgetfulness in dissipation. 'Perhaps he forgot me. I hope and trust he did, but he also forgot his God. Find him, bring him back to his God!'"

"Take this letter the good Father gave you to the Via Quattro Fontane and the priest to whom it is addressed will direct you. 'O, how I have wept, how I have prayed, how I have done penance; all have not prevailed and I am pierced to my heart's core with the terrible reflection—' She was unable to continue; her voice died upon her lips while clear burning tears rolled down her cheeks. The Countess kneeling at her bedside wept too; for she began to see what this self-denying heart had suffered."

"Marie," the Sister continued, "I shall soon be gone and there will be no one left to pray or think of him. You loved him, too, did you not, Marie?" "Yes, dear Sister, with all my heart, but you know his whereabouts have been years unknown."

"Promise me, O promise me that you will never cease to pray for him. Promise me there will be another voice to take the place of poor Francesca's, and promise me that you will find him. Promise, my child."

She seized her hands and fixed upon her a look in which the last forces of her life were concentrated. The Countess thought a moment; her beautiful face wore a grave and stern expression. Finally, raising one arm toward the crucifix, she said in a distinct voice, "Sister Francesca, I promise you to continue what you have commenced. I will pray and labor for his conversion all my life, and I swear to you I will find him and bring him back to his God."

A ray of heavenly light fell upon the white face of the Sister, and firmly seizing the hands of the Countess she said, "Marie, I can die now in peace," and with the words "Cor Jesu," Sister Francesca sank back upon her pillows dead.

III. Ten years have passed away. The grass is thick and green upon the grave of Sister Francesca. The Countess has grown old. She has travelled the world over in her promised search but without success. The letter directing her to a priest in Rome on the Quattro Fontane contained but little of her brother's whereabouts. It gave as a possible address Rue de l'Abbaye, Paris, but he had long since left there and no knowledge of him was obtainable.

Society has missed her graceful figure and pleasing conversation these many years. Some said it was an affair d'amour, others that she was leading the life of a recluse in order to start a revolution in society. Many were the opinions; none were correct. She has given to her life but one aim, and that sublime and difficult, and from the moment when the life of Sister Francesca passed into her own, all her actions, all her thoughts had been devoted to the redemption of one soul.

With what vigils, with what prayers, what sighs, what agony of heart, and with what fervent desire did she ask God for one soul. And what vows did she make to the Blessed Mother. What flowers she offered upon the altars; what prayers, in which she thanked God for the kindness that had given poor heart-weary mortals this all-powerful mediatrix!

Her brother's guardian angel, what careful and long conversation did she hold with him! How she labored and prayed for that of which he never thought! One would naturally ask why Marie d'Armini, Countess, rich, charming and admired, should rise so early in the morning and spend so many hours upon her knees while others of the nobility were enjoying their sleep on silken couches?

Why she went with the Sisters of Charity to visit the sick, why her attire was so simple and plain, why her room was so little ornamented, and finally why with so interesting an appearance and conversation she preferred so severe a life?

No one on earth could answer these questions, except the guardian angel who writes down these noble acts to the account of their forgetful subject, her unrepentant brother.

"I tell you, Filippo, this business is bad; the government has already set spies upon us, and I for one do not care to have my evening coat soiled with blood, and perhaps, 'chi lo sa,' who knows but at San Lorenzo they are already preparing a receiving tomb for your humble servant."

"No, I am willing to stand by you as I have, but by all the Apostles, I shall never spill blood and once and for all this question is settled."

"O, bien," replied his companion, who was no other than Filippo d'Armini, traveller, nobleman and bon vivant. "You know the old saying, that our friend Jean once used in the 'Trinite' at Paris: 'Jamais

unroux n'est venu amie.' Faith heart never went away!" "Be that as it may, caro mio, in this instance your quotation is misplaced, and as I could not the biggest dish of 'potenza' that was ever cooked by Giga in old San Marino, I move we eat to and make friends with the 'carta di mangiaro.'"

Thus conversation took place just opposite the celebrated Cafe Roma on the Corso in Rome, and crossing over they entered the restaurant and were assigned a table. "You have never seen the Countess since she was a child, Filippo?" "No, a sad, yes the saddest chapter in my life was written on the day she returned from her school in Paris, and I swore I would never call a D'Armini a relation of mine while there was breath in this body and, by God, I have kept that oath."

"That's good Chanti, Eduardo, it even surpasses the Continental at Napoli. 'Alla vostra salute and viva il vino generoso.'"

"They say the Countess is a beautiful woman, but on account of some hidden trouble is little seen in society. 'Too bad these women are sometimes led into seclusion by an imaginary religious feeling.'"

"Society needs her. You should call on her, and who knows what a rich harvest would be in store for you." The cries of a gendarme, who was shell of so-called aristocracy, which when broken emits the foulest odor. No, I shall never see her; my life is mapped out, and I fear neither God nor the devil. No more about the D'Armini, if you are my friend, Eduardo, and now as it is getting late and I have matters of importance with the Cavaliere Boltini, au revoir, and meet me at the Inghilterra to-morrow at mid-day."

D'Armini paid the bill and hastily left. It was quite dark when he entered the Piazza di Spagna, and he did not notice a figure which was closely following him. He stopped to light a cigarette just before he came to the Via Capo la Casa, when a blow struck from behind almost felled him.

He was a strong and fearless man and fought off his assailant until he felt the plunge of a stiletto, when he staggered and fell. "The cries of a gendarme, who was quickly on the scene, brought a score of people, who, gesticulating frantically, were exclaiming, 'chi e, chi e, who is he, who is he.'"

At that moment a carriage was seen coming along and as the man was dying, it was necessary to call it into immediate assistance. The gendarme explained the sad affair and the condition of the wounded man, and the coachman descended and opened the door.

"Contessa, a poor man has been stabbed, and he is dying." "Then, Beppo, give them my carriage, and I shall walk home. Was he much injured?" "He is dying, they say, Contessa, and is calling 'Francesca! Francesca! Francesca!'"

"I will wait, and perhaps I may be of some assistance." Only a glance was necessary, for there was the high forehead of the D'Armini, and the firm mouth. "Filippo, Filippo," she cried, and threw her arms about him. She immediately gave orders to drive in all haste to her home, for she knew too well her brother had only a short time to live.

In the same room where Francesca first met him they arranged a couch and placed him on it. The loving and tender sister, watching the night praying and beseeching God to restore him to consciousness.

It was late the next morning when the doctor called her and said: "Contessa, the patient is conscious now, but it will not last. You must go to him."

Quickly she obeyed and softly entered the chamber. He recognized her at once and taking her tear-stained face between his hands, said: "Marie, I have seen her! I have seen Francesca. She is an angel in heaven. Send for the Padre, for I am going to meet her."

"Filippo, Filippo, you have found God at last!" "Yes, dear sister, but how long have I lost Him. This is the end of all greatness and all honors, Marie, and the highest and lowest are here equal, made by him who equally created them. O, false world, you too shall pass away and your living actors shall cast off their garb of finery and be food for the vilest worms."

"Yes, Contessa, he is quite resigned, and will soon, I hope, be happy," said the Padre. They knelt silently around the

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dying man, and gazing on the crucifix he muttered something inaudible, and as the "Ave Maria" was calling Rome to prayer Filippo d'Armini was called to his God.

They buried him in the family lot in San Lorenzo, and there with the rest he awaits the resurrection. Marie is now happily married, and though streaks of gray are much in evidence in that black hair, her pleasant face still preserves the repose of former days. She has been blessed with mixed and imperfect happiness such as every one tastes in this world. For in this life the black squares are never far distant from the white ones, and in its tangled skein the dark threads are woven in by the side of brighter colors.

She has been happy, and though disappointments have come and where she would have wished sunshine to enter dark rain had fallen, still her heart is joyful, for her promise to Sister Francesca has been faithfully kept, for she had brought the lost sheep home to his Father as she was told in Old Albano.
MAX WALTER MANNIX.

Pope Opposes French Law.

The Pope has instructed the French episcopate to refuse the clause in the church devolution law providing for the creation of mutual aid societies for aged priests. These societies, it was planned, would not only take over the property belonging to certain pension funds for aged priests, amounting to \$4,000,000, but, in accordance with a recent amendment to the devolution of church property bill, they would accept pious foundations for masses.

This refusal of the Church will result, under the law, in turning over funds valued at many million dollars to public charities. In his letter of rejection the pontiff says he earnestly desired to save the French priests from further sacrifices and was disposed to authorize large concessions provided the law permitted the priests to safeguard their dignity and ecclesiastical discipline. But the law proposed the formation of societies open to all who wanted to join and provided no means for excluding those who had strayed from the Church. Under the proposed law the celebra-

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Ireland Wants Tourists.

A much needed effort to popularize Ireland as a resort for tourists is to be made by the Irish Hotel and Tourist Association which has just been meeting in Dublin. Ireland is rich in places of natural beauty, but little effort is made to bring people to see them, and when tourists do come they find in most cases that the accommodation is so bad that they do not pay a return visit. Switzerland and the Isle of Man, neither of which has any natural advantage over Ireland, make large sums every season from the tourist traffic.

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