

A SHOWER OF BLOOD.



HE celebrated Father Denza relates a strange phenomenon that happened at Missignadi, a small village at a short distance from Oppido Mamertina, Italy, on the 15th of May 1890. Forty-two persons, two of whom were officers, testified under oath that on the aforesaid day between 4:30 and 5 p.m., a light shower of blood fell, and stained persons, stones and plants. The sky was dark; and it was observed that the shower of blood followed a large black cloud that advanced from West to East. The area sprinkled with drops of blood was about two square miles.

On different other occasions, the bloody colour of rain or snow has been accounted for by the presence of certain cryptogams, or of mineral substances, especially iron oxide or cobalt chloride. The presence of such substances in large quantities in a current of air, undoubtedly requires special circumstances. The phenomenon is not of frequent occurrence, whether the colour noticed be reddish, or yellow, as happens when the colouring substance is the pollen of Coniferæ blown away by a storm at the time of fertilization. It was in this way that scientists used to account for showers of blood. But in the present case, we have reason to believe that true blood, and not only blood-colored rain, fell at Missignadi.

Virdia, the Director of the Oppido observatory, collected some of this rain in little cups and from leaves, and sample of it were sent to the laboratory of the School of Hygiene at Rome. In the report dated June 29th 1890, we read that the

stains of the drops vary from 1 millimeter to 4 millimeters in diameter, that they look like pellicles somewhat contracted, and about to crumble, and that all the other physical characteristics are those of blood. A particle of this substance heated upon a plate of platinum swells up and gives out the well known smell of burnt horn; again it catches fire, and leaves a terreous residue of a yellowish appearance, which gives exactly the reactions of iron. Another particle of the same substance, treated with chloride of iron and acetic acid yields beautiful hemin crystals, the quintessence of true blood. Lastly, a third particle acted upon with a solution of potash reveals to the microscope reddish spheroidal globules which go to indicate, though doubtfully, that it is the blood of birds.

This last circumstance, far from rendering this phenomenon easier to explain, makes it all the more difficult. If we were to account for it by the action of a storm it would be more natural to believe that the blood was taken from a slaughter-house than from the veins of migrating birds. But a phenomenon cannot be denied simply because it is difficult or even impossible to account for it. If the shower at Missignadi were not true blood how could we explain the presence of all the chemical characteristics of blood and especially of hemin?

A lesson to be derived from this fact, which has happened in our days, is that historians should not deny *a priori* all past events of the same kind. It may be that in some cases people were mistaken; but who would dare say that they were mistaken in all the cases mentioned in history?

