

Arcadia, whose forests were peopled with rural gods, and where every grotto, every murmuring spring had its altar, likewise abjured, though not so promptly, the worship of Pan and the Naiads for the veneration of the humble Virgin, whose divine child was pleased to receive his first homage from simple shepherds. But as ancient superstitions are more difficult to eradicate from rural districts than from any other places, it was long believed in the Arcadian hamlets that Diana still followed the chase in the depth of the great forests of Menales and Lyceum. Young and credulous shepherdesses, divided between the Christian faith and their ancestral superstitions, sometimes imagined that they saw, by the flickering light of the moon, fair white Dryads amongst the trees, Naiads bending pensively over the springs, or playful elves dancing on the buttercups and daisies in the meadows. But, about the time of Constantine, the Blessed Virgin had definitely prevailed over deified nature; and the numerous churches bearing her name, which still adorn the rustic scenes of the land of the ancient Pelages, attest the profound devotion of the Arcadians to the Virgin Mother.

Elida, too, very early built a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin on the banks of its romantic river, the Alpheus, and as it was surrounded by noble vineyards, it received the name of Our Lady of Grapes.

Macedonia preceded Greece proper in the veneration of Mary. Thessalonica had a bishopric even in the time of the Apostles, and its church was a superb edifice with jasper columns, dedicated by the pious Macedonians to the Blessed Virgin; this structure is still to be seen, but the Turks have converted it into a mosque.*

Nero, travelling in the Peloponnesus, did not dare to cross the frontiers of Laconia; the stern gloom of Sparta inspired him with fear. The mild, sweet Virgin of Galilee was more valiant than Cæsar; she passed the Eurotes, which hides its waves under rose-bays, and presented herself to the people of Leonidas, whose ancient virtue was preserved in the bitter, but invigorating waters of poverty. She was welcomed with enthusiasm, and that brave people hastened to

* *Wheeler's Travels.*

