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Some Italian Churches

'Tis said Toronto is the City of Churches. But Toronto in all her glory is not arrayed with churches like Italy. There are a cool 300 churches in Naples; there are over 400 in Rome; and in the rest of Italy they are scattered with equal profusion. The tourist from the great and glorious nation to the south of us, acting in accordance with the principle that whatever is common is cheap (principle well authenticated in commercial circles), affects to disregard the churches and art galleries of Italy. I have seen a Pittsburg millionaire, with diamond shirt stud and all the rest of it (once common day-laborer in Glasgow) go through the Pitti Palace in Florence in fifteen minutes to the second, while his brother held the stop-watch. He raced through the halls like a man demented, his arms and legs rigid, his head turning quickly from side to side as he took in the pictures, and when he came to the end the sweat was bubbling out on his brow. He conducted himself more circumspectly in the churches, but even there he showed his true colors. In one church, so rumor had it, he had crept up behind a confessional box where Sweet Sixteen was confessing her sins to an unshaven priest, and there greedily listened to all that was said; cursing his very soul that he could not understand Italian. But for the rest, he gave the churches the go-by, and would have none of them. "They're common as dirt," he said, with a fine sense of simile.

One cannot but have a fellow feeling for the Pittsburg millionaire, and yet at the same time one must remember that those who "cut" the Italian churches as he did, miss one-half the glory that was Italy.

At first the glory is not apparent. Take the Cathedral at Naples. Naples is the most poverty-stricken city in Europe. In 1870 two-thirds of the population had no recognized means of living, lived like dogs in the gutters. Even now men live in the old *fondaci*, forty in a room, and a cesspool in the corner. And all this squalor and misery and vice gathers and festers about the doors of the Cathedral. As you go up the steps you meet a blind man with the flies clustering about his eyes. A woman holds out a naked child swollen with sickness and quite unconscious, pleading for alms. You turn away from her to meet a man suffering from some loathsome disease which has eaten away his nose and lips and ears. If you so much as give him five *centesimi* (one cent), you are immediately surrounded by an angry mob of the halt and the lame and the blind, the fatherless and the widow, all clamoring for "macaroni." Your only safety (if you do not wish to be infected with every disease under the sun) lies in scattering to the four corners of the earth a handful of coppers, and fleeing amain.

Then, in addition to the misery that gathers head about the doors of the Cathedrals, there is very often about the churches of Italy a painful element of the ridiculous. One is sometimes tempted to wonder whether St. Paul, like the "Omnia Gallia" of the schoolboy, was not divided into "three halves." All over Europe one finds the "disjecta membra" of the Great Apostle, here the head, there the trunk, in another place "half of him," and so forth; and when one puts two and two together, the result comes out at considerably more than four. Sometimes, too, one's sense of modesty is shocked at being shown the left ankle-bone or big toe-nail of Ste. Ursula, or some other virgin saint, who we feel sure would not have permitted such an exhibition in her lifetime. The taste of the ecclesiastical authorities in these matters leaves much to be desired. Among the saints on the roof of the Milan Cathedral, for instance, they have placed the statue of Napoleon, and there the little Corsican stands in the midst of the saints

With neck outthrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

As the Milanese say, there are on the roof of Milan Cathedral 999 saints and one other.

Many of the little ecclesiastical legends are equally artistic. In the neighborhood of Rome, for instance, there are three springs to be found together by the roadside, several yards apart. The story about them is that once a saint, was slaughtered there, and that as his head rolled from his shoulders and fell on the ground, it bounded three times, and wherever it bounded a spring of pure water sprang up after it. At first one is lost in admiration at the neatness of the explanation, but after a while one begins to wonder about the resiliency of that sainted head.

Another good legend, of a similar aetiological character, was told by Canon Cody of St. Paul's several years ago in a lecture at the University. There is in Rome a Church of the Jesuits, which is situated on a high hill, and comes in for all the winds that blow. The popular story is that once the Devil and the Wind were gadding about the city of Rome and happened on this Church of the Jesuits. Said the Devil to the Wind, "I'm going into this church to look around. You wait here till I come out." "Aright," said the Wind, "I'll wait." So the Devil went into the Church of the Jesuits to look around, and the Wind waited and waited and waited, and the story is that it is still waiting, raving after its lost friend. For the Devil has never come out.

When detraction has done its worst, however, the fact remains that the churches of Italy are a thing of beauty and a joy forever. There is not