

GENAZZANO.

SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL.

History of the Devotion—Petrucchia and the Church of Our Lady—"The Madonna del Paradiso"—An Interesting Story of two English Pilgrims.

Six o'clock in the morning, yet Rome in the month of June is all astir, the Via Frattina is already alive with traffic. In a certain corner of the street may be seen a herd of shaggy, bearded goats, their drivers, two *contadini* from the cool Campagna, scarcely less wild-looking than the animals in their charge. These represent the milk-supply of Rome, and stand ready to be milked. Does the fresh morning air tempt you to take a glass of it? If so, give one of the herdsmen but a couple of sous, and he will draw you a measure rich and nourishing as the milk which the founder of the city threw upon three thousand years ago! Six o'clock, yet already the church hard by is being entered by the faithful, men and women desirous at its first beginning to sanctify their day to God. One Mass is over, and a second priest, preceded by his server, a happy looking Roman boy, his smiling face telling how entirely at home he is in his Father's house, is emerging from the sacristy. The Mass is begun and finished, and two men leave the church together, proceeding slowly through the crowded streets to the busy railway station.

Twenty minutes must elapse before their train can start, more than time to take a frugal Roman breakfast—two small rolls and a cup of *café au lait*—in the company's refreshment rooms. Soon they are joined by a *contadini* lad of twelve years old, sunburnt and bare-legged, who seats himself at their table. The boy, with the matchless grace and self-possession natural to every Roman, responds simply and without embarrassment to the questions of his chance companions. A lemon-grower's child is he, and having left his load of fruit with Il Signor Feretti at the "Ire Fontain," he is returning to his sick mother's cottage in the Campagna.

The train is starting, and the two companions leave the lad happy with a largesse which will procure for her he loves so well, medical attendance and any delicacies which may be prescribed. How kind is Madre Maria, she has heard his prayers, and sent two kind and rich Ingleses to supply his mother's needs.

The two Ingleses are, as the elder received the younger, on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel at Genazzano. Hence to-day it behooves them to travel like pilgrims, and to go third-class. No great hardship after all, although the elder traveller holds high office in the Holy Father's Court, for an empty carriage is easily found, and they will be all the cooler on the bare uncushioned boards. But alone they are not fated to be left. Soon their carriage is crowded with stout, ruddy, *contadini* women returning to their homes, and, alas, emitting from their breath more than a suspicion of the garlic plant. The pilgrims will now draw back, and soon they enter into conversation with their companions, meekly resigning themselves to the inevitable consequence of such companionship, the providing of a most grudging banquet to the active Italian flea.

The carriage moves so slowly that one can easily keep pace with it by walking at its side, and so, Ingleses-like, the younger man elects to walk. All nature seems to sing the praise of God in one glad poem, and man can scarce refrain from joining in her song of thankfulness to Him whose presence is manifested in such loveliness. Genazzano is at last reached, and the two pilgrims direct their steps to the church.

Before proceeding further with our narrative it may be well to consider the story of the Shrine of our Lady of Good Counsel at Genazzano. Here, in the fifteenth century, there lived an old lady of the name of Petrucchia da Jeneo, a member of the third order of St. Augustine, and a devoted client of the Mother of God. Her one grief was that the existing church in her native town, dedicated to the honor of Mary, was, from its poverty and plainness, unworthy of the Madonna. Petrucchia announced to the authorities

her intention of building a worthier temple. She was only possessed of moderate means, but, strong in faith, she sold all that she had and began the undertaking. The walls of the church were beginning to rise, when suddenly her funds became exhausted, and the good work had to be stopped. Petrucchia received little sympathy from her relations and friends, both generally blaming her for imprudence.

Another and a greater difficulty also arose than the want of funds. She had been understood to say that she began the undertaking principally on account of an inspiration received from God. Now, the Holy See, in order to guard against abuses, which had lately arisen through giving credence to the fancied supernatural visions of deluded persons, had decreed "forbidding such things to be attended to, unless they were corroborated by some other external sign and testimony, the mere assertion of a dream, a vision or a revelation, was on no account to be obeyed." Here was an unexpected difficulty, and one which prevented Petrucchia making an appeal to the faithful for assistance. The months passed by, and the low bare walls of Petrucchia's projected church remained in the minds of many of the inhabitants of Genazzano as a melancholy confirmation of the folly of beginning to build without first estimating the cost.

"Petrucchia's folly" became a proverb. But all the while the old lady remained undaunted. Strong in her simple faith and confidence in the Mother of God, she always replied to those who would condemn her action: "The work will be finished and that right soon; because it is not my work but God's: the Madonna and St. Augustine with do it before I die." Again and again she was heard to say; "Oh, what a Gran Signora will soon come and take possession of this place." "Poor old woman," her sympathizers would say, grieving in their kindly hearts at what they believe to be her pitiable condition, "Petrucchia's misfortunes have turned her train." Time went on and the feast of St. Mark came round. On this day it was customary to hold a great fair at Genazzano, and the little town was full. Evening, the pleasantest part of the day under an Italian sky, had arrived, and business being concluded, the people were enjoying their simple pleasures. All was laughter and happiness. Presently a thin cloud was seen floating in the direction of Petrucchia's unfinished building. Nearer and nearer it came, until it seemed to hover over, and then to descend upon one of the low walls, and then to disappear. The people rushed in this direction and were amazed to find a thin fresco, of the Madonna and the Holy Child, about sixteen inches square, resting upon one of the walls of the unfinished church. At the same time, as if to proclaim their joy at this exhibition of God's power, the bells of the different churches, untouched by mortal hands, broke out into a joyous peal of music. The people fell upon their knees before the picture, pouring out their thanks to God for so great a manifestation of His favour towards them. This picture soon became the great devotion of Genazzano, and received the name of the "Madonna del Paradiso."

Shortly after its arrival two strangers appeared in the town, one an Albanian, and the other a Slavonian by birth, who told a strange story. They had been living at Scutari, a city of Albania on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic, and distant about twenty miles from the sea. They were greatly in dread of an invasion from the Turks, and were wont to repair to a church outside the city, to pray for the assistance of God against the infidels. In this church there was a fresco, painted on the wall, of the Madonna and the Infant Jesus, which bore the name of the "Madonna del Buon Officio." To this picture they had always felt great devotions. At length the two men resolved to leave Scutari, but before leaving they paid a visit to their beloved Madonna. Kneeling before the picture they implored the Mother of God that as she had been forced to go into the land of Egypt with her Divine Child, so she would deign to accompany them in their flight. As they were thus praying, the fresco disappeared, and a thick cloud seemed to detach itself from the wall where it had been, and to pass through the doorway of the church. The men felt themselves compelled to follow it, and they did so, walking over the sea dry-footed until they came to Rome. Then they lost sight of the

cloud. Having heard that an unknown picture of the Madonna had been miraculously brought to Genazzano, they had journeyed thither; and in the "Madonna del Paradiso" they recognised the object of their devotions at Scutari.

Such was the story they told, which after a most searching investigation was found to be absolutely true. Many miraculous favours were received at the shrine, which continues to this day to be a favorite pilgrimage for the faithful. The descendants of the Albanian are to be found in the town; the family of the Slavonian is extinct. It is hardly necessary to add that after this miraculous sign of favour from Heaven, contributions poured in, and the Church which Petrucchia had begun was soon completed.

We will now return to our two pilgrims. Leaving the carriage at the beginning of the town, a short walk brings to the Church of Our Lady. On the left of the high altar a chapel is seen, in which are many votive offerings, telling of innumerable graces and favours received through the intercession of the Mother of God. This is the far-famed shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel. The two men kneel upon the altar steps, worn by the knees of Mary's clients for over four hundred years, and pay their homage to the Church's Queen. A blue silk curtain now conceals the shrine in which the wonder-working picture is contained; later on it will be disclosed in all its speaking beauty. Leaving the chapel, they proceed to the sacristy, where they meet the Reverend Prior. He tells them that in a few minutes' time the shrine will be opened, and the wondrous picture exposed for veneration. A procession is formed, in which they join, and with incense and lights they proceed to the shrine. All kneeling, the Litany of Loretto is sung, and as with the sweet smoke of the incense the joyful chant ascends telling of her whom the King delighteth to honour, the silk curtain is drawn back, the golden doors are opened, and the miraculous picture is exposed to view. Mary with her Divine Child seems to smile most lovingly upon each individual of that throng. What is your need? Do you want comfort for an aching heart, grace to repel some strong temptation, counsel in some momentous undertaking? Ask it of Mary; ask it of her who never wearies of her suppliants, who never can refuse her children. Ask freely of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Among the objects of veneration in the church is a blood-stained crucifix. A soldier, who in the course of a vicious, dissolute life had lost the faith, to show his contempt for all religion, drew his sword and stabbed the figure in the side. Blood immediately poured forth, running down the cross unto the ground, as if the scene on Calvary were again enacted.

Having satisfied their devotion, our two pilgrims prepared to return to Rome. But hearing that Mgr. Dillon, a recognized authority on Mary's shrine, and an old friend of the elder man, was staying in the neighbourhood, they determined first to visit him. A boy was soon procured to act as their guide, who, as was only natural, living as he did in so blessed a neighbourhood, was a devoted client of Mary. He daily served at Mass in the Church of the Madonna, and as often as he was permitted, at Mary's shrine. *Servius perpetuus Mariæ*, was he, "and when he was old enough he was going to be a priest."

Mgr. Dillon received the travellers gladly, and insisted on their partaking of a light lunch, the red wine of the country, and fruit grown under an Italian sky. He spoke to them with tears in his eyes of the shrine they had visited, and expressed how pleased he was at being able to live near it. "You must know," he continued, "that the fresco, which is about the thickness of a penny piece, remains standing on the low wall upon which it descended in the fifteenth century. It was unsupported on either side then, and thus it had remained to this day." This wall was left untouched, when by the generous contributions which flowed in after the miraculous arrival of the picture, Petrucchia was enabled to finish the church, and a fresh one was built which encloses it. It is, of course, concealed by the framework of the altar, but this can be removed, and the picture may be seen in its original position. A certain Cardinal would not believe that the picture remained unsupported, and came to Genazzano provided with the necessary authorization for making a thorough investigation. The Reverend Prior received him gladly, and gave him every facility for prosecu-

ting his examination. The heavy framework of the altar was removed, and His Eminence was able to judge with his own eyes of the truth of the story that the detached fresco remains unsupported on either side. The Cardinal even touched the picture with his hand, and it seemed to him that it moved. So frightened did he become at what he had done, that he fell back fainting into the arms of his attendants.

"I often say Mass at the shrine," remarked Mgr. Dillon, "and I can always tell whether my petition will be granted or not. If what I ask is pleasing to Our Lady, her face seems to grow suffused with color; if, on the contrary, it is not, a sorrowful expression comes upon her face. A remarkable instance of this occurred a short time ago. An only daughter of a noble Roman family became very ill, and I received a letter from her mother asking me to say Mass at the shrine for her recovery. I began my Mass, but before I had reached the prayer of the Consecration, I noticed that a very mournful expression had come upon the face of Our Lady, and I felt sure that what I was asking was not the will of God. Such was the case, for within a few days time news came to me that the child had gone to Heaven."

With the fall of the evening our travellers were obliged to begin this homeward journey, and they took leave of Mgr. Dillon with many thanks for his kindly hospitality, and for the interesting details which had added so much to the happiness arising from their visit to Genazzano. The Eternal City appeared very imposing as they again entered it; the Coliseum, seen in the morning light, especially appearing most impressive. One could almost believe it was still the resort of the inhabitants, as in the days of Imperial Hadrian. Tired out with their journey, our two pilgrims went to rest, and one of them to dream that he was again kneeling in the Church of the Madonna, making one of a vast throng of angels, saints, and men, servants of Mary, gathered together before the shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel.—*Walker W. C. Cumming in The Month.*

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