

THE EXPERIENCES OF SAN PANCRAZIO OF EVOLO.

From the German of A. Schneegans.

II.

MEANWHILE, Padre Atanasio was sorely puzzled to account for Don Cesare's conduct throughout the day. The more he thought over the matter, the more inexplicable did the feverish zeal manifested by the valiant little ship-broker against San Pancrazio, and with every one whom he overtook upon the way home, appear. With everyone whom he chanced to meet on the street, or whom he lighted upon in the Bottega, the good padre began to discuss the possible motives of Don Cesare.

"I can quite understand," said the father to the group of hearers standing respectfully about him, "I can quite understand why *you*, Don Ciccio, and *you*, Don Pasquale, and *you*, Don Geronimo, are so much incensed against the patron-saint. You need rain. You need it, as men need air and fish need water. That is, when I say that *you* need rain I mean that your fields, your lemon trees, your figs, your pomegranates, olive and almond groves, stand badly in need of it. You are men of property. You possess land and cultivate it, and water it with the sweat of your brow. The sweat of your brow, however, is, ha! ha! but a very tiny little drop of moisture—a mere dew drop—and we must have rain if the fields are to thrive." At this the worthy father laughed, and the bystanders duly honoured the small joke. "Well, then," continued the padre, "if your patron-saint neglects his duties, if he forgets to send rain...."

"He doesn't want to send us rain," shouted a bystander.

"Whether he is unwilling to send it, or whether he has forgotten to send it, I know not. I am not entitled to give an opinion, seeing that you might charge me with an ill-natured envy against good old San Pancrazio. Well, then, let that pass, I know what I know! But what did I mean to say? Oh! yes, exactly, if *you*, through the patron-saint's—neglect, shall we say?—suffer loss in your property, and have your confidence in him rudely shaken, I am by no means entitled to pass an opinion."

"It is the only sensible way of going to work with him," they shouted to the padre from all sides. "We know old Evolino! If you do not chastise him all your prayers avail nothing. And, mind you, this is not the first time either. Fifty years ago our fathers had to treat him in just the very same way, and he had not lain three days in the water before the rain came. It is just his old heathen obstinacy and stiff-neckedness, and it has to be broken at times."

Padre Atanasio turned imploringly to the right-hand and to the left, to the front and to the rear, shook his head from side to side, and raised his hands to his head in token of protest. After a few minutes' noisy interruption, however, his hearers allowed him to speak. He was quite out of breath, quite as much as if it had been he who had been shouting and raging and not the others.

"Do be quiet, only compose yourselves," he groaned. "I quite believe it! You ought to know all this far better than I. It in no way concerns me. I am only called upon to say mass in the Chapel of the holy Madonna, and your San Pancrazio belongs in no way to my jurisdiction! But this was not what I wanted to speak about! I only mean that Don Cesare owns neither tree nor meadow. Whether it rains or not must be a matter of complete indifference to him. He is a ship-broker. Now, what connection has that with rain? I should like to know that. And yet it was Don Cesare who tied the rope about the olive tree; he it was who with his own hands took down the saint from his pedestal and bore him away to the cliff and laid him down there. And Don Cesare is a prudent man; indeed, he is the most prudent of us; I mean of you all. He knows what he is about, and why he does it; and that is just the reason why I say to you that I cannot, for the life of me, understand his conduct. Don Cesare, I am convinced of it, has some particular object in view. This, however, he is as yet keeping secret, but I will one day make it manifest to you all."

In vain the padre's hearers, filled with admiration for Don Cesare's daring deed, strove to make him understand that the ship-broker shared in the feelings of his fellow-citizens—that he had not allowed himself to be guided by his own interests merely, and that consequently this unselfishness of his should be all the more admired and respected. All these arguments fell weak and powerless before the mocking, sceptical smile of the worthy father.

"My little friend, my little friend," said Padre Atanasio, as he shook his head doubtfully, "I know you and all your breed. You all crept forth from one and the same egg! Unselfishness? We will look for that somewhere else if you please; for whenever it occurs to you to praise the unselfishness of a fellow-citizen, you have immediately found your own advantage therein, and that, too, before everything else. Don Cesare is much too prudent a man to be unselfish, and must have had most cogent reasons for thus compromising you all with the blessed Pancrazio. Yes, compromised, Don Ciccio! for you are most seriously compromised, and were I the Evolino, Holy Deo—I meant to say: Holy Virgin—I should very soon know what I should do. That is not the question, however. Don Cesare understands very well how to feather his own nest, and get himself out of the scrape at the same time. I mean, that he will make it up, will clear himself with San Pancrazio, and leave you sitting there in the mud, keeping all the while a sharp look-out for the main chance. Doubt not but Cesare Agresta, the prudent ship-broker, will manage that."

Padre Atanasio was not, perhaps, very far astray; for Don Cesare was an active, busy, crafty little man, and must have had some special design in acting as he did; for when he took down the saint from his pedestal that morning and bore him outside the chapel upon his shoulders like a

child, he had whispered to him softly, so that no one could hear him: "Be not angry, dear Pancrazio, what I am doing now I am e'en obliged to do. I will, however, make amends to you again for this."

No one, in all probability, had overheard him—not even Padre Atanasio, who was standing close by, and beheld with a mischievous joy how the townsfolk were misusing the hated rival of the holy Madonna; for Don Cesare's countenance was by no means in harmony with his words, and whoever had marked the aspect and expression of his face at that moment must have thought to himself: "Thou poor San Pancrazio of Evolo! it is lucky for thee that thou art only made of wood, for wert thou alive, certainly thou would'st not leave the hands of this desperado, whose hair is bristling, and whose eyes are sparkling with rage and fury."

Quite another aspect, the most indifferent aspect in the world, did Don Cesare wear upon the evening of that day, as he entered the chamber in which his little sister was busy sewing by the light of a flickering and smoking tallow candle. In the most indifferent tone in the world he addressed her as she looked up to him with the loveliest and brightest black eyes in the world: "Lock up the house carefully, Carmela! I am going to Salvatore's, and it will be late ere I return."

At the door he turned round again:

"And Carmela," added he, "I have got this to say to thee: be careful of thine eyes, my little mousie! They have been wondrously bright for some days past. And, knowest thou, I should be quite well pleased with Nino; but he must lead thee to the altar! If he will not, tell him from me he will have to leave thee alone, otherwise he might get hurt. Good night, mousie!"

Whereupon Carmela, bending her head modestly over her work, answered:

"Go away, Cesare, and be easy! Carmela comes of a good stock." Of the same stock as her brother she was at any rate; for softly, just as Don Cesare had spoken to the saint, she said to herself:

"That Nino will marry Carmela and none other we are not likely to bring to pass by thy help, Cesare; and therefore I must e'en take my own way."

Her eyes sparkled as she bent over her work, as if she knew right well what she thought on that subject. And she knew it also, the dainty little witch, with her delicate little fingers and her raven-black hair; for, as soon as her brother's back was turned, she sprang up lightly, ran with nimble foot to the door, bolted it, and then stepped softly, softly, to the window which opened into the street, put her little head through the aperture, gazed quietly for some time after Don Cesare, and when she had seen him disappear through the darkness in the direction of Salvatore's house, she opened the window altogether, leaned over the sill, placed her small right hand over her eyes, and gazed steadily in the opposite direction, as if she was looking for something away in the distance of the pitch dark night. What she sought she found soon enough. The wished-for object appeared, after a few seconds, in the form of a slight, active youth, who, gliding softly under the shadow of the houses, cautiously approached the window until he stood, all of a sudden, right below it, when he seized Carmela's hands in his and whispered to her:

"I have been waiting for you quite a long while. I have kept my word. Will you keep yours to-day, Carmela?"

Cesare's cottage was situated at the end of a small by-street leading to the harbour. Whoever approached it from that direction was sure of being seen by no one, and it was exactly from that direction that the expected one had approached Carmela. The moon was yet far below the horizon, and everything was shrouded in darkness. There, unobserved from the neighbouring windows, one was able to indulge in a little quiet chat; and this was just what both of them did. They did not, however, content themselves with the elements of this love whisper, tender though it might be, for little Carmela soon, and not unwillingly, yielded her hand to the coaxing and pleading Nino, and not unfamiliarly did the latter imprint a kiss upon it—a long and loving kiss.

"Do come with me this evening to my cottage," he whispered to her; "we shall be all alone there, and we cannot always hope to be able to chat together here, in the street, before the window."

Carmela smiled to herself in the obscurity of the night.

"It is so far," said she, "suppose my brother were to return before I?"

"You will be back long before your brother returns. The road is close by, along the sea shore, under the headland of Evolo, and then only a couple of paces further. Just round the rock, right under the chapel, lies my house."

"It is too far, Nino, and the moon will soon be up, and then we shall be discovered."

For a long while they continued talking together. The moon rose slowly above the waves, and poured her calm, bright light into the gloomy streets; only for a short time, however; for the heaven began to darken again, and big black clouds came slowly from the westward.

"Look," laughed Nino, "the holy Pancrazio is beginning to tire of his bath already. And see, Carmela, only see how he favours our love. He is hiding the bright moonlight for us. You will come now, won't you? Do come, Carmela."

Carmela hesitated for a minute. Then she whispered, "Wait a moment, till I get my scarf," and disappeared.

Whilst these two were settling their affairs together, and coming to an understanding before Don Cesare's house, the latter was going about his own, but in another way and in a different direction. After bidding his sister "good night," he walked down the street at a leisurely pace, and with a composed and cheerful countenance, as if he were going for an evening's gossip at the house of a friend. That Carmela would look after him he was perfectly well aware: all girls are given to do such things,