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### Charitable Institutions of Italy— Naples.

Almost every city of Italy has some proverbial character, embodying, in a short epigrammatical sentence, the peculiar qualities by which it is distinguished. That of Naples is brief, but thoroughly Italian: "Vedi Napoli, e poi muori!"—"See Naples, and then die!" A stranger may smile at the extravagance of the form, but, in substance, he can hardly deem it an exaggeration. Nature has indeed lavished her choicest gifts upon Naples, and art has embellished and improved, with exquisite taste, the constituents of natural beauty thus profusely bestowed.

So attractive indeed are the natural beauties of the city and its environs, that visitors have come to regard it in no other light than that of a place of amusement and relaxation, after the more serious and solemn sight-seeing of Rome. A "run" to Naples agreeably fills up the interval between the Carnival and the Holy Week, or between Easter and Corpus Domini; and after a morning or two in the museum, a forenoon at Pompeii (taking in Herculaneum on the way), a drive out to Pozzuoli, with the *Viaggio d'Enea* as a supplement, and the *givo* of Salerno, Paestum, Amalfi, and Vesuvius, with, perhaps, a visit to the islands, if the weather is favorable, the tourist is supposed to have "been to Naples," and to have seen all that is worth in the southern capital of Italy. The churches, he is told, are nothing after those of Rome; the other religious establishments are scarcely named as deserving of notice; and of the charitable institutions he hears absolutely not a word. His travelling oracle, Madam Starke, (a) names but one of the entire number, the Albergo de Poveri; he finds Valery equally silent and unsatisfactory; (b) and there are ten chances to one, that he leaves Naples, ignorant, not only of the nature and condition, but even of the very existence, of the rest:

Nor, indeed, are the Italian guide books calculated to supply the sort of information best suited to a visitor whose time and opportunities of observation are limited. The information they contain is confined to a few of the institutions, and, generally speaking, extremely meagre, ill-arranged, and unsatisfactory; and, although the Hospital of the Incurables has a journal devoted exclusively to itself, it is almost entirely professional, containing nothing but reports of cases, and medical and pathological dissertations.

The following paper is an attempt, by a brief and unpretending enumeration of these munificent charities, to supply the deficiency. The materials have been partly collected upon the spot, partly drawn from general statistical reports, and the official returns of the institutions themselves. We need hardly say that it can be little more than an outline of the subject; but we have great pleasure in informing our readers, that, in a short

time, they may expect a detailed account, from the pen of the learned and amiable Canonico De Bianchi, (c) on the same plan of Morichini's *Istituti di Carità Pubblica* in Rome.

The charitable institutions of Naples claim an origin more ancient than those of any other city in Europe, Rome only excepted. Many of the most ancient among them must, of course, in the long lapse of ages, have changed their destination, or fallen into decay; but even of those which still subsist, there are several which may be traced back to a very remote antiquity. S. Gennaro dei Poveri, still a very extensive and flourishing establishment, was founded in 789. S. Antonio Abate was in existence in the eleventh, and probably in the tenth century. S. Eligio, still the principal fever hospital of the city, was erected in 1270. The Nunziata was founded in 1330, (though its original destination was not precisely the same as the present), and S. Angelo a Nilo, about the end of the same century, in 1389. The number of sick received into hospitals, and of poor relieved in the asylums, even in those early times, must have been very considerable. From a MS. census of the city, taken in the year 1591, it appears that the inmates of the hospitals numbered no fewer than two thousand four hundred and eighty one, and the daily distribution of wheat, during a time of famine and public distress, exceeded three thousand five hundred bushels. (d) The system of Monti di Pietà was introduced in 1539; the Conservatorio dello Spirito Santo was opened as early as 1555; and next to that of Rome, founded by Innocent III, the first foundling hospital established in Europe was that which still subsists in the Nonziata, although its resources have been curtailed by the arbitrary exactions of the French government.

The public charities of Naples may naturally be divided into three classes;—hospitals, charitable asylums, (which are of two kinds, conservatori and ospizi), and charitable banks, or loan-funds. There is another institute however, so intimately connected with them all, and so interwoven with the whole system, that any account omitting to explain its nature and offices, would necessarily, be not merely incomplete, but, indeed, almost unintelligible. We allude to the pious associations, called confraternities, which, though frequently referred to in former articles, are so numerous and so active in Naples, as to merit a special notice. It would be impossible, however, to enter fully into detail respecting them, as they number 174, and comprise at least 50,000 members. Many of them are mainly devoted to their object; but there are very few which do not connect with their devotional practices, some work of charity and benevolence; as attending the hospitals, visiting the prisons, relieving the sick poor

or burying the dead. Some of them are exclusively clerical; the remainder, partly mixed, and partly exclusively for the laity; but even in the latter it almost invariably happens that the director and some of the officers are clergymen. A hundred and sixty-five of the number wear a uniform, which, while it tends to remove all distinction of rank, and to place all on the true footing of equality which religious brotherhood implies, serves also as a disguise for the wearer and a safeguard against spiritual pride and ostentation. For our present purpose, it will suffice to enumerate a few, commencing with those which are exclusively clerical.

Of these the most remarkable is that popularly known, from the dress of the wearers, as the *Confraternita de' Bianchi*, and dedicated to our Blessed Lady, under the title of *Sancta Mario Succurre Miseris*. It is composed of the elite, as well in rank, as in ecclesiastical dignity, among the city clergy. Since its foundation, about three centuries ago, it has numbered among the brethren four popes, upwards of twenty cardinals (six of whom are still living), (e) and several saints, among whom are S. Giacomo della Marina, S. Francesco Caracciolo, S. Gaetano Tienne, founder of the Theatine congregation, S. Alfonso de' Liguori, B. Giovanni Marimoni, and B. Paolo, cardinal d'Arezzo. The great object of this confraternity, like that of S. Giovanni Decollato at Rome, is the care of criminals who are condemned to suffer the extreme penalty of the law, and who naturally require, in the depression and despair of their last hours, not only the most constant attention and tender care, but also instruction of a peculiar nature suited to their unhappy condition. The moment sentence of death is passed upon the prisoner, the members of the congregation take the place of the ordinary spiritual directors of the prison, and with unwearied vigilance watch to the very last hour every opportunity of instilling holy thoughts into his troubled mind; availing themselves of every favourable moment to inspire confidence, or to calm despair, to excite or confirm the disposition to repentance, or to direct him, if already repentant, in the reparation of the injuries which have been the consequence of his crimes. Nor is their care confined to the unhappy victim of the law himself. In order to relieve his mind more completely from the earthly cares which burden it in his last hours—cares which often press most sensibly upon minds otherwise hardened, and form the greatest obstacle to their conversion to God—the confraternity charges itself with the care of all those for whom the criminal is bound to provide and who stand in need of his assistance or protection. The parents of the unhappy man are secured against want, or rather are maintained in comparatively plenty and independence. If he leaves a wife, she is placed in a safe and honourable asylum, whence, if she desires to marry a second time, she receives a considerable dowry.

A similar provision is made for his children in some of the numerous conservatories of the city; and, in a word, every exertion is made upon the one hand to relieve the natural anxiety of the culprit for those whom he leaves behind, and, on the other, to soothe for them the pain of separation, more bitter because of the shame and humiliation by which it is accompanied.

In addition to their care of the condemned criminals, the Bianchi brethren also provide for poor and unfriended debtors, and prisoners confined for minor offences; paying the debts of the more meritorious among them, administering suitable advice and instruction for those whom it is possible to reclaim, and taking every means to recall them from the ways of crime to which they had been habituated.

It is consoling to know that their labours are eminently successful. Cases of impenitence or despair are all but unknown among the criminals attended by this pious brotherhood. No difficulty disheartens their holy zeal. No repulse, though accompanied by insult, and even violence, damps their resolution. Few indeed, even of the worst class of prisoners, are so utterly hardened that it is not possible to find some wavering or relenting moment, at which a thought of hope, or of terror, tenderly and judiciously suggested, will be entirely without influence; and suggestions, like these, tell with double effect when they come from those who are known to devote themselves to their holy duties with pure and disinterested motives. The impression once made, zeal and charity will be sure to supply means of following up and improving it; and the prayers offered up without intermission by the brethren, especially at the altar, cannot fail to bring a blessing upon the labours of the community. The merits of this estimable body are well appreciated in Naples. By the people they are held in the highest veneration; and even in the prisons, the most profligate and abandoned will uncover as a brother of Bianchi passes by.

There is another association of the Neapolitan clergy entitled *Confraternita delle Cappelle Scrotono*. It is a body of learned and zealous priests, associated for the charitable purposes of providing evening instruction and devotional exercises for artists, mechanics, and other persons actively employed during the day, and thus debarred from the public opportunities of instruction afforded in the churches during the morning. The city is divided into fifty-seven districts, each of which has a separate branch of the confraternity, with a district chapel, a rector, prefect, and confessors or chaplains, varying from six to ten, according to the numbers of the members. They meet every evening at the Ave Maria; and in order that the instruction may be more practical, as well as more usefully communicated, are divided into two classes, old and young. The evening is spent in literary and religious instruction, and concludes with night prayer recited in common. On Sunday they assemble at seven o'clock, A. M.

(c) To the kind assistance of this learned and accomplished ecclesiastic, we owe much of the materials of the present sketch.

(d) See a manuscript quoted by Galanti, p. 176. The precise amount was 2468 tomoli; this tomoli being 1.45 of an English bushel.

(e) The cardinal archbishop of Naples and the nuncio-apostolic are always members of the *Confraternita de' Bianchi*.

(a) Starke's Italy, p. 301.

(b) Valery, p. 469.