

A REMARKABLE CHAPTER.

(Continued.)

CARDINAL BARBERINI and Maria Luisa, the Queen of Etruria, were both indebted to Anna Maria for an unexpected restoration to health. The former, to whose illness we have already alluded, was in a very dangerous state, and the doctors with good reason feared a fatal termination. Anna Maria knew the peril he was in with a higher kind of certainty, for she read it in her sun, and moreover saw that this prelate's death had been decreed in the counsels of God. The decree, however, as the result proved, was conditional, not absolute. He would have died had not Anna Maria prayed for him, and prayed perseveringly. Far from being discouraged, she besieged the throne of grace night and day, although the only answer she received for some was that all must submit themselves to the will of God. But her faith was to triumph, as heretofore that of the Syrophenician, when similarly tried and apparently repulsed by our Blessed Lord. Anna Maria insisted, and obtained her request. But, before granting it, God told her that this cure would not be attributed to her, but to the physicians and to the prayers of other persons. She replied that she was well content to remain unknown to creatures, only she implored the Divine Goodness to heal the sick man. All hope of the Cardinal's life had been abandoned, when an unlooked-for crisis took place; he rallied and recovered. Whatever others may have thought, there was one, as we have seen, who recognised Anna Maria's share in obtaining this favor, and that was the Cardinal's sister-in-law, the Princess of Palestrina, whose name appears among the witnesses in the process. The Queen's cure took place at the time when General Miollis, then occupying Rome with the French Imperial troops, had confined that princess in the Convent of Dominico e Sisto along with her young family. Maria Luisa was subject to occasional epileptic seizures, which used to throw her into frightful convulsions. Accordingly, it was necessary to have her rooms doubly carpeted, for she would fall suddenly to the ground, where she would struggle and knock herself violently about, howling fearfully and foaming at the mouth, until at length she lay exhausted and as one dead, like the possessed youth in the Gospel. As it may be supposed, no medical advice had been spared in the case of a person of her rank. She had consulted Italian doctors, she had consulted foreign doctors, and they had consulted each other. Every remedy which art could devise had been adopted without success. The princess was at this time going through one of these paroxysms. Anna Maria was sent for. She touched her with her little Madonna, and assured her that she would never more suffer from this frightful complaint. The convulsions, in fact, entirely disappeared, and never returned. It may readily be imagined how much this miraculous cure, experienced in her own person, contributed to enhance the love and confidence with which Maria Luisa regarded her holy benefactress.

Anna Maria worked several cures in her own family. One of these was performed in the case of little Peppina, her grand-daughter, and is thus related by Domenico, who was certainly neither enthusiastic nor over-credulous. Indeed, while competent to observe and accurately to report a fact, he seemed to have a strange incompetence to discern its supernatural character, however patent this might be, until it was pointed out by others. 'I remember,' says this good man, 'that Peppina, Sofia's daughter, hurt her eye; the surgeons said that the pupil was lacerated, and despaired of her cure, on account of the inflammation which must necessarily ensue, which besides endangered the sight of the other eye. The servant of God made the sign of the cross with the oil of St. Philomena, laid her hand upon the child's head, and sent her to bed. Peppina slept very well, without feeling any pain, and the next morning the eye was so thoroughly cured that she was able to go to school at the Maestre Pie of the Gesu. The surgeon could not believe it, and wished to make several experiments to ascertain if she could see. This miraculous cure, which was a radical one, took place in winter, when the rigor of the season would have rendered it more difficult.'

Another miracle of healing performed by Anna Maria in her own family was in the case of her husband. Domenico is again the narrator. 'I also recollect being taken very ill,' he says, 'in the Church of San Marcello. I had scarcely reached home when I lost all consciousness, and they told me afterwards that it was (God preserve us from the same) an apoplectic seizure, not to say stroke, which I had. When I came to myself, with no recollection of what had occurred, I saw at my bedside the priest and my wife, who had laid her hand on my forehead, and was praying to the Blessed Virgin for me. It was a true miracle to get the better of such an attack without its leaving any bad result, especially in the head; and I have no doubt but that the servant of God obtained for me this marvellous and instantaneous cure. I was told that the priest who perceived my pulse cease beating, had given me absolution.'

It must not be concluded, because Domenico, when giving his evidence, uses the word 'miracle' in both these cases, and although at the time he no doubt was persuaded that a great '*grazia*,' as the Italians say, had been obtained in answer to his wife's fervent prayers, that therefore he then realised the fact that his wife had a supernatural gift of healing, which she exercised on these occasions, or that she literally performed a miracle. On the contrary, his simple statement as to his enlightenment after her death, through the instrumentality of others, bespeaks entire failure to discern while she lived the wonders which he was almost daily called to witness. He says, it is true, 'I believe that the servant of God was favored with many supernatural gifts,' but he was expressing his acquired conviction upon a retrospect of the past, not that which he entertained at the time. Had he believed that she was the recipient of such exalted divine favors, how could he possibly, for instance, be remained so blind in the case of her raptures and ecstasies? With respect to these latter he makes this singular and candid avowal: 'As for the ecstasies, I never could much perceive them;' after which he proceeds nevertheless to describe the outward appearance they presented. No sooner, however, had

Anna Maria expired, than he began to open his eyes. Many persons who had known her stopped him in the streets to inquire all the particulars of her death. 'Some,' he says, 'spoke of the special gifts she had received from God; others told of the graces they had obtained through her means; every one had some good to say of her, every one lauded her, regarding her as one who was replenished with merits and virtues; many went to visit her tomb in the cemetery of San Lorenzo notwithstanding the prevailing epidemic' (the cholera). 'As for me, I always esteemed her, and I say that the Lord took from me this good servant of His because I was not worthy to possess her. I repeat that I had always esteemed her as a soul of very high virtue, but I neither knew nor suspected a host of things which I have learned from one person or another since her death. I believe that the Lord placed her immediately in Paradise for her great goodness and eminent virtues, and I hope that she prays for me and for all her family.'

Thus it was that it pleased God that this plain and simple man should have his eyes kept from discerning the brightness of his wife's supernatural endowments, that he might be all the more impartial and unbiased a witness to her perfect possession of those humble Christian virtues which, after all, and not her sublimer gifts, went to form the title of her heavenly crown and her claim to the veneration of the faithful on earth. No one can have the slightest ground for suspecting that his mental eye was dazzled or his judgment influenced in the estimate he formed of her character. Each word, each act of hers, he had viewed with the coolness with which we regard the ordinary behaviour of our friends and relatives; he had not seen her conduct in the light of her supposed sanctity, but had to learn her sanctity afterwards from the sum of her acts when she had run her course, and from the train of glory which she left behind.

ANNA MARIA'S CLOSING DAYS AND DEATH.

Anna Maria walked all her days in what the author of the 'Imitation of Christ' calls the royal road of the Cross. 'O my dear daughter,' Jesus said to her in a vision with which he one day favored her, 'I am the flower of the fields; I am all thine, as also in like manner I give Myself to all who courageously take up their cross and walk in My steps. The children of the Cross are My beloved ones, and their sufferings constrain Me to love them more and more. He who would gain Heaven must lead a life of penance; he who would follow Me must suffer, and whosoever suffers is not subject to illusion, but advances securely in the way of salvation.' In this way Anna Maria never halted, and was advancing at an ever-accelerated pace during those declining years when a dispensation from rigor and a relaxation in the matter of mortification and penance seems so allowable. For she was now entered upon that evening of life of which we say and think such and thing. Looking only at what is external, we see nothing in this unwelcome season but gradual decay, the failure of strength, the fading away of all that adorned and embellished life, the departure of pleasures and, what is generally still more bewailed, the loss of all power to relish the little that remains. Such are the outward accompaniments of advanced age: joy and sunshine left behind, ever-deepening shades gathering in front; while in Anna Maria's case there was an accumulation of the most painful maladies incident to our mortal nature. But if such be the aspect presented to the eyes of flesh by suffering humanity, the eye of faith has other prospects, on which its gaze is ever fixed. For there is an inner man which is being renewed in everlasting youth day by day as the outward man decays. He is walking in another region, which has other skies and is lighted by other suns. 'The path of the just,' says Solomon, 'as a shining light, goes forwards and increaseth to perfect day.' Such was the path of the holy woman whose life we are now accompanying to its blessed close.

Besides the sun of grace, which illuminates the path of every true Christian, the brightness of which is proportioned to his own fidelity to its light, Anna Maria had her supernatural sun, the splendour of which, as we have said, increased with her own increasing perfection, till it attained a seven-fold lustre. Every day she beheld its brilliance become more dazzling, as does that of the orb of day when nearing its summer solstice—the same, but O, how different from the veiled luminary of the winter season! How could this gifted soul pause or think of rest with such an horizon around her, illuminated by so divine a light? Walking in the still dearer presence of the invisible God and in close union with the soul of her Beloved, Anna Maria pressed on, not knowing what it was to seek a dispensation from any pain or penance which her mortal frame could bear or which holy obedience would permit her to lay upon it. She hastened towards the goal, never pausing or reposing, as if she had attained to perfection; for, like the great Apostle, she also counted not herself to have apprehended, but was ever following after to apprehend that wherein she had been apprehended by Christ Jesus, pressing forward to the prize of her supernatural vocation. No worthier object of ambition can there be for any soul, none so worthy as this apprehending and perfect fulfilling of its vocation; and, blessed be God, it is attainable by all with the help of His grace, which He gives liberally in proportion to the work allotted by Him to each. Anna Maria's vocation was indeed a lofty and exceptional one, and for its accomplishment she received immense graces, but she nobly and faithfully corresponded therewith. Hers were the ten pounds, but she had so traded with those ten pounds as not only to deserve more than those who have received a lesser deposit, but proportionately more than do by far the greater number, on account of her rare correspondence to grace; for such perfect correspondence to grace as she exhibited is quite as rare, we may say, as were her exceptional graces. 'Take the pound away from him,' saith the Lord in the parable, 'and give it to him that has pounds.' And they said to him, 'Lord, he hath ten pounds.' Then the Lord replied, 'But I say to you, that to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; and from that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken from him.' Memorable words these. Anna Maria, then, abounded; poor, despoiled, and suffering externally, within she was overflowing with riches and with the joy which no man can take away. She abounded in grace, she was full of merits, and she was now going home with joyfulness, like the laborer described by the royal Psalmist, 'carrying her sheaves.'