

Stories Toto Told Me

By Baron Corvo

I—About San Pietro and San Paolo

ONCE upon a time, sir, the people in Rome were building two churches, the one for San Pietro on the Monte Vaticano, and the other for San Paolo outside the walls of the city. The two Saints used to spend all their spare time sitting on one of the balconies of heaven and watching the builders, for they were both very anxious about their churches. San Pietro desired to have his church finished before San Paolo's, and so, every night after it was dark, he used to leave the keys of heaven in the porch, and ask his brother, Sant' Andrea, to give an eye to the gate while he went round the corner for a minute or two. Then he would slip down to San Paolo's church and take to pieces the work which the builders had done during the day, and if there were any carvings or pillars or things of that sort which took his fancy, he would carry them away and build them into his own church, patching up the part he had taken them from so well that no one could tell the difference. And so, while the builders of the church of San Pietro made a progress which was wonderful, the builders of the church of San Paolo did not make any progress at all.

This went on for a long while, and San Paolo became more
uneasy

uneasy in his mind every day, and he could not take his food, and nothing gave him any pleasure. Santa Cecilia tried to amuse him with some new songs she had made, but this caused him to get quite angry, and he said that a woman ought to learn in silence with subjection.

One day while he was leaning over the balcony, he saw two pillars taken into his church which were of yellow antique, most rare and precious, and had been sent from some foreign country (I do not know its name). He was altogether delighted, and he went down to the gate and asked San Pietro to be so kind as to tell him whether he had ever seen finer pillars. But San Pietro only said they were rather pretty, and then he asked San Paolo to get out of the way and let him shut the gate, in case some improper souls should sneak in.

That night, sir, when it was dark, San Pietro went and robbed those two pillars of yellow antique, and set them up in his own church. But in the morning, San Paolo, who had thought of nothing but his new pillars all through the night, said a black mass because it was shorter, and then went on to the balcony to have the pleasure of looking at his church with its beautiful pillars of yellow antique. And when he saw that they were not there he became disturbed in his mind, and he went and sat down in a shady place to consider what he should do next. After much thought it appeared to him that he had been robbed, and as he knew that a person who has once committed a theft will continue to steal as long as he remains free, he resolved to watch his church at night, that he might discover who had stolen his pillars.

During the day the builders of San Paolo's church put up two fresh pillars of yellow antique, and two of porphyry, and two of green antique as well. San Paolo gloated over these fine things from his seat on the balcony, for he knew that they were so beautiful

tiful that they would tempt the thief to make another raid, and then he would catch him.

After the Ave Maria he made friends with one of the angels who was just putting on his armour in the guard-room before taking his place in the line of sentries who encircle the city of God both by day and night. These angels, sir, are at the least a hundred feet high, and San Paolo asked one of them, whose post was near the gate, to hide him under his wings so that he could watch for the robber without being seen. The angel said that he was most happy to oblige ; for San Paolo was a Roman of Rome, and very well thought of in heaven ; so when the night came on San Paolo hid in the shadow of his feathers.

Presently he saw San Pietro go out of the gate, and the light, of which the bodies of the saints are made, went with him, so that, though the earth was in darkness, San Paolo could see plainly all that he did. And he picked up the two fresh pillars of yellow antique, and the two of red porphyry, and also the two of green antique in his hand, just as you, sir, would pick up six paint-brushes, and he carried them to his own church on the Monte Vaticano and set them up there. And when he had patched up the place from which he had taken the pillars so that they could not be missed, he came back into heaven.

San Paolo met him at the gate and accused him of thieving, but San Pietro answered blusteringly that he was the Prince of the Apostles, and that he had a right to all the best pillars for his church. San Paolo replied that once before he had had occasion to withstand San Pietro to the face because he was to be blamed (and that was at Antioch, sir), and then high words arose, and the two saints quarrelled so loudly that the Padre Eterno, sitting upon His Sapphire Throne, sent San Michele Arcangiolo to bring the disputants into His Presence.

Then

Then San Paolo said :

“O Maestà Onnipotente,—The citizens of Rome are building two churches, the one for me and the other for San Pietro ; and for some time I have noticed that while the builders of my church do not seem to make any progress with their work, the church of San Pietro is nearly finished. The day before yesterday (and to-day is Saturday) two pillars of yellow antique were set up in my church, most beautiful pillars, Maestà, but somebody stole them away during the night. And yesterday six pillars were set up, two of yellow antique, two of green antique, and two of porphyry. To-night I watched to see if they would be stolen, and I have seen San Pietro go down and take them to his own church on the Monte Vaticano.”

Then the Padre Eterno turned to San Pietro, asking him if he had anything to say.

And San Pietro answered :

“Domeniddio, I have long ago learnt the lesson that it is not well to deny that which your Omniscience knows to be true, and I acknowledge that I have taken the pillars, and many other things too, from the church of San Paolo, and have set them up in my own. Nevertheless, I desire to represent that there is no question of robbery here. Altissimo, you have deigned to make me the Prince of the Apostolic College, the Keeper of the Keys of Heaven, and the Head of Your Church on earth, and it is not fitting that the churches which men build in my honour should be less magnificent than those which they build for San Paolo. Therefore, in taking these pillars that San Paolo makes such a ridiculous fuss about, I am simply within my right—a right which belongs to the dignity of the rank which the immortal splendour of your Majesty has been graciously pleased to confer upon me.”

But

But this defence did not content the Padre Eterno. He said that the secret method on which San Pietro worked was a proof that he knew he was doing what he ought not to do, and further, that it was not fair to the men who were building San Paolo's church to take away the fine things for which they spent their money for the honour of San Paolo. So he cautioned San Pietro not to allow it to occur again.

On the next day there was a festa and the builders did not work, but on the Monday they placed in the church of San Paolo several slabs of lapis lazuli and malachite, and during the night San Pietro, who was the most bold and daring of men, had the hardihood to take them away and put them in his own church, right before the very eyes of San Paolo, who stood at the gate watching him. By the time he returned San Paolo had made a complaint before the Padre Eterno, and San Pietro was most severely spoken to, and warned that, if he persisted in his disobedience, not even his exalted rank and general usefulness and good conduct would save him from punishment.

The following day, which was Tuesday, a marvellous baldachino of jasper and violet marble, which was the gift of the Grand Turk, was put up in the church of San Paolo, and at night San Pietro went down as usual and robbed it. For the third time San Paolo complained to the Padre Eterno, and then all the Court of Heaven was summoned into the Presence to hear judgment pronounced.

The Padre Eterno said—and His Voice, sir, was like rolling thunder—that as San Pietro had been guilty of disobedience to the Divine Decree, in that, urged on by vanity, he had taken the property of San Paolo for his own church on the Monte Vaticano, and by so doing had prevented the church of San Paolo from being finished, it was an Order that until the end of time the
great

great church of San Pietro in Rome should never be completed. The Padre Eterno also added, that as He would give no encouragement to sneaks and tell-tale-tits, the church of San Paolo outside the walls, though finished, should be subjected to destruction and demolition, and, as often as it was rebuilt, so often should it be destroyed.

And you know, sir, that San Paolo's church is always being burnt down or blown up, and that San Pietro's church has never left the builders' hands.

II—About the Lilies of San Luigi

YOU know, sir, that San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio were always very friendly together. While they lived in this world they used to get into mischief in each other's company, for they were extremely fond of playing tricks upon the pagans who were putting the Christians to death.

Then, when their turn came, they gladly suffered martyrdom, and San Pancrazio was killed by a wild beast in the Colosseo in Rome, while San Sebastiano was shot as full of arrows as a hedgehog is of prickles, and when that did not kill him he was beaten with a club until he died. And then they both went to live in heaven for ever and the day after.

Now, I must tell you what they look like, so that you may know them when you see them. First of all, you must understand that the saints in heaven are always young; that is to say, if you are old when your life in this world comes to its end, you just shut your eyes while your angel takes you to heaven, and when you open them the next minute you are there, and you
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have gone back to the prime of your life, and so you are for always ; but if you die while you are young you do not change your age, but remain at the age at which you died. That is, if you die a saint, or a martyr, which is better ; and, of course, you can always do that if you like. And even supposing it is good for you to have a little purgatory first, if you have kept good friends with the Madonna she will go and take you out the Saturday after you have died, and then you can go to heaven.

And your body, too, is changed, so that you cannot have any more pains or illnesses. Oh, yes ; it is made of flesh, just the same to look at as this ; but instead of the flesh being made of the dust of the earth it is made of the Fire of God, and that is why wherever the saints go they are all bright like the stars.

Ah, well, San Sebastiano was eighteen years old when he went to heaven, and so he is always eighteen years old ; and San Pancrazio was fourteen, and so he is always fourteen ; and they are quite as cheerful and daring and mischievous as they were in this world, so that when a joke has been played upon any of the saints they always say, "By Bacchus, there are those boys again."

There are, of course, very many boys in heaven, but now I am only telling you of these two—San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, and the third, whose name is San Luigi, and the angel of San Sebastiano, who is called Iriello.

You must know that San Luigi was altogether different to San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio. Of course he had not been a martyr like them, though he is a very great saint indeed, and I suppose it is because he has only been in heaven a little while and is new to the place that his manners are so stiff. He always goes about with his eyes on the ground, you know, and there is not a bit of fun in him. You see, he was a Jesuit, and there were no
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such things in the world for hundreds of years after San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio had been saints in heaven. When he first came, San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio thought there was another boy like themselves to join in their games, and they were quite eager to make his acquaintance and to give him a welcome. So the moment the choir struck up the "Iste Confessor," they rushed down to the gate to offer him their friendship. San Luigi came slowly through the archway, dressed in a cassock and surplice, carrying a lily in his hand, and his eyes were fixed upon the ground; but when San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, with their arms locked together, said how pleased they were to see him, he looked up at them shyly and said, "Many thanks," and then the appearance of San Sebastiano so shocked him that he blushed deeply and veiled his eyes again, and after that he kept out of their way as much as possible.

You see, sir, San Sebastiano was quite naked. Indeed he had nothing about him but his halo and an arrow; for when the pagans made a target of him they stripped off all his clothes and so he came to heaven like that. You can see his picture in the Duomo whenever you choose, if you do not believe me. But he was so beautiful and muscular, and straight and strong, and his flesh so white and fine, and his hair like shining gold, that no one had ever thought of him as naked before. San Luigi, however, found him perfectly dreadful, and pretended to shiver whenever he met him, which was not very often, because San Luigi spent most of his time in the chapel saying the Little Office.

San Sebastiano did consider him slightly rude, perhaps, and, of course, San Pancrazio agreed with his friend, and though they were quite good-natured and unwilling to make any unpleasantness, still they could not help feeling hurt when this newcomer—and that was the worst name they ever called him—turned up his

nose

nose because their minds and their manners were more gay and free than his.

One very hot afternoon in summer the two saints went to practise their diving in a delicious pool of cool water under a waterfall ; and when they were tired of that they lay down on the bank and dangled their legs in the stream, while the sun was drying their haloes.

Presently San Luigi came creeping along with an old surplice in his hand, and he went up to San Sebastiano and offered it to him, holding his lily up before his face all the time he was speaking. San Sebastiano did not move, but lay there on the green grass, looking at San Luigi with his merry laughing eyes, and saying not a word ; and San Pancrazio did the same. San Luigi repeated his offer from behind his lily, and implored San Sebastiano to put on the surplice, just to cover up his poor legs, he said. San Sebastiano replied that he didn't think there was anything amiss with his legs, which were good enough, as far as he could see, because the Padre Eterno had made them like that, and He always did all things well. Then San Luigi offered the surplice to San Pancrazio, who was also naked, because he had been bathing ; but he laughed as he answered, with many thanks, that he had some very good clothes of his own, which he would put on when he was dry ; and he pointed out his beautiful tunic of white wool with a broad purple stripe down the front, and his golden bulla, and his sandals of red leather, with the pearl crescent on the toes, for he was noble, sir, and also a Roman of Rome. San Luigi said that the tunic was rather short but it was better than nothing, and then he turned to San Sebastiano and again entreated him to put on the surplice.

Presently San Sebastiano stretched out his splendid arm from the long grass where he lay, and grabbed the surplice so suddenly
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that San Luigi dropped down on his knees, and his lily became disarranged ; and while he was picking himself up San Sebastiano rolled the surplice into a ball and tossed it over to San Pancrazio, who threw it back to him ; and the two saints played ball with it quite merrily for some minutes, and all the time San Luigi was protesting that he had not brought it out for that purpose, and beseeching them not to be so frivolous. But the game amused them to such an extent that they were now running to and fro upon the bank and taking long shots at each other. San Sebastiano had just made a particularly clever catch, but in returning the ball he over-balanced himself and tumbled splash into the pool. This had a bad effect on his aim, and instead of the ball going in the direction he intended—that is to say, towards San Pancrazio—it flew straight in San Luigi's face. He was still holding up his lily for a screen, and consequently it was crushed and broken and all the blooms destroyed ; and he seemed so grieved at this that the two friends—for San Sebastiano immediately swam to the side and climbed out of the pool—tried to console him by telling him that they would get him another in two winks of an eye.

But San Luigi said that was no good, because he always got his lilies off his altars down in the world, and no others would suit him ; and there were none there now because it was not his festa till to-morrow, and nobody would offer him any lilies till then.

When they heard this San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio burst into roars of laughter, and they made such a noise that the Padre Eterno, who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, sent one of the Cherubim from His Aureola to know what it was all about.

San Pancrazio jumped into his tunic and put his bulla round his neck, while San Sebastiano laced his sandals for him, and then
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the two friends stood at "Attention!" as the *Suprema Maestà e Grandezza* came under the trees towards them. Of course, you know, sir, that San Sebastiano was in the Emperor's body-guard when he lived in the world, and he had taught San Pancrazio all the drill.

Then San Sebastiano looked boldly into the Face of the Padre Eterno, and said :

"O Padre celeste e Domeniddio, we were laughing at Luigi because he will not have the lilies of Paradise, and prefers the nasty things they put upon his altars in the world."

San Luigi got quite angry at hearing his lilies called nasty, and the Padre Eterno said that the word certainly ought not to have been used unless San Sebastiano had a very good reason.

Then San Pancrazio explained that he was sure San Sebastiano did not mean to make any reflection upon the lilies themselves, because it would not be becoming to speak against the handiwork of the Padre Eterno ; but it was because the people who offered the lilies to San Luigi did not come by them in an honourable manner, that he had said they were nasty ; and San Sebastiano nodded his head and said that was just it.

These words made San Luigi still more angry ; and his wrath was so righteous and unaffected that San Sebastiano saw he was in ignorance of the dirty tricks of his clients, so he said that if l'Altissima Maestà would deign to allow them, he and San Pancrazio would show San Luigi where his lilies came from. The Padre Eterno was graciously pleased to grant permission, and passed on His way, for He knew that San Sebastiano was a boy whom you could trust anywhere.

Then San Sebastiano told San Luigi that if he could put up with the company of San Pancrazio he proposed they should make a little gita into the world that very night, because, as the next

day was his festa, all the boys would be getting lilies for his altars ; and in the meantime he invited him to come and look over the ramparts.

So the three saints went and stood upon the wall of gold ; and beneath their feet they could see the world whirling round in space. San Sebastiano pointed out that by midnight they would be just above a little white town which clustered up the side of a distant mountain. He said that it was called Genzano, and that the Prince Francesco Sforza Cesarini had there a palace with the most beautiful gardens in the world, which were sure to be full of lilies at that time of year.

San Luigi made answer that he would like to say his matin and lauds, and to get his meditation ready for the morning, before they started ; and he agreed to meet San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio at a little before midnight.

You know, sir, that there is no night in heaven, or rather, I should say, that it does not get dark there ; and so, when San Luigi came to look for San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, he found them in the orchard near the gate, turning a skipping-rope for Sant' Agnese and some of her friends ; but San Vito and San Venanzio, who were tired of playing morra, were willing to take their places at the rope ; and then they were all ready to start on their journey.

San Sebastiano called his angel, Iriello and told him where he wanted to go.

I ought to have let you know that the appearance of Iriello was exactly like that of San Sebastiano, only he did not carry an arrow, and he had wings growing out of his arms of the same colour as his body, but getting whiter towards the tips of the feathers. And then, of course, he was as big as a giant, like all the other angels—how many yards high I cannot say, because I do not exactly know.

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The three saints mounted him in this manner :

San Pancrazio stood on his left instep and put one arm round his leg to steady himself, and San Sebastiano stood on his right instep and put one arm round his leg to steady himself too ; San Luigi also stood on the right instep of Iriello, close to San Sebastiano, who clasped him round the waist with his other arm. When they were ready the angel, with a downward swoop of his wings, rose from off the wall of gold, and then, spreading them out to their full extent, remained motionless and dropped gently but swiftly towards the earth.

I should tell you that they had all made themselves invisible, as the saints do when they come down into the world, except when there is some one present who is good enough to merit a vision of the holy ones. And when they alighted in the garden by the magnolia tree, they left the angel there and went to sit down near the lily-beds. You understand that no one could see them, and they rested against the edge of the fountain and waited, and San Luigi took out his beads to while away the time.

Presently three or four men came into the garden very quietly, and they stood under the shade of a blue hydrangia bush. The eldest of them appeared to be giving directions to the others, and then they separated and went each to a different part of the garden.

“Who were those men ?” asked San Luigi.

“Tell him, 'Bastiano,” said San Pancrazio in a whisper.

“Gardeners,” murmured San Sebastiano ; “they have to stay up all the night between the twentieth and the twenty-first of June.”

“And I suppose they will be going to cut the lilies for the boys who are coming to fetch them ?” said San Luigi.

San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio nearly choked with laughter,
and

and then San Sebastiano said that if San Luigi would have the goodness to be patient, he should see what he should see.

They watched the gardeners go and hide themselves in the syringas, and for some time there was silence.

Then there came six ragamuffin boys, creeping cautiously through the darkness, and they made their way towards the lily-beds. As soon as they got there the men in the bushes jumped out upon them with a loud yell, whereupon the boys took to their heels and fled in a different direction to that from which they had come. The men gave chase, but they ran so swiftly that they were soon out of sight. Now, as soon as they were gone twenty or thirty more ragamuffin boys rushed noiselessly out of the darkness, and began to cut the lilies into sheaves as fast as they could. In a short time there was not one left standing, and then they made off with their spoils and disappeared.

The next minute the gardeners came back, loudly lamenting that they had failed to catch the robbers; but when they saw the beds where the lilies once stood, they called for the Madonna to have pity on them. And the chief gardener wept, for he said his highness the Prince would surely send him to prison.

And the three saints sat still by the fountain.

San Luigi was trembling very greatly; but because he is, as you know, of such wonderful innocence, he did not understand what he had seen, and he begged his companions to explain it to him.

So San Sebastiano told him that the boys of the world were wicked little devils, and very clever, too. So they sent the six best runners first, because they knew the gardeners would be watching. And these six were to make the gardeners chase them and lead them a long dance, so that the others could come as soon as the place was clear and steal the lilies. All of which had been done.

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And then San Luigi was very grieved ; but most of all because the gardeners would lose their places. So he asked San Sebastiano if he could not do something for them.

Then San Sebastiano said that they would be very pleased and quite happy if San Luigi would show himself to them, for they were most respectable men, and pious into the bargain ; neither had they sworn nor used bad words.

But San Luigi was so modest that he did not like to show himself alone, and he held out his hands, the one to San Sebastiano and the other to San Pancrazio, saying :

“My friends—if you allow me to say so—dear 'Bastiano—dear Pancrazio—who have both been so kind to me, let us all show ourselves, and then I will give them back the lilies.”

So they called Iriello and mounted upon his insteps again, and then a silver light, more bright than the moon, beamed from them, and the gardeners saw in the midst of the blaze the great angel by the magnolia tree, and the three saints standing in front of him—San Luigi in the middle, with San Sebastiano on his right hand and San Pancrazio on his left hand, with their arms round each other. Then the gardeners fell on their knees and returned thanks for this vision ; and, as the angel spread his wings and rose from the ground, San Luigi made the sign of the cross over the garden. And the men stood amazed and watched till the brightness seemed to be only a tiny star ; and so the three saints went back with Iriello into heaven.

And after they had disappeared the gardeners saw that the lily-beds were full of flowers more beautiful than had ever been seen before. But when the thieves brought their stolen flowers to the Church of San Luigi in the Via Carolina they were nothing but sticks and dirty weeds.

And the three saints are most friendly together now, because

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San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio cannot help admiring San Luigi for his strange innocence, as well as for the strange penance with which he gained his place in heaven; and they are always delighted to do anything to oblige him, because they have been longer there than he has and understand the ways of that blessed place so well; while San Luigi carries only the lilies of Paradise now, and is never so happy as when he is choosing the best branches of golden palm for his two martyr-friends; nor is he ever shocked at San Pancrazio because he is of a gay heart, nor at San Sebastiano because he is naked and not ashamed.

How could he be ashamed, sir?