

A BIT OF ITALIAN MERRYMAKING.

THE LILIES OF NOLA.



THE little city of Nola lies in the heart of fertile Campania, under the sunset shadow of Mount Vesuvius. Its aspect is singularly like that of a Western agricultural town that has ideas of future greatness. The half-finished façade of its great cathedral (which was destroyed by fire a score of years ago, and is now in process of such slow reconstruction as a lawsuit between the city and the architect will allow); the unstuccoed walls of the municipal palace, with its courtyard full of half-chipped lava-blocks; the fringe of ungainly houses that girdle the public square and await demolition in the new plan of city improvement, all call to mind the newness though not the enterprise of the western frontier of the New World, rather than the hoary antiquity of the Old, dating back hundreds and hundreds of years before Christ.

Yet every clod of this Campanian soil is alive with classic and artistic memories. The broken-nosed or wholly headless Roman emperors that guard in mutilated marble dignity the four corners of the public square witnessed in their day the prowess of Marcellus, the "sword of Rome," and exulted over the impregnability of the fortress which broke the prestige of Hannibal.

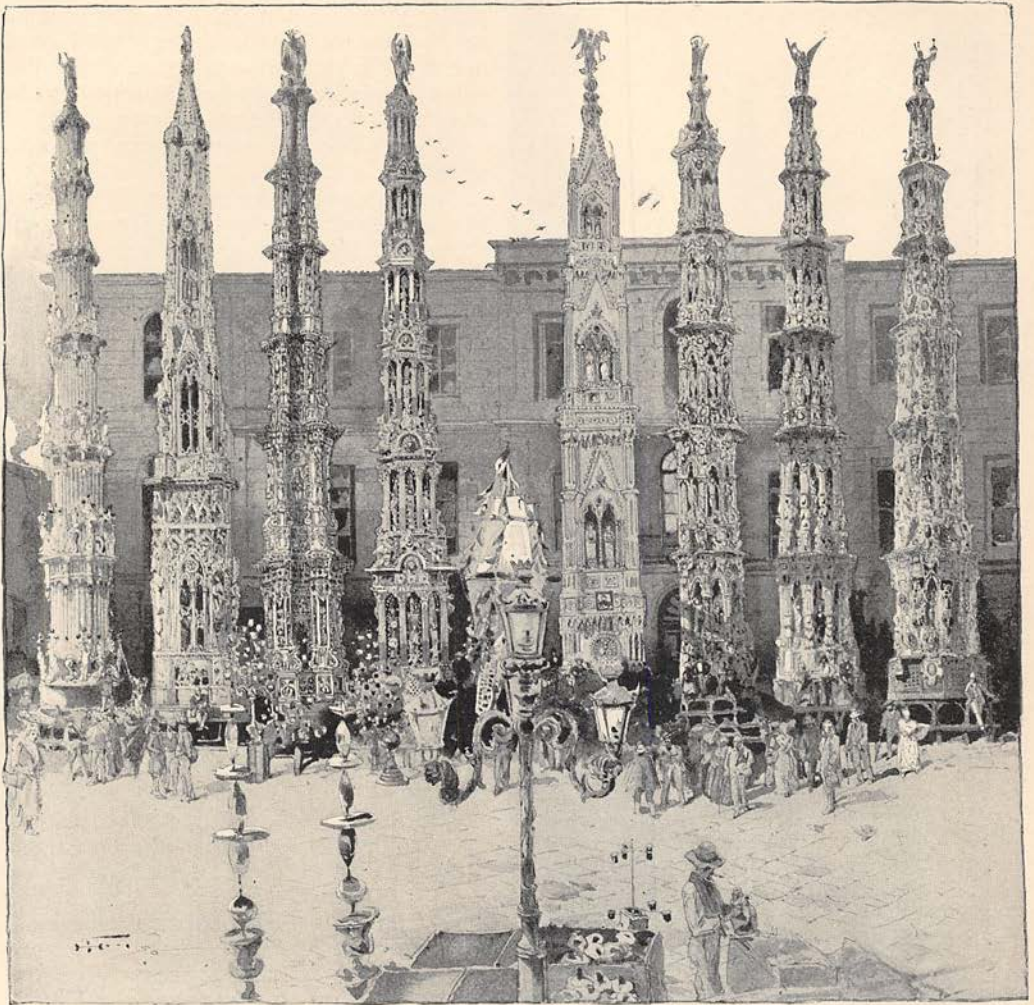
Here the archæologist collected the graceful array of fictile vases that illustrate one of the noblest periods of Greco-Roman art. Here the numismatist found the precious coins that enrich the world's museums. Here the serene Augustus, the godfather of art and literature, died; and as if to prove the immortality of the germs of individual thought, here lived, centuries after, Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor," and wrote in the quiet cloisters of the Dominican monastery the luminous "Philosophic Code" of the middle ages. Here, too, Giordano Bruno was born and, long before Bacon and Descartes, laid the foundations of modern experimental philosophy, and, in wide communion with the divine beauties of nature that encompassed him, conceived the lofty pantheism that was destined, later on, to lead him to the stake. In art, Giovanni da Nola chiseled his name on the imperishable records of the cinque-cento.

But these are all dusty memories. Nola has a living and personal one in the melodious

chime of church bells which celebrate in sonorous jargon, the world over, their invention by St. Paulinus, the beloved bishop of Nola. Thus the poetic idea that gave to every church spire a living voice wherewith to call to prayer, outlives the glory of Marcellus and of Augustus, and Nola celebrates her yearly festival in honor of the gentle and beneficent Paulinus.

The fifty trains despatched by the narrow-gauge railway on June 24 are insufficient to contain the crowds that flock to Nola to admire the famous *Gigli*, or Lilies, which are its pride. Pure tradition (for I can find no treatise or historical account of the custom) has handed down from father to son the art of making these large structures, which I should be afraid to describe did not photography come to the aid of faith and enable me to lay before the incredulous the proof that reality is sometimes stranger than fiction. The "Lilies" of Nola, which in the beginning were probably pyramids of flowers carried in the procession in honor of St. Paulinus, are to-day towering obelisks or turrets eighty or ninety feet high, artistically constructed in Gothic, Corinthian, and Doric styles, adorned with statues, ornamental friezes, bas-reliefs, and emblems, and built on movable platforms.

A *fanfara*, or band of trumpeters, occupies the first-floor balcony of a Lily, and marks the time for forty stout *facchini*, or porters, who in perfect step, and with corresponding good humor, gaily carry the towers, players and all, on their shoulders through the streets of the town! But this is not all. I shall not soon forget the genuine emotion I experienced when, penetrating on that radiant June morning into the broad piazza where the eight colossal Lilies in all their barbaric gold and pearl reflected and multiplied the dazzling rays of the sun, I heard the music of the approaching procession and saw the fragile turrets dance the tarantella! Back and forth and round about they went in cadenced step, proud to show their perfect equilibrium and to compete for the plaudits of the cheering crowd. An elephant on a tight-rope, leviathan plunging in a pond! And when, as the statue of the saint, borne on the shoulders of acolytes, slowly circled the square in the midst of chanting choirs and clouds of incense, I saw them bend before it at an angle as graceful as it



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

Grocers.

Wine-sellers.

The Bark.

Butchers.

Blacksmiths.

Tailors.

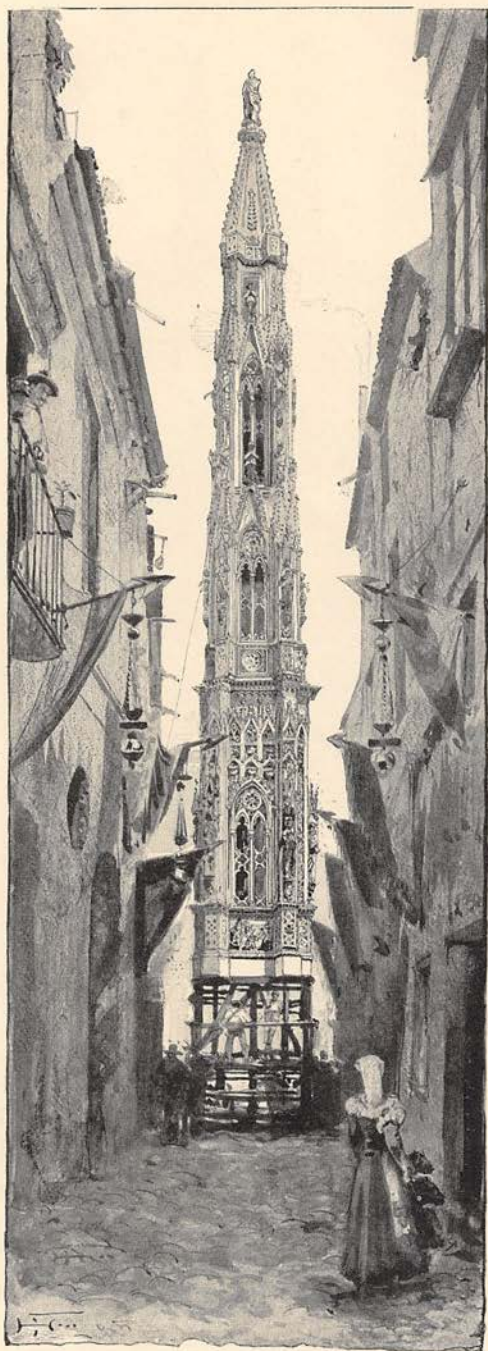
THE LILIES OF NOLA.

was defiant of the laws of gravity, I was forced to conclude that the days of miracles are not fully over. Faith may yet remove mountains by putting the robust shoulders of the faithful under them!

The eight Lilies of Nola may be seen in the above illustration at the moment when, drawn up in the public square on each side of the quaint bark of St. Paulinus, they await the solemn benediction of the bishop and the not less important award of the city premium. They are built at the expense of the various gilds and crafts of the town—bakers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, grocers, carpenters, and husbandmen or market-gardeners. Each one bears above the plinth the ensign or emblem of the gild: a poetic sheaf of wheat for the husbandmen; a man's prosaic waistcoat for the tailors; a

flask of wine and a pear-shaped cheese for the grocers; a horned ox's head for the butchers; a last for the shoemakers; a wrought-iron sickle for the smiths.

The average weight of each structure, including the band, the small boys in the rigging, and the triumphant female who sits in state under the central arch, is about six thousand pounds, or three tons. The cost ranges from two hundred to two hundred and fifty dollars each. Every year two *giglianti*, or lily-men, are chosen by each gild, one to dress and the other to undress the Lily. The first is the master of the feast, and the second, to whom belong the spoils, will be so next year; and almost before the echoes of the festival die away he begins his rounds to seek the offerings of friends and neighbors for the succeeding year.



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

THE LILY OF THE GROCERS' GILD.

The *charpente*, or skeleton, of the structure, which is formed of stout poles lashed firmly together, is preserved from year to year, and materially lessens the expense; the ornamentation, on the other hand, must be entirely new; and it is the aim as well as the pride of the

gigliante and his party to make it as magnificent as possible. "What do you do," I asked of one of the *giglianti*—an honest wine-seller, whose hands were as red as the wine-butts he handled—"when the offerings are scanty?"

"Go into debt," he laconically and promptly replied.

The giving up or lessening of the splendor of the festival is evidently not for a moment thought of. Better mortgage to-morrow's bread or to-morrow's vintage, with the easy faith of the Italian in Micawber's comfortable maxim.

Undoubtedly the handsomest Lily of the year I am describing, for purity of design and elegance of finish, was that built by the Butchers' Guild. It was a turret in pointed Gothic style, inclosed on all four sides, representing in pure white and soft chiaroscuro tints the central minaret, with its delicate and lacelike tracery, of the famous cathedral of Milan. A winged Victory crowned the summit, and beautiful statues filled the ornamental niches; and, vanity of vanities! a life-size portrait of the proud architect decorated the plinth, to the edification of beholders. The Lily of the prodigal wine-merchant I have quoted was in delicious rococo style, a very tangle of brilliant coloring and elaborate detail as fantastic as a vase of *vieux Saxe*. The grocers' Lily was in Gothic and the shoemakers' in baroco style. The Lilies of the smiths and of the tailors rose like colossal towers of glittering majolica, while the bakers' Lily, built in pure Corinthian style, was admirably adorned with reclining angels, trumpet in hand, that recalled the exquisite seraphs of Fra Angelico. Thus the old artistic fire lingers in the veins of an uncultivated people, who rudely but vividly express what they vaguely feel.

The choosing of designs and the work of preparation occupy considerable time; but the erecting, or "dressing," of the Lily, as it is called, is, like the building of Aladdin's palace, done in a single night—a haste rendered necessary by the fact that an accidental shower would speedily melt the gay structure to paste. However, in this brilliant climate, in the month of June, unless Vesuvius has a very threatening cloud-cap on, fair weather may be counted on.

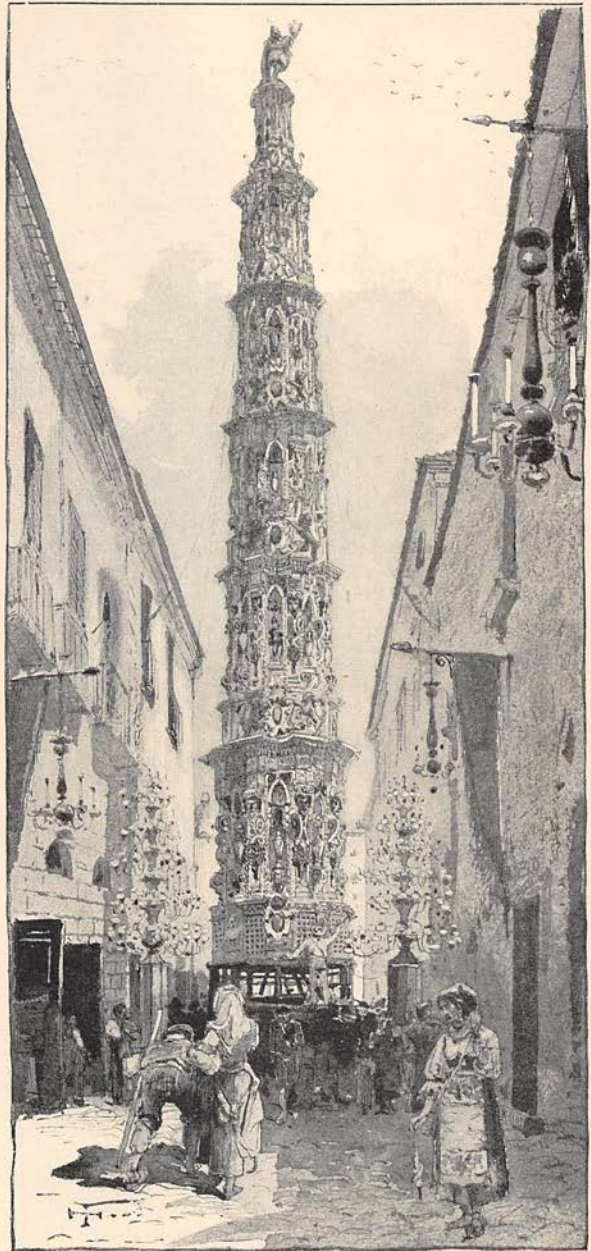
As soon as the Lily is dressed and fully adorned (I counted upon one no fewer than fifty statues of papier-mâché!) it is firmly anchored with ropes to the trees and balconies about the home of the *gigliante*, which becomes the Mecca of the faithful, until it is called to join the procession at the public square. Then the rigging, which is masked with thick bunches of green box and is gaily decorated with fluttering bannerets, is mounted by daring urchins, who, poised here and there like squirrels fifty feet in air, steady the lofty pinnacle with invisible ropes. The platform is occupied by the band,

without which it would be impossible to keep step, and the underpinning is manned by the robust porters, whose shoulders before the day is over are always bruised and often cut and bleeding. The *gigliante*, like a band-master, goes ahead and gives the signal of march, crowds of small boys dance and cut fantastic tricks before it, the people applaud to the echo, and the majestic pile moves swifly and smoothly through the crowd, seeming to be propelled by its own impulse rather than by the will of forty men.

As the Lilies bow before the advancing saint, a scene of wild bombardment takes place. From every story of the structure are violently thrown handfuls of pebbly *confetti*. They rattle like hail against the silver stole and jeweled miter of the saint, while a snow-storm of rose-leaves and flower-petals from the balconies fairly thickens the air. In the center of the square, also upon a movable platform, the famous bark awaits the arrival of St. Paulinus. This is a small sloop firmly wedged into the imaginary waves of a painted ocean, and is supposed to be a facsimile of the one that brought the saint back from captivity in Africa, in the year 400. For, as the story runs, the good and gentle bishop, after having expended all his vast fortune to redeem from slavery the Nolan captives taken in the incursions of the Vandals, had nothing left to give as a ransom for the only son of a poor widow who appealed to him for help—nothing but himself, and himself he gave.

Sacred tradition relates that he labored as a slave in the fields until, having performed—in spite of himself, so to speak—various miracles, he was recognized by the Vandals, released from bondage, and restored to Nola, loaded with rich gifts, and accompanied by all the Nolan captives that had remained slaves. In the bark a turbaned negro in Turkish costume represents the converts he brought back from Africa.

The band, it is true, wears the uniform of the Italian army, and plays the rattling hymn of the house of Savoy in honor of the saint dead fourteen hundred years ago; but these are trifling anachronisms, which give a certain



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THE LILY OF THE TAILORS' GUILD.

flavor to the feast, as a dash of salt does to punch. There is so much genuine devotion, so much perfectly naive heathenism, in the *festa* that one might sooner believe one's self on the shores of the Ganges, with the fateful car of Juggernaut approaching, than in the heart of modern Italy, with Progress looking gravely on, and Anarchy sneering in the background.