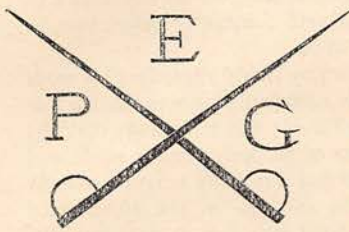


THE FALSE PROPHET OF ARCIDOSSO : DAVID LAZARET.



THE strange signature here represented was that of a man known as "St. David," who on the 17th day of August, in the year of grace 1878, fell in a skirmish with the

representatives of public law and order. It is asserted that he was leading a party of Socialists to initiate a revolutionary rising in Montelabro; but with whatever degree of faith or mistrust we may think proper to receive such sayings, the facts connected with this man's career are strange enough to be worth gathering and recording, for they show that in Tuscany, which boasts itself the most cultivated province of Italy, a half-mad or feather-brained individual could gather about him the elements of a most mischievous organisation, starting, no doubt, under the innocent guise of a society of penitents, but ending in showing itself in the real likeness of a band of incendiaries or assassins.

Although not actually taken red-handed, it is easy to see from the verses written by their leader whither he was urging them; rendered in prose they run thus: "O all ye possessed of lands and wealth, make less show of luxury, give bread to the languishing poor, otherwise your substance shall be given up to sack before your eyes."

St. David, as he dubbed himself, was the son of a small cotter in Tuscany; some of his early years were spent at the miserable Communal School, but he was removed before he had learned all that was taught even there, in order to drive his father's little cart. It seems he was able to read, and now he wasted his time in dreaming dreams of greatness, founded on the vapid contents of various windy Italian novels. Soon growing tired of the small stage offered by his native village, he cast about, like other misunderstood geniuses before him, for a wider space in which to play his part, and he decided for the army.

The cobwebs were not cleared from his brain during the period of his military service, and he went back to his native place with less inclination than ever to work, and with greater thirst than ever for rule and glory.

Striking out a new course he began to write, but being unable to write for journals he took to constructing tragedies, but could not meet with a publisher who would print, or a manager who would mount them.

This second attempt failing, he tried another and totally different plan, which at least was better in the sense of being profitable and lazy, for after mature deliberation he proclaimed himself called to the ascetic life, and gave himself up to visiting churches and confessionals.

The entire abandonment of his wife and children formed one item in this new and convenient programme, but whether its propriety was equally evident to the hard-working younger brother, on whom their maintenance now depended, deponent sayeth not.

Finally, in 1868, our saint disappeared from his native haunts without leaving a trace, and was absent for many months, during which his people had forgotten him; but on his return he showed, with many evident signs, that his time had been busily, if not pleasantly, occupied in preparing for a new part—namely, that of prophet.

His speech was now sententious; his eyes were always upturned; he wore a broad-brimmed hat, which entirely hid the upper part of the face; and an enormous beard which, besides concealing the lower part of his face, rendered the man quite unrecognisable; and his general state of dirt and squalor was horrible.

He did not know his family or friends, but proclaimed himself charged by St. Peter and the Virgin Mary to declare what he saw when on his way to Rome from his own village, all those months before. He had halted in the Sabine country to see a pious female relative, who desired him to go on a certain night to a certain solitary grotto, where he should see wonderful things and should hear marvellous words, which it would become his duty blindly to obey.

Accordingly at midnight he was praying alone in the appointed grotto, when noises and sounds as of an earthquake supervened, and then the vault seemed to open, admitting into its pitchy darkness streams of brilliant light, in the midst of which the Virgin and St. Peter appeared in regal splendour.

Thus far (bating the blasphemy) not so bad, we may say; but now St. Peter steps forward, and saying, "*In hoc signo vinces*," causes the man to faint and fall prone, by barbarously applying to his forehead a red-hot iron brand.

After this the *séance* may have lasted longer, but St. David knew nothing more till in the morning he came to himself, and found he was yet in the grotto, and all alone, but he felt on his forehead and found the ineffaceable brand, which resembled the accompanying design.

Some of the poor folk, on hearing his account of the vision, prostrated themselves and kissed the hem of his garment, and others followed the prophet up to the hill-top, where he now took up his abode, and where he preached to all the curious from all the countryside, who soon gathered to see this "Heaven-marked" man.

He lived on bread, garlic, and onions, with water from the brook; and soon a small stone tower was built to shelter him, wherein he wrote prophecies on the future destiny of the nations, on the Papacy, and on his own mission. Two men stood at the entrance to



the tower, and took charge of the various offerings of grain, wine, and money which were made by the visitors.

For about two years this profitable affair was carried on, with a comic incident by way of interlude in the year 1870, when the saint showed a precious relic found by himself, and declared by him to be a jaw-bone of King David, or, as he is called in Italy, St. David. The relic, on being examined by a surgeon, proved to be the jaw-bone of a patriarchal goat!

It is quite probable that our visionary was directed by other and stronger heads, for he now laid the foundation for a civil and religious community in Montelabro, beginning with a sort of hermitage of twelve chambers, and a chapel for the worship of the Virgin, close to his own tower.

He chose twelve men to aid him in governing this new community, calling them apostles; but he took the title of Great Prophet and the chief place for himself. The number of followers increased, and he proposed to add seven chief hermitages to his society, which was named "The Pious Institute of Hermits Penitent and Penitentiary."

One of his hermits was entrusted with the guidance of the community at Montoro, and there a brother of that hermit became insane in consequence of the practices adopted.

David secured a number of followers of the better class by his fine words; for instance, he used to say he constituted the new society by the direct order of Heaven, but he acknowledged the authority of the Romish Church, that we ought to live Christian lives, flee from sin and from occasions of sin, and from blasphemy, put aside avarice, practise pardon and charity, tell no lies, be frugal in eating and drinking, give up dice and smoking, &c.

His Articles of Constitution were the following:—

"The Society is to begin January 1st, 1872, and to end in December, 1890.

"The member gives himself, all his goods, his wife, and if possible his children.

"The members are of three classes—nobles, landed proprietors, and workpeople, who possess little or nothing.

"All must serve the Society and work for their own living.

"The Society maintains its members, takes care of the sick, and teaches the children according to the position they may previously have occupied.

"The shortest period of membership allowed is three years, and he who leaves before that period is up loses all profits or advantages.

"Until the seven hermitages are ready members can reside in their own houses, but must always obey the Society, which also must be allowed to gather in their harvests.

"Members live in community or in their own houses, but must all dress alike, and with materials supplied by the Society."

The men wear a grey coat of common cloth, with black cording, boots coming over the trousers, and a hat trimmed with grey cords. The beard must be left free to grow as it will.

The wives and children wear dark dresses, black and red woollen stockings, and Polish boots.

St. David dressed in grey cloth, and carried a long staff divisible in three parts, with a very large knob at the top.

Every member wears a copper medal with emblems

which are not explained; and they place an emblem also over the door of their houses.

Any one who has visited Arcidosso or Scansano will readily bear witness to these facts, for he will have had these followers of St. David constantly before him, in the fields and on the roads.

The pamphlets written by David regarding his work seem to have had a sale sufficiently large to furnish him with the means of livelihood; but it appears that the doctrines of community of property, and of work, and of profits were not carried out quite fairly; probably the source of profit by the sale of the aforementioned pamphlets gradually dried up; but at any rate the society was bankrupt, and David made divers pilgrimages to Brittany and Ireland in search of aid.

There is a long list of Articles of Belief, which seem more or less to have been taken from the Gospels, but one of them denies the eternity of punishment while admitting that of reward; and there is also a collection of prophecies uttered by David regarding the future of nearly all the European kingdoms; that regarding England denounces utter ruin, that regarding the Pope assures him of the speedy intervention of a powerful king, who shall restore all his lost provinces and give him universal sway in addition.

In 1872 David was prosecuted for fraud in business matters, but managed to evade conviction, while in 1874 he was imprisoned for larceny and vagabondage, besides being fined about twenty pounds sterling; he appealed to the Superior Court of Perugia, however, and again was let off!

Later he seems to have been aided by an ex-priest, who preached in all the districts and gathered more dupes into the fold; but though this success helped him, it was not stable, and in April last he arranged the plan of a general rising, whose rallying-cry was, "Jesus, David, and the Republic." He ordered, and by a strange fatuity on the part of the Custom House authorities was allowed to receive, some cases of showy uniforms from Marseilles. On August 17th his followers assembled in large numbers on the heights, and although some journals say they were 3,000 persons, it is more probable that 2,000 would be a fair computation; but they made a great show, since all except the leaders were dressed in loose white linen gowns.

David himself wore a kind of crown, and his red robes, carrying in his hand an iron-bound staff. The small party of ten carbiners who, under guidance of the civil officer from Grosseto, were the representatives of law and order, are worthy of all praise for the cool courage with which they quietly followed the civilian up the hill in the face of this surging multitude to challenge the lunatic David. The usual summons in the name of the King having been made, and no answer returned, and no sign of retirement shown, the summons* was repeated, and David then said, "I am the King;" this he followed up by action, for on the order being given by the civilian to the carbiners—

* These summonses in the King's name are equivalent to "reading the Riot Act" in England.

"Fire!"—he knocked him down by a blow from his formidable staff, instantly falling himself by a ball from a Sicilian carbineer, who aimed full at the cross between the two C's on the wretched man's forehead.

Immediately he fell, a few shots were discharged by a concealed party of his friends, and a large shower of stones was thrown, but not one of the public force was seriously hurt, although each of their ten balls had found its billet. The people seemed utterly demoralised at the unexpected conclusion of the campaign, and picking up David's body, they all wended their way back to whence they had come. David never recovered consciousness, and died in a few hours.

The civilian was soon assisted by peaceable citizens, and the affair ended much better than could have been expected. There were no reinforcements nearer than

Siena, fifteen hours from Grosseto. Some news of the projected rising, which was to have sacked two prosperous villages near, must have reached headquarters, it is said; and yet the Prefect allowed the usual small party of ten soldiers to remain without reinforcements in its distant and exposed position.

Such performances merely invite the commission of crime, and everybody in Italy is indignant at the neglect which led to the effusion of blood, which a little care and common sense would have prevented.

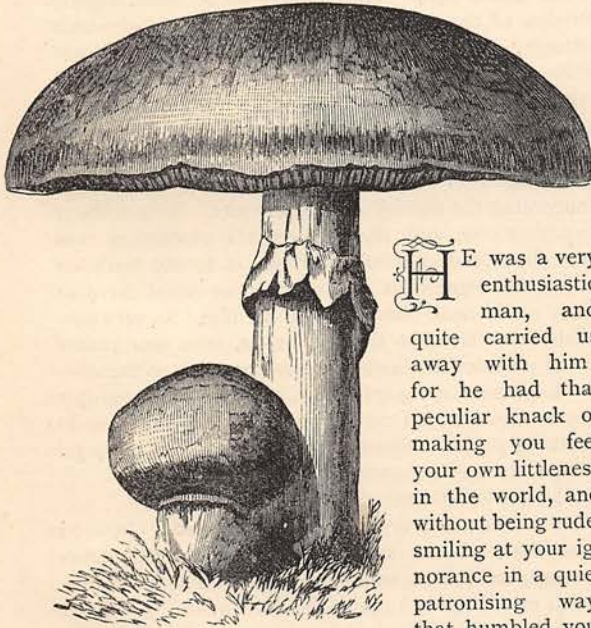
One word, in conclusion, regarding the supernatural mark on David's broad forehead. Unbelieving outsiders declare he had tattooed it; of late, they say, the heart within a parallelogram had disappeared, leaving only the cross between reversed C's visible.

He was a tall, commanding person, and only just forty-five years old.*

C.

OUR MUSHROOM BED.

A NARRATIVE OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS.



HE was a very enthusiastic man, and quite carried us away with him; for he had that peculiar knack of making you feel your own littleness in the world, and without being rude, smiling at your ignorance in a quiet patronising way, that humbled you,

and made you feel as if you had been neglecting your education most abominably, and that you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

He was staying with us for a few days in our little country home, and one way and another he had given me a pretty good rating.

"Ah! yes," it would be; "outbuildings, melon-pits, vineries—hum!—yes. You see, my dear fellow, you do not make proper use of your advantages. With such a place as this you ought to enjoy every vegetable luxury of the kingdom; as it is, you—"

He finished with a peculiar twist of his lips and a shrug of his shoulders, which, of course, all meant contemptuous pity of a more unpleasant kind than the simple verbal way in which some people express it.

I know him now, and I have no hesitation in saying that our friend was a sham—the gardening sham. You have the same type of individual everywhere, and find him ready to take you to task. He is not always a gardening sham, for he may be "horsey," and talk spavins, splinters, and swollen hocks at you. He may be a medical amateur, and give you goose-skin by his discourse upon your various organs and the ailments from which you suffer. Beware of this man of all others. The others will touch your pockets; this man will touch your health. This type is to be found in all walks of life, and is female sometimes as well as male, and the best advice I can give respecting them is—find them out as soon as you can.

"Now, look here," said our friend at dinner one day: "mushrooms—tough, leathery, tasteless. I'll be bound to say that you gave a shilling for those mushrooms."

"I gave two," I said modestly.

"Ah! yes," he said, poking at a button mushroom, which he impaled with a fork, rubbed in the sauce, and then popped in his mouth.

"I am sorry they are not better," I observed.

"Yes, they are bad," he continued, holding up a threatening finger at me. "Two shillings for a wretched little punnet of brown mushrooms not fit to eat, when for an expenditure of, say, half-a-crown you might have hundreds of basketfuls of fresh, delicious fungi—sappy, nutritious, and full of aroma!"

"But could we?" I said.

"Could you! my dear fellow. Why, you can grow mushrooms anywhere; in dark cupboards, in your old boots, in pots, and pans, and pails; in old boxes, in halves of beer-barrels, or—why, of course, the very thing—that dark pit-like shed. The very place!"

* While this is passing through the press, one at least of the party of order has succumbed to the injuries received. It is reported also that a number of Lazarettisti continually watch David's grave, expecting his resuscitation.