

LOUIS NOTARI

THE
LEGEND



OF SAINT
DEVOTA

(English translation of the monegasque poem of 1927)

Song eight



THE EVENING

Evening was falling when Saint Devota was gently lifted from the boat; a mild evening of the kind we often enjoy under our winter sky.

The sun was setting behind the Signal ridge and, little by little, shadows crept up from the seashore towards the Spelüghe, darkening the Gaumate gorge - but higher up "brother sun", as good Saint Francis called him, blazed through the almond trees that shivered in the cool evening breeze.

The blossoming trees were tinged with pink from the caress of the sun's ray that still it sent from behind the hills, but then it seemed that, slowly, a Bengal flare lit up the whole of Spelüghe, the whole of Cundamine and the old Rock of our forefathers.

That evening, the whole of nature honored the saint with the whiteness of lilies that, together with martyrdom's red dew, made the pure spirit of independence flourish; and the last rays of the dying sun stained the almond trees with blood, and the little Temple of Flora too and the Revere with its olive trees, those symbols of peace and prayer since ancient times.

Once they had carefully wrapped the foreign martyr, who seemed in peaceful slumber, in the red shroud, they cast their eyes up to the white dove which, silently and tirelessly, like a butterfly, fluttered above the head of the young virgin.

And then the bird took flight and soared towards the Gaumate that, we must admit, must in those days have looked like a fairy cave. It was a dark and lonely gorge, a triumph of nature and of those plants which thrive in shadow, but tradition says that at the entrance, where today the chapel stands, there grew an olive tree and cypresses.

Perhaps Our Lord had set them to grow there for the purpose of preparing a beautiful tomb for the saint whom He had brought so far across the sea into the midst of our people, to let us know His gospel and to remove us from our mundane world.

And the white dove flew straight to the wild olive tree which is, - we repeat once more - sacred and blessed as a symbol of peace and

prayer; and the saint's procession followed the bird solemnly and without noise: no onlookers, no priests or bells polluting the air with clamour, no mourners or flute-players that were then the custom at the burials of the rich and the vain bourgeoisie.

Following the white wings of the bird, our young virgin proceeded slowly towards the cypresses which, by the will of the Lord, had grown there, straight, tall and slender; reaching towards the sky so that one day the remains of His saint would rise slowly to Him, purified by the filters of the tree and transformed into an essence, distilled in a smell of incense which at night, when the sky is serene and the air is light, rises towards Him like a silent prayer.

And at this twilight funeral everything was peaceful, calm and serene: no tears or lamentations, no sobbing or sighing; all walked slowly and in deep contemplation. All of them pondered, of course, on the mystery surrounding this departed woman and her journey, and all fell under the thrall of this bird that was not merely passing through. Perhaps something still unknown to us had seized the soul of our ancestors at that moment: the strange feeling that an invisible force was changing the destiny of our people. Silently, they processed after the old Corsican and after Gaudençiu who, their heads bowed, carried the dead woman - but in the air there was something strange, that came from who knows where, unspeakable, which made them understand that no aura of sadness surrounded the dead girl sent by heaven, around the dead girl who smiled still, despite the martyrdom which had torn her from life and all its beauties so early.

All dressed in white, holding branches of palm and blossom of almond, the young girls who had celebrated Flora had come unbidden, and followed in procession.



*Candu sun arivai da i arcipressi
E an missu 'n tera a poveřa piciuna
Giüstu u suřiyu dava i darei riflessi
Sçü a roca che řa fã pei so Patruna.*

But at the end of the funeral yet another beautiful miracle awaited: while everyone was staring at it, the white dove suddenly disappeared; all saw before their eyes, all had seen it on the branch, and then suddenly nobody saw it any more!

When, having reached the cypresses, they had laid the poor little girl in the ground, the sun cast its last rays on the Rock which would later choose her as its patron.

Looking out from their homes that evening, and not knowing why the sun was so red, the old people said to themselves: “red sky at night, shepherd’s delight!”

And everything suggests that this was the moment that brought our old chronicles to a close, and marked the birth and the foundation of the happy destiny of our Rock.

