

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF PIO NINO

Toward the end of the sixteenth century a combmaker, Alberto Mastal, of Brescia, with whom the world did not go well, went to live at Sinigaglia. Fortune smiled on him in his new home; the combmaker flourished, and became so rich that he obtained the hand of a young lady of fortune named Feretti, and at the same time the rank of Count. Such is the origin of the house of Mastal Feretti. Girolami Mastal Feretti, descended from the latter, married a daughter of Count Salasari, and the issue of this marriage is Gian-Maria Mastal, born in 1792, now Pius IX.

From his infancy he seems to have been weak, subject to epileptic fits, and difficult to manage. When a boy he was sent to the college at Viterbo, presided over by the learned astronomer, Lughitram, but his chronic indisposition did not permit him to derive much advantage from that seat of learning. On returning home, however, his health greatly improved, and as he grew stronger, he manifested a keen desire to enter the army. To fit him for this profession he devoted much time to athletic exercises, and soon became remarkable for his military bearing. Those familiar with the appearance of Pius IX., as seen in St. Peter's, or the Sistine, will scarcely be prepared to hear that in his youth he was noted for his dandy dress, appearing always in a semi-military uniform, wearing boots and spurs, and seldom seen without a cigar in his mouth. Being very handsome, with a tolerable poet and good musician, he soon became an object of admiration to many, and of affection to some, girls, but, although more than one loved him, he never married, and sought the hand of Elena, daughter of Prince Albani. This lady, who is said to have been extremely beautiful, at first encouraged young Mastal, but eventually married the Colonel of a regiment quartered at Sinigaglia, whom she was in the habit of meeting frequently at the reunions in her father's house. The disappointment was so severely felt by the young man, that, to alleviate his misery, he plunged into dissipation, drank deeply, and gambled largely. About this juncture Napoleon's career had terminated. Pius VII. returned to Rome, and public affairs began to assume a tranquil phase. Accordingly, young Mastal, who was leading a very unsettled life, was sent to Rome, where two of his uncles resided, who, it was believed, were in a position to be of service to him.

Arriving in the capital, he engaged a very humble apartment, his allowance being only a few pounds a month. Nevertheless, so fascinating were his manners, and so handsome his person, that he soon became one of the most fashionable young men in Rome, and was a constant visitor in the palaces of the highest nobles in that city. A successful player at the card table, his winnings enabled him to live in a manner that made him the envy of less fortunate youths, and led to love adventures not yet entirely forgotten in Rome.

But, though young Mastal was well pleased with the life he was leading, it was far from satisfying his parents, who naturally desired to see their son established in some honorable profession. Accordingly, as the military spirit still burned strongly in Gian-Maria, an attempt was made to satisfy it, to some extent at least, by placing him in the Guardia Nobilit, which had been established immediately after the Congress of Vienna. His interest was sufficient great to cause him to be enrolled as a candidate for admission to the corps, but a representation having been made to the Secretary of State that he was subject to epileptic fits, his name was removed from the list of candidates, and he was advised that he must not hope to be a Guardia Nobilit. The intelligence overwhelmed him with sorrow, his spirits became depressed, a dangerous illness supervened, on his recovery from which—due, as his biographers declare, to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin—he determined on devoting his life to the cause of religion.

There are many still living in Rome who remember the sudden and extraordinary change in young Mastal. Dying of his fashionable costume, the most boot and clanking spur gave place to thick shoes, the laced coat to a black soutane, and the jaunty step to a measured walk, with bent head and down-cast eyes. At this period Mastal was twenty-four years old. Hard study followed, and finding that this, though pushed to excess, did not impair his health, but rather improved it, a change due more probably to an abstemious life—he conceived that God especially called him to the work of priesthood, and having obtained the necessary medical permission to enter the church, he was ordained. His religious zeal now rapidly unfolded. Endowed with a peculiarly fine voice, well remembered by those who have had the pleasure of hearing him read the offices in St. Peter's or the Sistine Chapel, he studied eloquence, practiced speaking extempore, and soon acquired such a mastery of language as to draw vast crowds whenever he ascended the pulpit. He was particularly brilliant in his fervent—short, impassioned discourses, such as you may hear during the holy week at the Gesù—and carried his congregation entirely with him. Women who had admired Mastal as a youth of fashion, now hung on his words and buzzed around his confessional; strong-minded men, too, became weak before him, for he took their souls by his pictures of the torments in store for the wicked, simulating purgatorial flames by plunging his hands in burning spirits.

But, singular as all this was, the youthful priest, altho' for more active occupation, and a more extensive sphere of usefulness, and a more glowing and long waiting. Pius VII. having decided on sending a politico-religious mission to Chile, Mastal applied to be appointed Secretary, and succeeded, though against the will of his family, in obtaining the appointment. The mission, headed by the Bishop of Civita del Castello, after a long and hazardous voyage, arrived at Buenos Ayres. The journey from that city to Chile was attended with great suffering, but, although the mission underwent many perils, they were productive of no other effect on the Secretary than that of causing him to desire to remain in the country; one reason doubtless being that his health so far

from being impaired by the hardships of the journey, was simply improved. Indeed, he had been heard to say that once to that he never enjoyed better health than during this period of his life; and now so entirely did he enter into the spirit of the undertaking that when his chief, discouraged by the ill success attending his efforts to convert the natives, determined on returning to Europe, Mastal was for remaining in Chile at all hazards, preferring even possible martyrdom to abandoning a measure to which he had committed himself.

On Mastal's return to Europe, Leo XII. filled the pontifical throne. This pontiff, naturally enthusiastic and energetic, testified his appreciation of Mastal's conduct by creating him Archbishop of Spoleto. When Gregory XVI. assumed the tiara, he was removed from Spoleto, and elected Cardinal and Bishop of Imola.

Though Mastal's early life was not by any means uneventful, yet the Romans knew but very little of him until he was elevated to the tiara. In grateful remembrance of the kindness of Pius VII. he assumed the name of Pio. Such, in outline, was the early life of the great high priest at Rome—a man who, when he ascended the Papal throne, was hailed by the liberal party with a frenzy of enthusiasm, but who soon by his policy, became the champion of Ultramontaniam. In justice, however, let it be added that Pius IX. inherited an accumulation of difficulties, postponed and complicated by his predecessors.—London *Figaro*



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