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The “Scoppio Del Carro” at Florence

Jessie L. Weston

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Fable, 24th ed., under heading "Grotto"). It would be interesting to know whether the custom is confined to the London district or whether it is observed elsewhere in England. And also whether there was a shrine set up in the city of London itself, or whether there were several shrines set up in the villages just outside, which lay on the great main roads leading to London.

The shell connected with Saint James the Great was the scallop-shell, *Pecten Jacobaeus*. The children's use of the oyster-shell is probably due to the fact that it roughly resembled the scallop-shell in shape, and also was at this time easily procurable because of the commencement of the oyster season.¹ For the legend of St. James the Greater and his connection with Spain, with Compostella, and with the scallop-shell, see the *Lives of the Saints*.

FREDERIC G. D'AETH.

THE "SCOPPIO DEL CARRO" AT FLORENCE.

(*Ante*, p. 131.)

IN the spring of the year 1904 I had occasion to visit Florence on business, and, by a fortunate coincidence, my visit extending over Easter, I was able, for the first time, to witness the well-known annual ceremony of the "Scoppio del Carro."

The "Carro," as it is called, resembles in form rather a Catafalque, or Funeral Urn, being a sombre grey-brown erection, four-sided, and diminishing in size alike towards the summit and the base. The lines were marked out by wreaths of fireworks, in pink

¹[This seems questionable. Every housewife knows that oysters are out of season "when there is no r in the name of the month"; *i.e.* from April to September. Accordingly the 1st of September is the date of Colchester Oyster-Feast, which thus apparently resembles a feast of "first fruits" partaken of by the elders of the community. Could not some member of the Society manage to be present at it this year, and send us particulars? —ED.]

and white paper, which crowned the top, ran down the four sides, and encircled the intersecting line. The same "Carro" apparently serves year after year.

This structure was mounted upon a wheeled base, hung with crimson cloth and drawn by two splendid white oxen, almost hidden under their crimson " housings," their horns gilded, and huge flat wreaths of flowers and evergreens rising high above their foreheads.

The ceremony of the "Scoppio" takes place on Easter Eve. Early on that day the "Carro" was drawn by the oxen to its appointed station on the Piazza del Duomo, midway between the Cathedral and the Baptistery. The great west doors of the Duomo were opened, and from the "Carro" to a pillar erected in front of the High Altar ran a wire at a height of about 6 feet from the ground. A passage was left down the centre of the nave, the spectators being ranged on either side, and crowding the vast interior from wall to wall.

A little after eleven the service began, but in the prevailing bustle and confusion it was quite impossible to ascertain either the details of the ritual or the words of the prayers. Shortly before 11.30 the clergy of the Cathedral, including the Archbishop, came in procession down the nave, chanting as they went, and issuing from the west door, crossed the square to the Baptistery. After a short absence (about 20 minutes) they returned, but now at the rear of the procession walked one of the priests, carefully carrying a lighted candle. This, I was told, was the "Sacred Fire" brought by one of the Pazzi family from Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, and never since extinguished. I imagine that what my informant really meant was that the candle had been lighted at the "Sacred Fire" which was preserved in the Baptistery.

On returning to the altar the celebrant, whether the Archbishop or not I could not see, began High Mass. Precisely at noon the "Gloria" was reached, and as the first words were sung the sacred fire was applied to the pillar, which, like the "Carro," was wreathed with fireworks. This was the supreme moment of the ceremony; with a hissing sound, amid a shower of sparks, a dove, apparently of fire, flew from the pillar along the wire,—it should have reached the "Carro," and setting that alight, returned to the

altar from whence it came, on the success or non-success of its flight depending, in the opinion of the Contadini, the fate of this year's harvest. By some unhappy chance it flew no farther than midway down the nave, where, with a last despairing "fizzle," it became extinguished, revealing itself as a stuffed bird tied on to a bundle of squibs. Immediately the spectators rushed upon it, each trying to secure at least a feather. Finally a small child succeeded in capturing what remained of the carcass, and went off with it in triumph.

That evening the walls were placarded with the announcement of a "Mala Pasqua," and all sorts of misfortunes for the present year were freely prophesied. A friend who had witnessed the "Scoppio" on many previous occasions told me she had never before seen it fail thus, and that the last time it happened was the year of the late Archbishop's death.¹

The points which struck me most were the curious shape of the "Carro" and the elaborate decoration of the oxen, which seemed to me to hint at a possible sacrificial origin.

JESSIE L. WESTON.

¹ "Another chapter is devoted to a description of the extraordinary ceremonial which takes place in the Duomo of Florence on every Easter Eve, when a firework in the shape of a dove is lighted at the high altar, rushes down a cord attached to a cart outside the west door, and there sets fire, in broad daylight, to a collection of squibs, crackers, gerbs, and other loudly-banging and evil-smelling combustibles. There is a wide-spread belief that if the dove flies straight to the cart the result will be a good harvest. Certainly the present writer can testify, from personal observation last Easter, that when, as then happened, some kink in the cord interrupted the flight and caused the dove to explode in small fragments inside the cathedral, a general depression seemed to seize the multitude who filled not only that enormous building but the whole piazza and the adjacent streets; and the Florentine newspapers next morning wrote pathetically of the universal disappointment."—Review, *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany*, by Janet H. Ross; *Morning Post*, 26th Jan., 1905.