THE "PRESEPE." BY SIDNEY J. A. CHURCHILL, M.V.O.

The representation of the Nativity in churches, as well as in private houses, at Christmas-time is a very ancient institution in Italy. Luigi Correria, in an article on the "Pastori ed il Presepe Napoletano," contributed to the "Emporium" of Bergamo (Vol. XI. p. 68, with six illustrations), states that the Presepe, or representation of the birth of Christ, is mentioned in early notarial records of the XVth century in Naples. An article contributed to "Roma: Rassegna illustrata dell' Esposizione del 1911" (Rome, December 25, 1910) carries the custom of exhibiting the Nativity in convents and private houses much further back, and mentions the fact that the Basilica Liberiana of Santa Maria Maggiore, in Rome, from the VIIth century was called "Santa Maria ad Praesepe." The representation of the Nativity took place regularly at Christmas in one of its chapels, and from this Gregory IV (A.D. 827–843) took the model for a Nativity which he caused to be erected in S. Maria in Trastevere. The writer in the "Roma," from whom this is quoted, is of opinion that the Presepe originated with the "Mystery" plays. During the Middle Ages the churches in Northern Europe appear to have frequently been the scenes of religious representations by living actors. S. Francis of Assisi himself, in the year 1223, prepared a representation of the Nativity, during which he preached to his followers. Such "Mystery" plays are common to this day amongst the Persian followers of Muhammed, and preaching is an important part of the ceremonial.

The Presepe is a translation in dialect of the biblical narrative of the birth of Christ. In Sicily and the kingdom of Naples much skill was devoted to the preparation of the Presepe. When Carlo III of Naples prepared a Presepe with his own hands, and his queen cut up her own sumptuous garments to dress the dolls used in the King's "Nativity," all the best talent of the day was employed in the construction of the figures. The shepherds were modelled on actual figures of well-to-do peasants of the day, or of the preceding century. Some of these dolls, whether of wood and rag or terra-cotta, are extraordinary examples of plastic art. At the present day, although there are still some fine collections in private hands, in museums, and in churches—and it takes years of search and intelligent collecting to form a complete Presepe—the art of making the dolls is dying out, and there is only one person left in Naples who can produce the old dolls and repair them. Most of his examples are old ones which he has collected in a long life of devotion to his
THE "PRESEPE"

dying art; his work has been mostly limited to the grouping of them together and to repairing such as required treatment.

The dolls were made of wood as regards faces, limbs, and hands; the bodies of rag, so as to be more pliable. Later the heads were made of terra-cotta; the modern Presepe figure is of *papier-mâché*. The Presepe usually represented three phases—the Annunciation; the Nativity in the Grotto at Bethlehem with the Visitation; and the *Taverna*. At the Annunciation the shepherds are seen sleeping by their farms with their flocks around them; the Nativity shows the birth of Christ and the Eastern kings in homage; and the *Taverna* a wayside resthouse, such as might be met with in Southern Italy during the XVIIIth century. The fruit of the soil and cattle of all kinds are shown in quantity.

One of the greatest and most famous modellers of *Pastori* was Giuseppe Sammartino, who was born in 1720 and died in 1793. A well-known follower of his was Giuseppe Gori. His speciality was the making of nobles and Oriental figures. Francesco di Nardo was famous for his animals, but even more skilful than he were the brothers Saverio and Nicola Vassallo. Francesco Gallo, who was also a modeller at the Capodimonte Porcelain Works, modelled animals for the Presepe. The finer examples of the Pastori are faithful representations, down to the most insignificant details of contemporary peasant costumes, which are now fast disappearing under the penetrating and progressive influence of up-to-date means of communication and emigration.
GOLD, ENAMEL AND PEARL EARRINGS AND PENDANT FROM SICILY. PEARL PENDANT CROSS FROM MILAN, LOMBARDY
GOLD FILIGREE JEWELLERY FROM SARDINIA
(The property of Contessa Sanginet de Touludo)
GOLD, ENAMEL AND PEARL EARRINGS FROM SICILY
265 PILIGREE PENDANT FROM
SIRACUSA, SICILY

266 PEARL EARRING FROM
NAPLES, CAMPANIA

267 PENDANT FROM TUSCANY

268 PENDANT FROM CALABRIA

269 SILVER-GILT AMULET FROM
SOUTH ITALY

270 EARRING FROM VENICE

271 PENDANT FROM SOUTH ITALY
(The property of Signor Bulgari)
276 SILVER-GILT PARURE FROM CALTAGIRONE, SICILY
(The property of Princess Trabia)

277 FILIGREE NECKLACE AND PENDANT FROM CALTAGIRONE, SICILY
JEWELLERY

286 AND 287  SILVER GIRDLE AND CLASP FROM PIANO DEI GRECI, SICILY

288 AND 289  SILVER GIRDLE AND CLASP FROM SICILY
(The property of Senatore Chiaromonte Bordonaro)
JEWELLERY

290  SILVER AND CORAL ORNAMENT USED AT CHRISTENINGS
     FROM PIANO DEI GRECI, SICILY

291 AND 292  SILVER-GILT GIRDLE AND CLASP FROM PIANO DEI GRECI, SICILY
293 AND 294  SILVER GIRDLE AND CLASP FROM PALERMO, SICILY (1703)
(The property of Senator Andrea Guerrieri)

295 AND 296  SILVER GIRDLE AND CLASP FROM PIANO DEI GRECI, SICILY (1680)
JEWELLERY

297 SILVER-GILT GIRDLE-CLASP

298 GIRDLE-CLASP FROM PIANC DEI GRECI, SICILY

299 SILVER-GILT GIRDLE-CLASP FROM PALERMO, SICILY

300 SILVER GIRDLE FROM PALERMO, SICILY (1710)
(The property of Mrs. Euphrosyne Whitaker)
JEWELLERY

301 SILVER HAIR-COMB FROM SOUTH ITALY

302 SILVER HAIR-COMB FROM CATANIA, SICILY

303 SILVER HAIR-COMBS FROM NAPLES, CAMpanIA

304 SILVER HAIR-ORNAMENT FROM SARDINIA
305 BUTTONS FROM VENICE AND SOUTH ITALY

306 SILVER AND JEWELLED BUTTONS FROM SARDINIA

307 SILVER CHAIN FROM SARDINIA, AND NECKLACE FROM ABRUZZO

308 GOLD BEADS FROM SOUTH ITALY
AMULETS

(The property of Mrs. Malcolm Holme)

309 TO 314 RATTLES USED BY CHILDREN AS CHARMS AGAINST THE "EVIL EYE"
315 IVORY AMULET FROM SOUTH ITALY
(The property of Dr. T. Askby)

316 SILVER CHARMS AGAINST THE "EVIL EYE," WORN BY CHILDREN
(The property of Mrs. Malcolm Holme)

317 PENDANT CRUCIFIX FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA

318 SILVER BELL WORN BY CHILDREN AS A CHARM AGAINST THUNDER, FROM NAPLES (XVIII CENTURY)

319 SILVER CHAIN FROM SARDINIA

320 SILVER BELL WORN BY CHILDREN AS A CHARM AGAINST THUNDER, FROM NAPLES
SILVER-WORK

321 TO 323 SILVER HEADS OF KNITTING-NEEDLES, FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA

324 SILVER HEAD OF KNITTING-NEEDLE, FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA

326 SILVER HEAD OF KNITTING-NEEDLE, FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA

325 SILVER PENDANT USED TO HOLD THE THREAD WHILST KNITTING. FROM ABRUZZO (XVIII CENTURY)
NECESSAIRE OF ENGRAVED AND GILDED BONE, FROM SICILY
"PRESEPE" DOLLS

328 AND 329  PRESEPE DOLLS FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA (XVIII CENTURY)
(From the Collection of Signor Enrico Caruso, M.V.O.)
"PRESEPE" DOLLS FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA (XVIIIth CENTURY)

(From the Collection of Signor Enrico Curno, M.I.O.)
"PRESEPE" DOLLS

335 TO 338 "PRESEPE" DOLLS FROM NAPLES, CAMPANIA (XVIIITH CENTURY)
(From the Collection of Signor Enrico Caruso, M.V.O.)
WOOD-CARVING

CARVED SPINNING WHEELS FROM LOMBARDY

From the Bequest F. Battey Collection, Milan.
341 CARVED MILKING-STOOLS FROM CREMONA, LOMBARDY

342 CARVED SEAT OF MILKING-STOOL FROM CREMONA, LOMBARDY

343 CARVED SEAT OF MILKING-STOOL FROM CREMONA, LOMBARDY

344 CARVED CHAIR FROM LOMBARDY

(From the Bagatti Valsecchi Collection, Milan)
WOOD-CARVING

350 CARVED BUTTER-MOULD FROM PIEDMONT

351 AND 352 CARVED BUTTER-MOULD FROM PIEDMONT

353 CARVED BOX FROM ABRUZZO

346 TO 349 CARVED BOXES FROM ABRUZZO
Photos Ltd., Itali. Arti Grafiche, Bergamo

354 AND 355 CARVED PLANE AND INK-STAND FROM LOMBARDY
(From the Bagutti Valsecci Collection, Milan)

356 CARVED PEN FOR A CHILD, FROM LOMBARDY
WOOD-CARVING

357  CARVED WOODEN SPOONS FROM SICILY

359  CARVED WOODEN Forks FROM BASILICATA

Photos Ist. Ital. Arti Grafiche, Bergamo
WOOD-CARVING

360 Carved supports for table-glass, from Siracusa, Sicily.

361 Shepherds' carved staves from South Italy.

WOOD-CARVING

362 CARVED DISTAFFS FROM ABRUZZO
   Photo Ist. Ital. Arti Grafiche, Bergamo

364 CARVED WOOL-WINDER FROM SICILY
   Photo Ist. Ital. Arti Grafiche, Bergamo

363 CARVED DISTAFFS FROM CALABRIA
   Photo Ist. Ital. Arti Grafiche, Bergamo
WOOD-CARVING

365 CARVED YOKE FROM SICILY

366 TO 368 CARVED GOAT-YOKES FROM PIEDMONT

369 CARVED COW-YOKE FROM SICILY
(From the Pitre Collection, Palermo)

370 WOODEN COW-YOKE, WITH POKER-WORK AND BRASS MOUNTS, FROM PARMA
(From the Leader Williams Collection, Palermo)

371 CARVED COW-YOKE FROM SICILY
(From the Pitre Collection, Palermo)
WOOD-CARVING

372 CARVED YOKE FROM ROMAGNA

373 TO 375 CARVED BULLOCK-YOKES FROM VERONA, VENETIA

376 CARVED WOODEN CART, USED FOR RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES, FROM PIEDMONT

Photos Ist. Ital. Grafiche, Bergamo
PAINTED CARTS

Photo Ballardini

377 AND 378 PAINTED BULLOCK-CARTS FROM ROMAGNA
378a PAINTED HORSE-CART FROM SICILY
378b PAINTED BULLOCK-CART FROM ROMAGNA
WROUGHT-IRON CANDLESTICK, FIRE-DOGS AND TOOLS FROM LOMBARDY
(From the Bagatti Valsecchi Collection, Milan)
387 WROUGHT-IRON HAND-BASIN
FROM LOMBARDY

388 COPPER BRASIER ON WROUGHT-IRON STAND
FROM LOMBARDY

From the Bagatti Valsecchi Collection, Milan

389 WROUGHT-IRON CANDLESTICK
FROM LOMBARDY
WROUGHT-IRON AND WOODEN CANDLESTICKS FROM LOMBARDY
(From the Bagatti Valsecchi Collection)
MISCELLANEOUS CARVING

393 AND 394 CARVED SUPPORTS FOR CORSETS, FROM CALABRIA
Photo Ist. Ital. Arti. Grafiche, Bergamo

395 TO 397 CARVED HORN GOBLET AND DRINKING-FLASK, FROM SARDINIA
Photo Ist. Ital. Arti. Grafiche, Bergamo
398 TO 401 PAINTED POTTERY FROM MONTE VERGINE, NAPLES
POTTERY

FROM ROMAGNA

FROM ROMAGNA

FROM MARCHES

FROM MONTELUPO, TUSCANY

FROM MONTELUPO, TUSCANY

FROM MONTELUPO, TUSCANY

FROM ROMAGNA

FROM ROMAGNA

FROM ROMAGNA

FROM ROMAGNA

418 TO 426  PAINTED EARTHENWARE PLATES
POTTERY

(Terra-cotta figures from Caltagirone, Sicily)
428 BASKET MADE OF PALM LEAVES, FROM CASTELSARDO, SARDINIA

(From the Industrie Femminile Collection)

429 BASKETS MADE OF CHESTNUT BRANCHES, FROM BERGAMO, LOMBARDY

(From the Industrie Femminile Collection)
430 AND 431  BASKETS MADE OF CHESTNUT BRANCHES, FROM BERGAMO, LOMBARDY
(From the Industrie Femminile Collection)
432 TO 435 BASKETS MADE OF PALM LEAVES, FROM CASTELTURDO, SARDINIA
(From the Industrie Femminile Collection)

436 BASKETS MADE OF BULRUSHES, FROM PUGLIA
(From the Industrie Femminile Collection)
Pipes and Bandoliers

437 Wooden pipes, from Rome
(The property of Sgr. Passarelli)

438 Bandoliers from Sicily
From the Petré Collection, Palermo
CUT PAPER DESIGNS

439 TO 442  CUT PAPER DESIGNS FOR LACE AND EMBROIDERY (XVIIIITH CENTURY)
444 TO 449  CUT PAPER DESIGNS FOR LACE AND EMBROIDERY (XVIIIth CENTURY)