

POPA TANDA

By I. SLAVICI

God have mercy on the soul of Schoolmaster Pintilie! He was a good man, and a well-known chorister. He was very fond of salad with vinegar. Whenever he was hoarse, he would drink the yolk of an egg with it; when he raised his voice, the windows rattled while he sang, "Oh, Lord, preserve Thy people." He was schoolmaster in Butucani, a fine, large town containing men of position and sound sense, and given to almsgiving and hospitality. Now Schoolmaster Pintilie had only two children: a daughter married to Petrea Tzapu, and Trandafir, Father Trandafir, priest in Saraceni.

God keep Father Trandafir! He was a good man, he had studied many books, and he sang even better than his dead father, God have mercy on his soul! He always spoke correctly and carefully as though he were reading out of a book. Father Trandafir was an industrious, careful man. He gathered from many sources, and made something out of nothing. He saved, he mended, he collected to get enough for himself and for others.

Father Trandafir went through a great deal in his youth. One does not achieve big results in a minute or two. The poor man has to go without a great deal more than he ever gets. He worked harder with his brain than with a spade and fork. But what he did was not work thrown away. Young Trandafir became priest in his native town, in Butucani, a fine large town containing men of position and good sense, but Trandafir did not enjoy the almsgiving and hospitality.

Father Trandafir would have been a wonderful man had not one thing spoilt him. He was too severe in his speech, too harsh in his judgments; he was too straightforward and outspoken. He never minded his words, but said right out what he had in his mind. It is not good to be a man like that. Men take offence if you speak too plainly to them, and it is best to live peaceably with the world. This was evident in Father Trandafir's case. A man like him could not stay two years in Butucani. It was first one thing, then another; at one time he complained to the townspeople, the next time to the archdeacon. Now it is well known that priests must not make complaints to the archdeacon. The archdeacon understands presents much better than complaints. But that was what Father Trandafir would not comprehend.

There is no doubt that Father Trandafir was in the right.

But the thing is, right is the prerogative of the mighty. The weak can only assert themselves gradually. The ant cannot overthrow the mountain. It can, though, change its position; but slowly, slowly, bit by bit. Perhaps the Father knew that this was so in the world; he had his own standard, though.

"Even the devil cannot turn what is true and right into a lie!" This was his remark, and with this remark he got himself turned out of Butucani. That is to say, it was not only he who did it, it was the townspeople too. One word and a little something besides to promote a good understanding with the archdeacon, a visit to the bishop, and a word there from the archdeacon: things get done if one knows how to do them. The long and the short of it was that Father Trandafir was sent from Butucani to Saraceni--to promote a good understanding among the faithful. Priest in Saraceni! Who knows what that means to be priest in Saraceni? That is what befell Father Trandafir! Who would fain leap the ditch throws his bag over it first. Father Trandafir only had a wife and two children; his bag was empty. That was why he leaped so unwillingly from Butucani to Saraceni.

In the "Dry Valley" there was a village which they called "Saraceni."