

kind of walls were open to the sky; later, one does not know when, the walls had been made to converge in one place, to support what was supposed to do duty for a tower. This--owing to the fact that the supports of the facade had perished through the buffeting of a very strong wind--had fallen towards the patient earth, dragging the entire structure after it. And there it had remained ever since, for the church counted for little in Saraceni; it was superfluous.

Priest? They say there is no village without a priest. Probably whoever said this did not know about Saraceni. Saraceni was a village without a priest. That is to say, it was a village with a priest--only this priest was a priest without a village. Saraceni was unique in one way. There had never been a priest who stayed more than three days in Saraceni; he came one day, stayed the next, and left on the third. Many guilty priests passed through Saraceni; whoever had stayed there long would have expiated all his sins.

Then Father Trandafir reached this penitential spot. He could not expect to do as the others had done, come one day, stay the next, and depart the third. He was too much out of favour with the archdeacon to imagine that he would send him to another village. He could not remain without a village: a priest without a village--a cart without a wheel, a yoke without oxen, a hat on the top of a wig. He began to think what he must do; he must take things as they were, and stay gladly in Saraceni. It was only a village in name, but no one could say he was a priest without a village. But really a more suitable priest for a more suitable village you could not have found. The poverty of the priest corresponded to the poverty in the homes of his parishioners. From the beginning Trandafir realized one thing: it was much nicer in Butucani than in Saraceni. There the people all had something, and you could always have some of it. In Saraceni all the latches were made of wood. Then the Father reflected: the priest did all the business of the town, but the town took care of the priest's purse. Before long the Father began to feel sure that the people who started by being charitable and hospitable were not born fools. "It is a wise thing when men meet together to comfort and cheer each other. Even our Redeemer began with almsgiving, and the wedding at Cana of Galilee." Thus thought Father Trandafir; but in Saraceni there was neither almsgiving nor hospitality.

"There is one thing," said the Father to himself a little later on, "in a poor village there is no corn for the priest to gather. As long as the people of Saraceni are lazy, so long shall I be hungry!" And he began to think how he was going to make his parishioners industrious. The industrious man eats the stones, makes soup out of the stagnant water, and reaps corn where the hemlock used to grow. "Then"--concluded the priest--"when the cow has fodder she is no longer dry!"

Thus he spoke, and he set to work to put it in practice. A man who has nothing to eat busies himself with other people's affairs. He does no good that way! The blind man cannot aid the cripple; the hungry don't improve their village; when the geese keep watch among the vegetables, little remains for the gardener: but Father Trandafir was obstinate; when he started, he went on--and he got there, or he died by the way.

The first Sunday Father Trandafir preached before the people, who had assembled in considerable numbers to see the new priest. There is nothing more agreeable to a man who desires the welfare of others than to see his words making an impression. A good thought multiplies itself, penetrating many hearts, and whoever possesses it and passes it on, if he values it, rejoices to see it gaining ground in the world. Father Trandafir felt happy that day. Never before had he been listened to with such attention as on this occasion. It seemed as though these people were listening to something which they knew but which they did not understand well. They drank in his words with such eagerness, it was as though they wanted to read his very soul the better to understand his teaching. That day he read the gospel of "The Prodigal Son." Father Trandafir showed how God, in His unending love for man, had created him to be happy. Having placed man in the world, God wishes him to enjoy all the innocent pleasures of life,