

produced scarcely anything, the poll-tax existed only in name, the new-born were baptized for nothing, and the dead were buried gratis by the priest.

Near the church was a deserted house; a house in name only. The owner of the house could have kept cattle, but he had no beasts. By the side of the house there was room for a garden, but there was no garden because, as we have already said, there were no fences in Saraceni. Father Trandafir bought the whole place and lived in it. As the house belonged to the priest, nothing much was done to put it in order, and it was quite dilapidated, the walls had holes in them, there were rents in the roof. The Father only troubled himself about other people's houses.

The priest's table was no better than the house. According to the old saying, man follows the ways of other men even when he wants to make them follow his own: the priest lived like the rest of the village. Happily he had his wife's dowry, but often one does not try to get help from just the place where it is to be had. The season of Lent drew near.

"It will not do!" said Father Trandafir. "This will not do!" And he began to do as the rest of the world does, to occupy himself first and foremost with the care of his own house.

Directly the spring-time came, he hired a gipsy, and set him to work to plaster the house with clay. In a few days all four walls were firmly plastered. After that, the priest enjoyed sitting outside more than inside the house, because you could not see the walls of the house so well from within; a plastered house was a fine thing in Saraceni, especially when one could say to oneself, "That is mine!" There was one thing, though, which was not as it should be. Every time the Father's eyes fell upon the sides of the roof he went indoors--he felt he had seen enough. He did not want to see the defective roof, but every time he wanted to look at the walls he had to see the roof. That damned roof! It could no longer be left like that.

Down in the valley where there are numerous pools, not only willows and osiers grew, but here and there were to be found sedges and rushes, cat's-tail and a species of reed. "That is what I will do!" thought the priest. He engaged a man, and sent him out to cut sedges and rushes and cat's-tail and reeds. One Saturday the house was surrounded by bundles tied with osiers; and the following Saturday the roof was mended and edged on the top with bundles of reeds over which were stretched two strips of wood fastened with cross pieces. The work was good, and not dear. People passed by the priest's house nodding their heads and saying, "The priest is one of the devil's own men." Now the priest could stay happily outside.

But this happiness did not last long. There was still one thing that was not quite right. The priest felt that he was too much in the open. There was no other house in the village like his, and it would have been better a little separated from the village. The Father hardly liked to say "At my place," when "my place" was "in the village." There must be a fence, and a gate for the people to enter by, when they came to see the priest; it might be a fence in name only, and the gate only a hurdle, but it must be an understood thing that before anyone could enter the priest's house he must cross the priest's yard. Once more the priest hired a man and sent him to cut briars and stakes. He fixed the stakes into the ground, and placed the briars between them, and there was the fence, ready made. In front of the house, in the direction of the church, about half an acre of ground was enclosed: the gate was formed by four poles fastened by two others placed crosswise. The priest's wife especially rejoiced at being thus shut in, and the priest rejoiced when he saw his wife's pleasure. There was not a day on which either the priest or his wife did not say to the children: "Listen! you are not to go outside the yard; play quietly at home."

Once a man starts, he never gets to the end. One desire gives rise to another. Now the priest's wife got an idea in her head.