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SWITZERLAND ABROAD

Spartaco Vela and his descendants

Some years ago I read in a Swiss publication a short report about the life and the work of the great Swiss Sculptor Vincenzo Vela and his wife Sabina. Some of his creations and historical relics are to be found in the Museum of Ligornetto, once his residence, and donated to the Confederation by his son Spartaco. From that publication it appeared that with the death of Vincenzo Vela, his brother Vincenzo and his son Spartaco, the male line of the family had ceased to exist.

How far from the truth! It always surprised me that all these years nobody really seemed to care about this family or tried to follow matters up as it would have been only normal to assume in the case of such a great name. I am ever so glad, that through special circumstances, I may be able to make my modest contribution towards this family's history.

Spartaco Vela was at heart a painter and in this he was encouraged by his friend Gambia, also an artist-painter, but his parents insisted that he should dedicate more of his time to sculpture. Spartaco was overshadowed by the greatness of his father and by the result of his short life it is clear that he was of a weak character and very submissive to his parents. Spartaco met a young girl in Milan, Giuseppina Serra, later Mrs. Rampazzini. She posed for him as a subject in many of his earlier paintings. Love followed and it is supposed that there was a religious marriage. As a result of this union a son was born to them in Milan on 6th October, 1881, and Spartaco gave him the name of Regolo-Vincenzo, which proves again the liking of the Vela family for Roman names.

Many letters are in the possession of his descendants, showing how in the course of years love changed into bitterness. Spartaco depended entirely on his father for his finances. Giuseppina was a very possessive mother and was always complaining of not seeing Spartaco enough. To cut a long story short, she brought her son up alone, encouraged him in his studies and gave him her name Serra. Spartaco, in his will, left him a yearly life donation of 2,000 Sw. Fr. later changed into Lire.

Regolo-Vincenzo, son of Spartaco and Giuseppina grew up to be a good and successful man and concluded his studies with a degree in civil engineering. As such his activities covered many fields. Construction of railways and roads in Sicily, Corsica and Abyssinia during the Graziani campaign; and then for many years he worked on tunnels and water-dams for the power stations in the valleys of the Serio and Brembo in the Province of Bergamo; and later on at fortifications and other works of national import-

ance. He married twice. From the first marriage he had one daughter, and from the second one with Miss Madeline Tosio, born in Quimper, Bretagne, France, but originating from Poschiavo, Switzerland, four sons and one daughter, Laura, my wife.

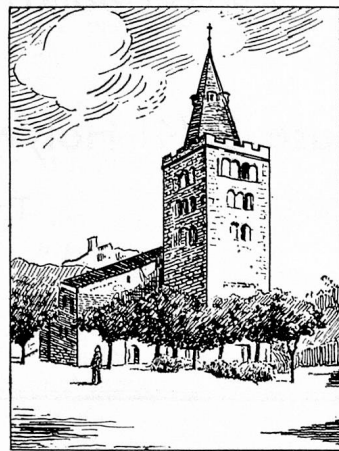
The sons and daughter created their own families and their numerous sons and daughters, my nephews and nieces, progressed well, several obtaining recognition and good positions as doctors, scientists, professors, etc. Now some of their offspring are forming families and the youngest generation is already putting in its appearance. It is interesting to note that some of these descendants have inherited the gifts of

the Vela. Here you see Giorgio Serra, a grandson of Spartaco, who since early childhood has practised sculpture and painting.

If for reasons unknown to me the Vela family has renounced to recognise officially their descendants, nevertheless the fact remains that they are still loved and revered by many of their own blood, up to this very day. The young generation all living abroad, true "Ausland-Schweizer" seldom miss the occasion, when in Switzerland, to visit the Museum in Ligornetto, against payment of an entrance fee, and lay some flowers at the family tomb of their ancestors.

Ermanno Berner

SWISS CATHEDRALS



SION NOTRE DAME DU GLARIER

In spite of the centuries and the calamities which have overwhelmed it, particularly in 1778 and 1788, Sion has remained one of the most interesting Swiss towns by the number and variety of its monuments.

The actual cathedral, the church which originally had the name of Notre Dame du Glarier, has lost its antique character. The chancel itself only dates from the 15th Century and was only partially completed by Cardinal Schinner. The bell tower alone, one of the most ancient in Switzerland has survived all the transformations of the edifice. It is a high square tower of the 11th and 13th centuries, of Roman style (Carolingian period), embattled and coifed by a pyramid built of bricks, which is also the top storey of the tower, and an elegant hexagonal spire.

The nave, vaulted with ogives, was terminated at the beginning of the 17th Century. The chancel, adorned with stalls of the 17th Century, is decorated behind the high altar with a triptych of gilt wood representing the Assumption.

None of the churches of Sion look as having been built to serve as a cathedral. The church of St. Theo-

dore, which is close by, reconstructed by Cardinal Schinner, already existed in the 13th Century.

It is believed that when the Episcopal See was established in Sion, Notre Dame de Valère became the cathedral and was transferred later to Notre Dame du Glarier, which is the cathedral today.

Though not as high as its northern neighbour, (Hill of Tourbillon), the Hill of Valère is no less picturesque, thanks to the edifice and the towers that crown its summit. The church and the manor stronghold, the church especially, are considered as the most ancient historical monuments of the Valais and Switzerland. Its name is attributed to the Roman Valeria, mother of Titus Campanus, prefect of the Emperor, and whose Mausoleum was at the foot of the hill.

The bell tower, a strong defending tower with battlements, is now protected with a quadrangular roofing. This church, or that which preceded it, probably between 999 and 1032, was originally called Sainte-Marie de Sion, and then Sainte-Marie de Valère, and was probably the bishopric's cathedral before this became definitively the role of Notre Dame du Glarier.

(P.S.)

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