

**THE GIRDLE LEGEND  
OF PRATO, A  
METRICAL SKETCH**

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The girdle legend of Prato, a metrical sketch by Robert C. Jenkins

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**ROBERT C. JENKINS**

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PRATO

*A METRICAL SKETCH*

BY

ROBERT C. JENKINS, M.A.

RECTOR OF LYMINGE AND NOW CANON OF CANTERBURY

'Credono i Pratesi di possedere la Cintura di Maria Vergine, che dicono lasciata da essa medesima cadere dall'alto nell'atto di essere assunta in cielo. Narrano che un loro cittadino trasportatosi in Siria.....la ricevesse in dote di una povera fanciulla da esso sposata, e che con essa tornasse in patria'

*(Istoria dell'Assemblea tenuta in Firenze l'anno 1787, p. 237)*



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TO THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE, M.P.  
WITH GRATEFUL RESPECT

### TO THE READER.

THE first part of the following sketch is derived from the simpler of the two legends of the Assumption given by Nicephorus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, l. ii. c. 21. For the second part the writer is chiefly indebted to the *Notizie Istoriche intorno alla Sacratissima Cintola di Maria Vergine che si conserva nella città di Prato* (Firenze, 1722), written by the Abate Bianchini. Of the two versions of the legend there given, he has adopted that which describes the fortunate possessor of the 'Sacred Girdle,' as a member of the noble family of the Dogomari in Prato, rather than that which makes him 'di onesta ma di povera condizione,' although this latter is pronounced by the narrator to be the more probable opinion. The third portion belongs to a more historic and even recent period, and is founded on the *emeute* which took place in the City of Prato in 1787, when the visitation of the



privileged altars there by a commission of the Assembly of Bishops at Florence led to the popular belief that the altar of the *Cintola* was endangered. This stirring incident in the history of the famous *Cintola* has been graphically related by the Abate Tanzini in the *Istoria dell' Assemblea tenuta in Firenze*,<sup>1</sup> appended to the Acts of the Assembly published by authority of the Grand-Ducal Government of Tuscany. It forms a remarkable episode in the life of the celebrated Bishop of Pistoja and Prato, Scipio de' Ricci, and was evidently designed as a popular demonstration against the reforms he was projecting in the Church of Tuscany. The Count of Prato is the only non-historic person in this attempt to represent in a metrical form the vigorous narrative of the Abate Tanzini; while the incidents surrounding it constitute all that has been added from pure imagination either to the ancient legend or the later history.

<sup>1</sup> *Istoria dell' Assemblea, Firenze, 1787. Page 237.*

# THE GIRDLE LEGEND OF PRATO.

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## PART I.

### THE MORNING OF THE RESURRECTION.

*The Blessed Virgin and St. Mary Magdalene.*

*The Blessed One.* How wearily this night of dread  
suspense

Melts in the cold, grey dawn ! even as our hopes  
Before the bitter truth ; as His dear life  
In the chill morn of death. O ! that on us  
That morn had risen ! then we should need no more  
His loving charge—' Watch, pray—the spirit still  
Is willing, but the flesh—' ah ! weaker far  
Even than on that dread night—these long, long hours  
I watch, but cannot pray !

*St. Mary Magdalene.* Yet these true vigils  
Are as the soul of prayer—they plead to heaven

*The Girdle Legend of Prato.*

Even as the silence of the cross—unheard  
 On earth, yet heard and answered at the throne ;  
 Even as those words which gave thee as a mother  
 To him whom most He loved.

*The Blessed.*

That gift is still

A balm for every wound ; yet now no more  
 It soothes this stricken heart. What earthly son  
 Can fill the place of Him, the living guide ?  
 Mine eyelids fail for looking up to God,  
 And yet I dare not bend them down to earth,  
 Or trace the paths where He companioned me,  
 To see His form no more ; with loving hand  
 I pluck the last frail flowers of memory, springing  
 Even from beneath His cross, as though from seed  
 Cast on the way-side by the listless hand  
 Of wandering weary grief.

*St. Mary Magdalene.*

And yet thy soul

Was mightiest when most weak ; thy sleepless eye  
 Did mount o'er yon eternal hills to heaven,  
 As if to trace the pathway of thy Love  
 As He returned to God. And thou didst bind  
 Thy watch-worn frame with girdle, as though still  
 His words were in thine heart—' With girded loins  
 Watch—wait'

*The Blessed.*

O ! speak not of that bond of love,  
 That girdle, plaything of His earliest years,