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NOBILITANTUR HIS (VASIS) OPPIDA QUOQUE UT REGIUM

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SINCE THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY
AT THE SERVICE OF THE CITY
OF REGGIO CALABRIA.

The title of forefather of the Calveri family can be attributed, without going too far back in time, to Giuseppe Calveri.

As a child he visited his grandmother's house, a seamstress, and helped her collect needles and watched her work, hence starting as a young man to sew trousers and jackets for the peasants; later, with fabric remnants he tailored waistcoats, and then moved on to jackets.

His brother, Francesco Calveri, enlisted in the Garibaldini. This was anticlerical, thus the belief that the Calveri were socialists.

Giuseppe marries Santina Costantino, from the "San Giorgio Extra" quarter. Owing to her beauty, she was chosen every year to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin during the August Feast.

From the "Sbarre" quarter, Giuseppe moved to work in a side street of the cathedral. His wife gave birth to four children Antonio, Giuseppina, Francesco and Angela.

Before the 1908 earthquake, Giuseppina found out that in Taranto, owing to the coming and going of Navy ships in the port, a commercial activity could be developed. She left and opened, with the funds of land sold in Reggio, a shop of millinery and gloves and women's clothes repair. Giuseppina met and married Peppino, a builder, who constructed a three-story building at the "Quattro Canti" in Via Dante, and on the ground floor, he dedicated three large windows to his wife. The "beautiful Peppina". In Taranto the smallpox epidemic broke out and, probably because of gloves tried on by some clients, she got infected; though she did not die, her face remained pockmarked. Giuseppina used to tell the story that "Our Lady of the Sea" had saved her: She recovered and increased her activity as a milliner. The most stylish women of Taranto were her clients.

Meanwhile back in Reggio, the 1908 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the store, swamped by water and sand, with all the merchandise.

Giuseppina returned to Reggio, helped the family, bought other goods, fabrics and much more, and returned to Taranto.

Her brother Francesco Calveri married the noblewoman Rosa Melacrino, a

native of Pellaro and woman of great faith. In Melacrino, she owned some houses opposite the Cathedral, destroyed by the cataclysm.

Rosa and Francesco were assigned a barrack in the famous “Scordo” quarter (now Caserta Park), and Rosa, a woman of prayer who had been brought up in a family of priests, nuns and significantly of the ancestor Brother Gesualdo Melacrino, was not discouraged by the poverty that surrounded her.

Rosa was of great help to all, living in the house with her sister Annetta, a woman celebrated for her beautiful green eyes.

As a consequence of the fall of rubble caused by the earthquake, she had remained paralyzed. Everyone knew that, at Donna Rosa’s house, those in need would always find hospitality.

Francesco’s children were: Santina (who at the age of 8-9 prepared pans full of potatoes and meatballs for all the shack dwellers, in 1921), Giuseppe, Francesco known as Ciccio, Giovanni, Maria and Antonio, known as Ninì. Despite the little ones in pushchairs, Mother Rosa went to help her husband at the store.

Rosa had three brothers: Antonio, Francesco and Gaetano.

The first two, having lost their properties owing to the earthquake and to their love for gambling, emigrated to New York in the USA and to Rosario in Argentina, while Gaetano, enthusiastic of Mussolini’s social fascists participated to the march on Rome, receiving assignments from the Authority of the time. Among the sons of Francesco Calveri, the second son Giuseppe attended to the trade together with his father. He was the most elegant, very light-skinned and blond; he wore suits of Welsh fabrics, and Partridge’s Eye, Donegal and Tweed for the more sporting events.

He travelled between Taranto, Naples, Florence, Turin, Paris and Scotland, bringing back fabrics, models and stories of his adventures with girls of the upper middle class. Joseph fell ill with Hodking’s disease or a malignant lymphogranuloma and, at that time, treatment was scarce. Mother Rosa suffered greatly, praying “Our Lady of Consolation”, and received from Lourdes a statue of the Blessed Virgin. As the disease progressed, she saw the will of God and prayed with the whole family. They treated him at home, assisted by doctors including Baron Scordo and surgeon Caracciolo.

At the age of twenty-three, Joseph, in great suffering, requested to talk to his brother Ciccio, seen as the most reckless of the family, though the most kind

hearted, and told him: “Ciccio, go down to the shop because you have the qualities”.

Ciccio did not go immediately, he wanted to finish high school where he had fallen in love with his teacher. The story did not last long. “He finally went down” and was in dispute with his father because too static in the displaying of garments. Indeed, according to Ciccio when clothes and accessories were removed from the shopwindows, marks remained on the fabrics.

Francesco proved to be harsh and hasty with undecided customers, sometimes commenting: “Tell me how much you want to spend so as not to waste my time”.

His father Francesco always displayed sailor suits, straw, plus-fours, velvet jackets, sequin dresses and overalls, work aprons and other uniforms.

Indeed, Francesco the senior, in addition to ready-to-made garments, also had a workshop where a dozen of seamstresses, called “the ladies”, sewed garments that were sold mainly to the Town Hall.

In addition, father Francesco rose every day at 3:30 am in the morning and went to a small property near the cemetery, in Via Reggio Campi, milked the goat, collected produce from the garden and the henhouse and brought everything home and then went to the store.

During the fascist period, the earthquake victims of the barracks were assigned the houses of the so-called “Building Authority”. Beautiful cosy houses, still holding strong today, comfortable with courtyards to socialize with the neighbours and in common a small inner garden, an orchard and a cellar. The cold and draughty barracks were a long past memory.

Never had a city risen so quickly from an earthquake. The houses with tiled roofs and built in terraces along the streets parallel to the seafront, had awarded the city the title of “Bella Reggio” (Stunning Reggio).

Francesco and Rosa sent the youngest and good-natured Ninì to Taranto to his sister Peppina, to study medicine. Meanwhile the war had broken out and Ciccio, working with his elderly father, had become head of the family and was exempted.

Giovanni, the fourth of the sons, a university student in mathematics at Messina, was enlisted and sent with the Armir army to Russia.

Mother Rosa feared for this other son and sent supplies, fruit, lemons and oil that reached Giovanni, whose letters described the drama of the war. The sol-

diers froze to death because poorly equipped, they often ate the meat of horses killed by the frost, and in their sleep they crushed rats under their weight. The war was strongly felt in Reggio too. The shop was frequently closed for fear of bombing and thieves.

The Calveri family first evacuated to Salice where they were guests of the Carisano and also Postorino families.

Rumours spread that the Calveri were of Jewish and socialist origin: hence in fear of persecution, they decided to move in all secrecy to the elementary schools of Armo, where their future sister-in-law Dina Mascalchi taught, native of the region of Marche.

It was Dina who actually helped Ciccio transfer all the goods from the store to the school facilities.

Two donkeys were provided and loaded with almost all the merchandise: coats, clothes, boxes with shirts and much more, all tied up as best as possible.

The journey was dramatic.

As they crossed the S. Agata river course they proceeded in a line. It was almost midday, when American bombers flew out of the clouds releasing bombs on the city and fighters blasted away.

The second donkey's legs gave away perhaps for fear, or rather hunger. Ciccio and Dina tried to pull it, shouting: "Get up, get up! "

The merchandise slipped and had to be repositioned on the back.

The fighters swooped across and upwards, blasting away their artillery. They took refuge in a farmhouse. In the end the donkey stood up and they reached the school. The merchandise was like hope is the poor man's bread. A pirate radio, in the school, announced the end of the war. Rosa and Francesco's penultimate child, Maria, kept her lover's letters, air-force lieutenant Mario Mascalchi, meteorologist and geophysicist, who was with Italo Balbo in north-eastern Africa, always on the move between Libya, Eritrea, Cyrenaica and Somalia.

Taken prisoner, he was put on a train bound for Tunis.

Here the convoy was divided and some wagons were diverted to English prison camps in Africa where the Italians were deeply miserable, while the rest were embarked on ships sailing to the United States.

Mario Mascalchi's ship was the Providence.

Officers like him, were granted by the Americans a weekly wage and comfort-

able accommodation, and were given the possibility to tour several states of the United States Confederation. Mario Mascalchi returned home immediately after the war and married his Maria, in the church of "San Giorgio al Corso", and moved on to live in Augusta in Sicily, a seaplane base.

Meanwhile in Taranto, Ninì was struck by typhus and his sister Santina left Reggio, with the hardships of the time, to visit her agonizing brother Antonio. The shop, opposite the Bank of Italy, was transferred always along the Corso Garibaldi in Reggio to the new address, facing the Circolo Cacciatori. There were still American soldiers in the city, while the first Italian veterans returned in dribs and drabs. The homecoming was unexpected, and miraculously Giovanni saw Reggio once again.

Everyone wanted a change of clothes and the saved merchandise was immediately sold.

At that time, Nini, extremely weak, died and Rosa was seen crying.

The military in uniform were persecuted by the same population that in the past had praised them, hence everyone wanted to change and hide with different clothes.

Rosa's brother, Gaetano Melacrino, who initially worked for the mayor was appointed in 1948 head of the municipal transport company and later on director of the celebrated "Admiral Genovese Zerbi" beach resort.

The post war period enabled Ciccio to give new impulse to the store and, thanks to Santina who cared for the administration, the business grew.

Ciccio Calveri met the manufacturing firms during his trips and on a daily basis rearranged and enhance the splendour of the shopwindows, with new and creative displaying means, and buying original tools and furniture for the store.

Father Francesco "came down" to the store ever more rarely, while his wife Rosa waited at home for the children to come back from work, cooking for everyone and also always finding time to pray and be merciful without her husband and children noticing.

She strongly believed that the poor and those in need must not be forgotten, well aware of how much Providence had helped her during her life.

She had been a Carmelite and Dominican tertiary.

Rosa suddenly died while preparing lunch for her offspring: she was sixty-five years old.

Santina took the reins of the house and store and thought even less of possible suitors, feeling the responsibility of her role.

She was a woman of considerable flair, very good in the kitchen and quick, and always had time for everything: church and singing with Father Catano-so and the sisters of Saint Pius X. She took care of the house, went down to the store, managed the paperwork, visited the sick, the cemetery and her friends. She also went to the theatre and cinema, and always practiced playing the piano she had studied at the “Pius X” Institute with Sister Cecilia, the school she had attended when she was a young girl, singing pieces of operetta, novels and operas.

Santina was very fond of Manlio, the eldest of her sister Maria Calveri Mascaldi's children, as if he were her son. He was the “sickly” of the house and always in need of a change of scenery and to move from Sicily to Calabria. She frequently took him and Ciccio on business trips and holidays for spa treatments, and with her aunt Peppina to Castellammare di Stabia. Meanwhile, Giuseppina Calveri moved to Naples after the death of her husband Peppino Fanigliulo, leasing out the stores in Taranto, and joining her sister Angela whose daughter Ninetta Romeo ran a fur store in the Neapolitan capital in Via Romeo.

Ciccio, in the meanwhile in Florence, met in Via Tornabuoni and started dating a girl who did not intend to move to Reggio; Francesco insisted, but in turn she suggested the opening of a store in Florence, not eager to move to a city near Africa.

After a few years, Francesco met in Naples the owner of a shirt selling store and, encouraged by his aunt Peppina, was about to open a store in Corso Umberto, but his thoughts for Santina and Giovanni and especially towards the city of Reggio with its seafront and its scents, his childhood memories and friends of the “Scordo” quarter, but most of all of “his store”, made him give up the long-lasting ties.

Santina developed the female part of the shop, Ciccio the aesthetic and innovative part together with contacts with firms for the choice of samples. The elderly Francesco Calveri slowly passed away, surrounded by the love of all his offspring.

Meanwhile, Giovanni married the stunning lady professor Francesca Miceli. Later, Ciccio and Santina managed, with the help of a bank manager, to pur-

chase the building under construction from the Engineer Zagarella, current site of the store.

The drawings of the shop were skilfully sketched by the Architect Prof. Albanese, who, interpreting the life of the Calveri family, designed a modularity that recollected the English confidentiality of the London stores, with the same vanishing lines already present in all the architect's works, for example the Candelora church in Reggio.

Architect Palmeri was the director of the works and the firms Gangemi and Trimboli achieved the creation, today deemed as cultural heritage.

More recently the renovation of the lower floor was carried out by the Architect Vincenzo Ferrara, with the cabinetmakers Imbesi in Cannitello. The entrance door of the store, a brass “grating”, was designed by the Architect Albanese according to the project of the artist Professor Michele Di Raco, with in mind Calabrian fabrics and accomplished by the De Leo firm of Reggio Calabria.

Meanwhile, aunt Peppina Calveri Fanigliulo died in Naples and left all her belongings to the Dominican friars, so as to secure herself a treasure in heaven. The success of the Calveri firm also stemmed from the beautiful and everlasting relationship between the Calveri family and their collaborators during the past epochs, based on a common life sharing of those who worked in the store.

There are many names: Caterina, Filomena, Maria, Giuseppa, Vaticano, Pino, Sandro, Gianni, Biagio, Lia, Jessica and Boguscia. The last named is characterized by the most stable collaboration, owing to her past experience as head of sector in a Polish clothing factory.

It is also true that, in recent times, the Calveri family has been harmed by the abuses of unfaithful collaborators, who took advantage of the trust of those who had always been so generous towards them.

The testimony given by Francesco Calveri was of high moral, not recriminating against the ill-gotten gains, confident that not everything that hurts is harmful, letting time judge the deeds and misdeeds.

And the “sickly”? The “sickly”, son of Maria, Francesco's sister, continued to be raised by his uncles. He enrolled at the University of Messina and, accustomed to getting up early in the morning, as early as five o'clock, he first went and helped his Uncle Ciccio at the store and then embarked on the ferryboat to Sicily.

Manlio then moved to the University of Padua, where he met the woman of his life, the stunning and virtuous entrepreneur of noble origins Gesualda Augimeri from Palmi, related to the Ruffo of Calabria. Eventually, he decided to leave University and help his uncles run the store.

Today there are Manlio Mascacchi's five children who, as a result of their uncle Ciccio's caring during their childhood, are truly keen to continue the business through the many skills acquired, especially Vincenzo, with the support of his sister Maria Emanuela and his brothers Emilio, Marco and Matteo.

A special thanks must be made to all the customers of our "beautiful and kind" Reggio, or better, to our friends, to whom we express deep gratitude and whose most important names are now in heaven, to whom our prayers are addressed.

Their children and grandchildren remain today, recipients of our top-notch service, and now an integrated part of a metropolitan city space with Europe. In particular, we would like to thank all fashion brand representatives for their devotion and commitment throughout the Calveri/Mascacchi's company history. Let us remember Adorni, who in 1951, with a tiny sample book, promoted the small company "Brioni", which then flourished into the firm we all know today; Formento and its English fabrics; Fish and Milli and their English firms; Orefice, an expert of Scottish woollens and accessories; Harvey and Chapal and their leather goods; Magnani and its sportswear, namely the legendary Glans; Malizia and its shirts; Pescosolido, Amex and other English firms, Leo Stock, Penna, Marino, Spada, Cafora, De Simone, Gallo and many others, lost in the memory of time, but still in our hearts.

Finally, we wish to thank His Eminence Antonio Morabito, Canon of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Archdiocese of Reggio Calabria, who blesses our intentions to make evermore timely the Birth of our Lord, the "God who comes".

"Glory to God and peace on earth to the men He loves".



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who has been part of the Calveri firm
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