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NEW

ITALIAN SKETCHES.

BY

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS,

AUTHOR OF "SKETCHES IN ITALY," ETC.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

PREFATORY NOTE.

This volume of New Italian Sketches has been made up from two books published in England and America under the titles of "Sketches and Studies in Italy" and "Italian Byways." It forms in some respects a companion volume to my "Sketches in Italy" already published in the Tauchnitz Collection of British Authors. But it is quite independent of that other book, and is in no sense a continuation of it. In making the selection, I have however followed the same principles of choice. That is to say, I have included only those studies of places, rather than of literature or history, which may suit the needs of travellers in Italy.

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

DAVOS PLATZ, *Dec. 1883*.

TO

CHRISTIAN BUOL AND CHRISTIAN PALMY

MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

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NEW ITALIAN SKETCHES.

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AUTUMN WANDERINGS.

I.—Italiam Petimus.

Italiam petimus! We left our upland home before daybreak on a clear October morning. There had been a hard frost, spangling the meadows with rime-crystals, which twinkled where the sun's rays touched them. Men and women were mowing the frozen grass with thin short Alpine scythes; and as the swathes fell, they gave a crisp, an almost tinkling sound. Down into the gorge, surnamed of Avalanche, our horses plunged; and there we lost the sunshine till we reached the Bear's Walk, opening upon the vales of Albula, and Julier, and Schyn. But up above, shone morning light upon fresh snow, and steep torrent-cloven slopes reddening with a hundred fading plants; now and then it caught the grey-green icicles that hung from cliffs where summer streams had dripped. There is no colour lovelier than the blue of an autumn sky in the high Alps, defining ridges powdered with light snow, and melting imperceptibly downward into the warm yellow of [Pg 12] the larches and the crimson of the bilberry. Wiesen was radiantly beautiful: those aërial ranges of the hills that separate Albula from Julier soared crystal-clear above their forests; and for a foreground, on the green fields starred with lilac crocuses, careered a group of children on their sledges. Then came the row of giant peaks—Pitz d'Aela, Tinzenhorn, and Michelhorn, above the deep ravine of Albula—all seen across wide undulating golden swards, close-shaven and awaiting winter. Carnations hung from cottage windows in full bloom, casting sharp angular black shadows on white walls.

Italiam petimus! We have climbed the valley of the Julier, following its green, transparent torrent. A night has come and gone at Mühlen. The stream still leads us up, diminishing in volume as we rise, up through the fleecy mists that roll asunder for the sun, disclosing far-off snowy ridges and blocks of granite mountains. The lifeless, soundless waste of rock, where only thin winds whistle out of silence and fade suddenly into still air, is passed. Then comes the descent, with its forests of larch and cembra, golden and dark green upon a ground of grey, and in front the serried shafts of the Bernina, and here and there a glimpse of emerald lake at turnings of the road. Autumn is the season for this landscape. Through the fading of innumerable leaflets, the yellowing of larches, and something vaporous in the low sun, it gains a colour not unlike that of the lands we seek. By the side of the lake at Silvaplana the light was strong and warm, but mellow. Pearly clouds hung over the Maloja, and floating overhead cast shadows on the opaque water, which may literally be compared to chrysoprase. The breadth of golden, [Pg 13] brown, and russet tints upon the valley at this moment adds softness to its lines of level strength. Devotees of the Engadine contend that it possesses an austere charm beyond the common beauty of Swiss landscape; but this charm is only perfected in autumn. The fresh snow on the heights that guard it helps. And then there are the forests of dark pines upon those many knolls and undulating mountain-flanks beside the lakes. Sitting and dreaming there in noonday sun, I kept repeating to myself *Italiam petimus!*

A hurricane blew upward from the pass as we left Silvaplana, ruffling the lake with gusts of the Italian wind. By Silz Maria we came in sight of a dozen Italian workmen, arm linked in arm in two rows, tramping in rhythmic stride, and singing as they went. Two of them were such nobly-built young men, that for a moment the beauty of the landscape faded from my sight, and I was saddened. They moved to their singing, like some of Mason's or Frederick Walker's figures, with the free grace of living statues, and laughed as we drove by. And yet, with all their beauty, industry, sobriety, intelligence, these Italians of the northern valleys serve the sterner people of the Grisons like negroes, doing their roughest work at scanty wages.

So we came to the vast Alpine wall, and stood on a bare granite slab, and looked over into Italy, as men might lean from the battlements of a fortress. Behind lies the Alpine valley, grim, declining slowly northward, with wind-lashed lakes and glaciers sprawling from storm-broken pyramids of gneiss. Below spread the unfathomable depths that lead to Lombardy, flooded with sunlight, filled with swirling vapour, but never wholly hidden from our sight. For the blast kept

shifting the cloud-masses, and the sun streamed through in spears and bands of sheeny rays. [Pg 14] Over the parapet our horses dropped, down through sable spruce and amber larch, down between tangles of rowan and autumnal underwood. Ever as we sank, the mountains rose—those sharp embattled precipices, toppling spires, impendent chasms blurred with mist, that make the entrance into Italy sublime. Nowhere do the Alps exhibit their full stature, their commanding puissance, with such majesty as in the gates of Italy; and of all those gates I think there is none to compare with Maloja, none certainly to rival it in abruptness of initiation into the Italian secret. Below Vico Soprano we pass already into the violets and blues of Titian's landscape. Then come the purple boulders among chestnut trees; then the double dolomite-like peak of Pitz Badin and Promontogno.

It is sad that words can do even less than painting could to bring this window-scene at Promontogno before another eye. The casement just frames it. In the foreground are meadow slopes, thinly, capriciously planted with chestnut trees and walnuts, each standing with its shadow cast upon the sward. A little farther falls the torrent, foaming down between black jaws of rain-stained granite, with the wooden buildings of a rustic mill set on a ledge of rock. Suddenly above this landscape soars the valley, clothing its steep sides on either hand with pines; and there are emerald isles of pasture on the wooded flanks; and then cliffs, where the red-stemmed larches glow; and at the summit, shooting into ether with a swathe of mist around their basement, soar the double peaks, the one a pyramid, the other a bold broken crystal not unlike the Finsteraarhorn seen from Furka. These are connected by a snowy saddle, and snow is lying [Pg 15] on their inaccessible crags in powdery drifts. Sunlight pours between them into the ravine. The green and golden forests now join from either side, and now recede, according as the sinuous valley brings their lines together or disparts them. There is a sound of cow-bells on the meadows; and the roar of the stream is dulled or quickened as the gusts of this October wind sweep by or slacken. *Italiam petimus!*

Tangimus Italiam! Chiavenna is a worthy key to this great gate Italian. We walked at night in the open galleries of the cathedral-cloister—white, smoothly curving, well-proportioned logge, enclosing a green space, whence soars the campanile to the stars. The moon had sunk, but her light still silvered the mountains that stand at watch round Chiavenna; and the castle rock was flat and black against that dreamy background. Jupiter, who walked so lately for us on the long ridge of the Jacobshorn above our pines, had now an ample space of sky over Lombardy to light his lamp in. Why is it, we asked each other, as we smoked our pipes and strolled, my friend and I; —why is it that Italian beauty does not leave the spirit so untroubled as an Alpine scene? Why do we here desire the flower of some emergent feeling to grow from the air, or from the soil, or from humanity to greet us? This sense of want evoked by Southern beauty is perhaps the antique mythopœic yearning. But in our perplexed life it takes another form, and seems the longing for emotion, ever fleeting, ever new, unrealised, unreal, insatiable.

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II.—Over the Apennines.

At Parma we slept in the Albergo della Croce Bianca, which is more a bric-à-brac shop than an inn; and slept but badly, for the good folk of Parma twanged guitars and exercised their hoarse male voices all night in the street below. We were glad when Christian called us, at 5 A.M., for an early start across the Apennines. This was the day of a right Roman journey. In thirteen and a half hours, leaving Parma at 6, and arriving in Sarzana at 7.30, we flung ourselves across the spine of Italy, from the plains of Eridanus to the seashore of Etruscan Luna. I had secured a carriage and extra post-horses the night before; therefore we found no obstacles upon the road, but eager drivers, quick relays, obsequious postmasters, change, speed, perpetual movement. The road itself is a noble one, and nobly entertained in all things but accommodation for travellers. At Berceto, near the summit of the pass, we stopped just half an hour, to lunch off a mouldly hen and six eggs; but that was all the halt we made.

As we drove out of Parma, striking across the plain to the *ghiara* of the Taro, the sun rose over the austere autumnal landscape, with its withered vines and crimson haws. Christian, the mountaineer, who at home had never seen the sun rise from a flat horizon, stooped from the box to call attention to this daily recurring miracle, which on the plain of Lombardy is no less wonderful than on a rolling sea. From the village of Fornovo, where the Italian League was camped awaiting Charles VIII. upon that memorable July morn in 1495, the road strikes suddenly aside, gains a spur of the descending Apennines, and keeps this vantage till the pass of La Cisa is [Pg 17] reached. Many windings are occasioned by thus adhering to arêtes, but the total result is a gradual ascent with free prospect over plain and mountain. The Apennines, built up upon a smaller scale than the Alps, perplexed in detail and entangled with cross sections and convergent systems, lend themselves to this plan of carrying highroads along their ridges instead of following the valley.

What is beautiful in the landscape of that northern water-shed is the subtlety, delicacy, variety, and intricacy of the mountain outlines. There is drawing wherever the eye falls. Each section of the vast expanse is a picture of tossed crests and complicated undulations. And over the whole sea of stationary billows, light is shed like an ethereal raiment, with spare colour—blue and grey, and parsimonious green—in the near foreground. The detail is somewhat dry and monotonous; for these so finely moulded hills are made up of washed earth, the immemorial wrecks of earlier mountain ranges. Brown villages, not unlike those of Midland England, low houses built of stone

and tiled with stone, and square-towered churches, occur at rare intervals in cultivated hollows, where there are fields and fruit trees. Water is nowhere visible except in the wasteful river-beds. As we rise, we break into a wilder country, forested with oak, where oxen and goats are browsing. The turf is starred with lilac gentian and crocus bells, but sparely. Then comes the highest village, Berceto, with keen Alpine air. After that, broad rolling downs of yellowing grass and russet beech-scrub lead onward to the pass La Cisa. The sense of breadth in composition is continually satisfied through this ascent by the fine-drawn lines, faint tints, and immense air-spaces of Italian landscape. Each little piece reminds one of England; but the geographical scale is enormously more grandiose, and the effect of majesty proportionately greater. [Pg 18]

From La Cisa the road descends suddenly; for the southern escarpment of the Apennines, as of the Alpine, barrier is pitched at a far steeper angle than the northern. Yet there is no view of the sea. That is excluded by the lower hills which hem the Magra. The upper valley is beautiful, with verdant lawns and purple hill-sides breaking down into thick chestnut woods, through which we wound at a rapid pace for nearly an hour. The leaves were still green, mellowing to golden; but the fruit was ripe and heavy, ready at all points to fall. In the still October air the husks above our heads would loosen, and the brown nuts rustle through the foliage, and with a dull short thud, like drops of thunder-rain, break down upon the sod. At the foot of this rich forest, wedged in between huge buttresses, we found Pontremoli, and changed our horses here for the last time. It was Sunday, and the little town was alive with country-folk; tall stalwart fellows wearing peacock's feathers in their black slouched hats, and nut-brown maids.

From this point the valley of the Magra is exceeding rich with fruit trees, vines, and olives. The tendrils of the vine are yellow now, and in some places hued like generous wine; through their thick leaves the sun shot crimson. In one cool garden, as the day grew dusk, I noticed quince trees laden with pale fruit entangled with pomegranates—green spheres and ruddy amid burnished leaves. By the roadside too were many berries of bright hues; the glowing red of haws and hips, the amber of the pyracanthus, the rose tints of the spindle-wood. These make autumn even lovelier than spring. And then there was a wood of chestnuts carpeted with pale pink ling, a place to dream of in the twilight. But the main motive of this landscape was the indescribable Carrara range, an island of pure form and shooting peaks, solid marble, crystalline in shape and texture, faintly blue against the blue sky, from which they were but scarce divided. These mountains close the valley to south-east, and seem as though they belonged to another and more celestial region. [Pg 19]

Soon the sunlight was gone, and moonrise came to close the day, as we rolled onward to Sarzana, through arundo donax and vine-girdled olive trees and villages, where contadini lounged upon the bridges. There was a stream of sound in our ears, and in my brain a rhythmic dance of beauties caught through the long-drawn glorious golden autumn-day.

III.—Fosdinovo.

The hamlet and the castle of Fosdinovo stand upon a mountain-spur above Sarzana, commanding the valley of the Magra and the plains of Luni. This is an ancient fief of the Malaspina House, and still in the possession of the Marquis of that name.

The road to Fosdinovo strikes across the level through an avenue of plane trees, shedding their discoloured leaves. It then takes to the open fields, bordered with tall reeds waving from the foss on either hand, where grapes are hanging to the vines. The country-folk allow their vines to climb into the olives, and these golden festoons are a great ornament to the grey branches. The berries on the trees are still quite green, and it is a good olive season. Leaving the main road, we pass a villa of the Malaspini, shrouded in immense thickets of sweet bay and ilex, forming a grove for the Nymphs or Pan. Here may you see just such clean stems and lucid foliage as Gian Bellini painted, inch by inch, in his Peter Martyr picture. The place is neglected now; the semicircular seats of white Carrara marble are stained with green mosses, the altars chipped, the fountains choked with bay leaves; and the rose trees, escaped from what were once trim garden alleys, have gone wandering a-riot into country hedges. There is no demarcation between the great man's villa and the neighbouring farms. From this point the path rises, and the barren hill-side is a-bloom with late-flowering myrtles. Why did the Greeks consecrate these myrtle-rods to Death as well as Love? Electra complained that her father's tomb had not received the honour of the myrtle branch; and the Athenians wreathed their swords with myrtle in memory of Harmodius. Thinking of these matters, I cannot but remember lines of Greek, which have themselves the rectitude and elasticity of myrtle wands: [Pg 20]

> καὶ προσπεσὼν ἔκλαυσ᾽ ἐρημίας τυχὼν
> σπονδάς τε λύσας ἀσκὸν ὃν φέρω ζένοις
> ἔσπεισα τύμβῳ δ᾽ ἀμφέθηκα μυρσίνας.

As we approach Fosdinovo, the hills above us gain sublimity; the prospect over plain and sea—the fields where Luna was, the widening bay of Spezzia—grows ever grander. The castle is a ruin, still capable of partial habitation, and now undergoing repair—the state in which a ruin looks most sordid and forlorn. How strange it is, too, that, to enforce this sense of desolation, sad dishevelled weeds cling ever to such antique masonry! Here are the henbane, the sow-thistle, the wild cucumber. At Avignon, at Orvieto, at Dolce Acqua, at Les Baux, we never missed them. And they have the dusty courtyards, the massive portals, where portcullises still threaten, of Fosdinovo to themselves. Over the gate, and here and there on corbels, are carved the arms of [Pg 21]

Malaspina—a barren thorn-tree, gnarled with the geometrical precision of heraldic irony.

Leaning from the narrow windows of this castle, with the spacious view to westward, I thought of Dante. For Dante in this castle was the guest of Moroello Malaspina, what time he was yet finishing the "Inferno." There is a little old neglected garden, full to south, enclosed upon a rampart which commands the Borgo, where we found frail canker-roses and yellow amaryllis. Here, perhaps, he may have sat with ladies—for this was the Marchesa's pleasance; or may have watched through a short summer's night, until he saw that *tremolar della marina*, portending dawn, which afterwards he painted in the "Purgatory."

From Fosdinovo one can trace the Magra work its way out seaward, not into the plain where once the *candentia mœnia Lunæ* flashed sunrise from their battlements, but close beside the little hills which back the southern arm of the Spezzian gulf. At the extreme end of that promontory, called Del Corvo, stood the Benedictine convent of S. Croce; and it was here in 1309, [Pg 22] if we may trust to tradition, that Dante, before his projected journey into France, appeared and left the first part of his poem with the Prior. Fra Ilario, such was the good father's name, received commission to transmit the "Inferno" to Uguccione della Faggiuola; and he subsequently recorded the fact of Dante's visit in a letter which, though its genuineness has been called in question, is far too interesting to be left without allusion. The writer says that on occasion of a journey into lands beyond the Riviera, Dante visited this convent, appearing silent and unknown among the monks. To the Prior's question what he wanted, he gazed upon the brotherhood, and only answered, "Peace!" Afterwards, in private conversation, he communicated his name and spoke about his poem. A portion of the "Divine Comedy" composed in the Italian tongue aroused Ilario's wonder, and led him to inquire why his guest had not followed the usual course of learned poets by committing his thoughts to Latin. Dante replied that he had first intended to write in that language, and that he had gone so far as to begin the poem in Virgilian hexameters. Reflection upon the altered conditions of society in that age led him, however, to reconsider the matter; and he was resolved to tune another lyre, "suited to the sense of modern men." "For," said he, "it is idle to set solid food before the lips of sucklings."

If we can trust Fra Ilario's letter as a genuine record, which is unhappily a matter of some doubt, we have in this narration not only a picturesque, almost a melodramatically picturesque glimpse of the poet's apparition to those quiet monks in their seagirt house of peace, but also an [Pg 23] interesting record of the destiny which presided over the first great work of literary art in a distinctly modern language.

IV.—La Spezzia.

While we were at Fosdinovo the sky filmed over, and there came a halo round the sun. This portended change; and by evening, after we had reached La Spezzia, earth, sea, and air were conscious of a coming tempest. At night I went down to the shore, and paced the sea-wall they have lately built along the Rada. The moon was up, but overdriven with dry smoky clouds, now thickening to blackness over the whole bay, now leaving intervals through which the light poured fitfully and fretfully upon the wrinkled waves; and ever and anon they shuddered with electric gleams which were not actual lightning. Heaven seemed to be descending on the sea; one might have fancied that some powerful charms were drawing down the moon with influence malign upon those still resisting billows. For not as yet the gulf was troubled to its depth, and not as yet the breakers dashed in foam against the moonlight-smitten promontories. There was but an uneasy murmuring of wave to wave; a whispering of wind, that stooped its wing and hissed along the surface, and withdrew into the mystery of clouds again; a momentary chafing of churned water round the harbour piers, subsiding into silence petulant and sullen. I leaned against an iron stanchion and longed for the sea's message. But nothing came to me, and the drowned [Pg 24] secret of Shelley's death those waves which were his grave revealed not.

"Howler and scooper of storms! capricious and dainty sea!"

Meanwhile the incantation swelled in shrillness, the electric shudders deepened. Alone in this elemental overture to tempest I took no note of time, but felt, through self-abandonment to the symphonic influence, how sea and air, and clouds akin to both, were dealing with each other complainingly, and in compliance to some maker of unrest within them. A touch upon my shoulder broke this trance; I turned and saw a boy beside me in a coastguard's uniform. Francesco was on patrol that night; but my English accent soon assured him that I was no contrabbandiere, and he too leaned against the stanchion and told me his short story. He was in his nineteenth year, and came from Florence, where his people live in the Borgo Ognissanti. He had all the brightness of the Tuscan folk, a sort of innocent malice mixed with *espièglerie*. It was diverting to see the airs he gave himself on the strength of his new military dignity, his gun, and uniform, and night duty on the shore. I could not help humming to myself *Non più andrai*; for Francesco was a sort of Tuscan Cherubino. We talked about picture galleries and libraries in Florence, and I had to hear his favourite passages from the Italian poets. And then there came the plots of Jules Verne's stories and marvellous narrations about *l'uomo cavallo*, *l'uomo volante*, *l'uomo pesce*. The last of these personages turned out to be Paolo Boÿnton (so pronounced), who had swam the Arno in his diving dress, passing the several bridges, and when he came to the great weir "allora tutti stare con bocca aperta." Meanwhile the storm grew serious, and our [Pg 25] conversation changed. Francesco told me about the terrible sun-stricken sand shores of the Riviera, burning in summer noon, over which the coastguard has to tramp, their perils from

falling stones in storm, and the trains that come rushing from those narrow tunnels on the midnight line of march. It is a hard life; and the thirst for adventure which drove this boy—il più matto di tutta la famiglia—to adopt it, seems well-nigh quenched. And still, with a return to Giulio Verne, he talked enthusiastically of deserting, of getting on board a merchant ship, and working his way to southern islands where wonders are.

A furious blast swept the whole sky for a moment almost clear. The moonlight fell, with racing cloud-shadows, upon sea and hills, the lights of Lerici, the great *fanali* at the entrance of the gulf, and Francesco's upturned handsome face. Then all again was whirled in mist and foam; one breaker smote the sea-wall in a surge of froth, another plunged upon its heels; with inconceivable swiftness came rain; lightning deluged the expanse of surf, and showed the windy trees bent landward by the squall. It was long past midnight now, and the storm was on us for the space of three days.

V.—Porto Venere.

For the next three days the wind went worrying on, and a line of surf leapt on the sea-wall always to the same height. The hills all around were inky black and weary.

At night the wild libeccio still rose, with floods of rain and lightning poured upon the waste. I thought of the Florentine patrol. Is he out in it, and where? [Pg 26]

At last there came a lull. When we rose on the fourth morning, the sky was sulky, spent and sleepy after storm—the air as soft and tepid as boiled milk or steaming flannel. We drove along the shore to Porto Venere, passing the arsenals and dockyards, which have changed the face of Spezzia since Shelley knew it. This side of the gulf is not so rich in vegetation as the other, probably because it lies open to the winds from the Carrara mountains. The chestnuts come down to the shore in many places, bringing with them the wild mountain-side. To make up for this lack of luxuriance, the coast is furrowed with a succession of tiny harbours, where the fishing-boats rest at anchor. There are many villages upon the spurs of hills, and on the headlands naval stations, hospitals, lazzaretti, and prisons. A prickly bindweed (the *Smilax sarsaparilla*) forms a feature in the near landscape, with its creamy odoriferous blossoms, coral berries, and glossy thorned leaves.

A turn of the road brought Porto Venere in sight, and on its grey walls flashed a gleam of watery sunlight. The village consists of one long narrow street, the houses on the left side hanging sheer above the sea. Their doors at the back open on to cliffs with drop about fifty feet upon the water. A line of ancient walls, with medieval battlements and shells of chambers suspended midway between earth and sky, runs up the rock behind the town; and this wall is pierced with a deep gateway above which the inn is piled. We had our lunch in a room opening upon the town-gate, adorned with a deep-cut Pisan arch enclosing images and frescoes—a curious episode in a place devoted to the jollity of smugglers and seafaring folk. The whole house was such as Tintoretto loved to paint—huge wooden rafters; open chimneys with pent-house canopies of stone, where the cauldrons hung above logs of chestnut; rude low tables spread with coarse linen embroidered at the edges, and laden with plates of fishes, fruit, quaint glass, big-bellied jugs of earthenware, and flasks of yellow wine. The people of the place were lounging round in lazy attitudes. There were odd nooks and corners everywhere; unexpected staircases with windows slanting through the thickness of the town-wall; pictures of saints; high-zoned serving women, on whose broad shoulders lay big coral beads; smoke-blackened roofs, and balconies that opened on the sea. The house was inexhaustible in motives for pictures. [Pg 27]

We walked up the street, attended by a rabble rout of boys—*diavoli scatenati*—clean, grinning, white-teethed, who kept incessantly shouting, "Soldo, soldo!" I do not know why these sea-urchins are so far more irrepressible than their land brethren. But it is always thus in Italy. They take an imperturbable delight in noise and mere annoyance. I shall never forget the sea-roar of Porto Venere, with that shrill obbligato, "Soldo, soldo, soldo!" rattling like a dropping fire from lungs of brass.

At the end of Porto Venere is a withered and abandoned city, climbing the cliffs of S. Pietro; and on the headland stands the ruined church, built by Pisans with alternate rows of white and black marble, upon the site of an old temple of Venus. This is a modest and pure piece of Gothic architecture, fair in desolation, refined and dignified, and not unworthy in its grace of the dead Cyprian goddess. Through its broken lancets the sea-wind whistles and the vast reaches of the Tyrrhene gulf are seen. Samphire sprouts between the blocks of marble, and in sheltered nooks the caper hangs her beautiful purpureal snowy bloom. [Pg 28]

The headland is a bold block of white limestone stained with red. It has the pitch of Exmoor stooping to the sea near Lynton. To north, as one looks along the coast, the line is broken by Porto Fino's amethystine promontory; and in the vaporous distance we could trace the Riviera mountains, shadowy and blue. The sea came roaring, rolling in with tawny breakers; but, far out, it sparkled in pure azure, and the cloud-shadows over it were violet. Where Corsica should have been seen, soared banks of fleecy, broad-domed alabaster clouds.

This point, once dedicated to Venus, now to Peter—both, be it remembered, fishers of men—is one of the most singular in Europe. The island of Palmaria, rich in veined marbles, shelters the port; so that outside the sea rages, while underneath the town, reached by a narrow strait, there is a windless calm. It was not without reason that our Lady of Beauty took this fair gulf to herself; and now that she has long been dispossessed, her memory lingers yet in names. For Porto Venere

remembers her, and Lerici is only Eryx. There is a grotto here, where an inscription tells us that Byron once "tempted the Ligurian waves." It is just such a natural sea-cave as might have inspired Euripides when he described the refuge of Orestes in "Iphigenia."

[Pg 29]

VI.—Lerici.

Libeccio at last had swept the sky clear. The gulf was ridged with foam-fleeced breakers, and the water churned into green, tawny wastes. But overhead there flew the softest clouds, all silvery, dispersed in flocks. It is the day for pilgrimage to what was Shelley's home.

After following the shore a little way, the road to Lerici breaks into the low hills which part La Spezzia from Sarzana. The soil is red, and overgrown with arbutus and pinaster, like the country around Cannes. Through the scattered trees it winds gently upwards, with frequent views across the gulf, and then descends into a land rich with olives—a genuine Riviera landscape, where the mountain-slopes are hoary, and spikelets of innumerable light-flashing leaves twinkle against a blue sea, misty-deep. The walls here are not unfrequently adorned with bas-reliefs of Carrara marble—saints and madonnas very delicately wrought, as though they were love-labours of sculptors who had passed a summer on this shore. San Terenzio is soon discovered low upon the sands to the right, nestling under little cliffs; and then the high-built castle of Lerici comes in sight, looking across the bay to Porto Venere—one Aphrodite calling to the other, with the foam between. The village is piled around its cove with tall and picturesquely-coloured houses; the molo and the fishing-boats lie just beneath the castle. There is one point of the descending carriage road where all this gracefulness is seen, framed by the boughs of olive branches, swaying, wind-ruffled, laughing the many-twinkling smiles of ocean back from their grey leaves. [Pg 30] Here *Erycina ridens* is at home. And, as we stayed to dwell upon the beauty of the scene, came women from the bay below—barefooted, straight as willow wands, with burnished copper bowls upon their heads. These women have the port of goddesses, deep-bosomed, with the length of thigh and springing ankles that betoken strength no less than elasticity and grace. The hair of some of them was golden, rippling in little curls around brown brows and glowing eyes. Pale lilac blent with orange on their dress, and coral beads hung from their ears.

At Lerici we took a boat and pushed into the rolling breakers. Christian now felt the movement of the sea for the first time. This was rather a rude trial, for the grey-maned monsters played, as it seemed, at will with our cockle-shell, tumbling in dolphin curves to reach the shore. Our boatmen knew all about Shelley and the Casa Magni. It is not at Lerici, but close to San Terenzio, upon the south side of the village. Looking across the bay from the molo, one could clearly see its square white mass, tiled roof, and terrace built on rude arcades with a broad orange awning. Trelawny's description hardly prepares one for so considerable a place. I think the English exiles of that period must have been exacting if the Casa Magni seemed to them no better than a bathing-house.

We left our boat at the jetty, and walked through some gardens to the villa. There we were kindly entertained by the present occupiers, who, when I asked them whether such visits as ours were not a great annoyance, gently but feelingly replied: "It is not so bad now as it used to be." The English gentleman who rents the Casa Magni has known it uninterruptedly since Shelley's [Pg 31] death, and has used it for *villeggiatura* during the last thirty years. We found him in the central sitting-room, which readers of Trelawny's *Recollections* have so often pictured to themselves. The large oval table, the settees round the walls, and some of the pictures are still unchanged. As we sat talking, I laughed to think of that luncheon party, when Shelley lost his clothes, and came naked, dripping with sea-water, into the room, protected by the skirts of the sympathising waiting-maid. And then I wondered where they found him on the night when he stood screaming in his sleep, after the vision of his veiled self, with its question, "*Siete soddisfatto?*"

There were great ilexes behind the house in Shelley's time, which have been cut down, and near these he is said to have sat and written the *Triumph of Life*. Some new houses, too, have been built between the villa and the town; otherwise the place is unaltered. Only an awning has been added to protect the terrace from the sun. I walked out on this terrace, where Shelley used to listen to Jane's singing. The sea was fretting at its base, just as Mrs. Shelley says it did when the Don Juan disappeared.

From San Terenzio we walked back to Lerici through olive woods, attended by a memory which toned the almost overpowering beauty of the place to sadness.

VII.—Viareggio.

The same memory drew us, a few days later, to the spot where Shelley's body was burned. Viareggio is fast becoming a fashionable watering-place for the people of Florence and Lucca, [Pg 32] who seek fresher air and simpler living than Livorno offers. It has the usual new inns and improvised lodging-houses of such places, built on the outskirts of a little fishing village, with a boundless stretch of noble sands. There is a wooden pier on which we walked, watching the long roll of waves, foam-flaked, and quivering with moonlight. The Apennines faded into the grey sky beyond, and the sea-wind was good to breathe. There is a feeling of "immensity, liberty, action" here, which is not common in Italy. It reminds us of England; and to-night the Mediterranean had the rough force of a tidal sea.

Morning revealed beauty enough in Viareggio to surprise even one who expects from Italy all forms of loveliness. The sand-dunes stretch for miles between the sea and a low wood of stone pines, with the Carrara hills descending from their glittering pinnacles by long lines to the headlands of the Spezzian Gulf. The immeasurable distance was all painted in sky-blue and amethyst; then came the golden green of the dwarf firs; and then dry yellow in the grasses of the dunes; and then the many-tinted sea, with surf tossed up against the furthest cliffs. It is a wonderful and tragic view, to which no painter but the Roman Costa has done justice; and he, it may be said, has made this landscape of the Carrarese his own. The space between sand and pine-wood was covered with faint, yellow, evening primroses. They flickered like little harmless flames in sun and shadow, and the spires of the Carrara range were giant flames transformed to marble. The memory of that day described by Trelawny in a passage of immortal English prose, [Pg 33] when he and Byron and Leigh Hunt stood beside the funeral pyre, and libations were poured, and the *Cor Cordium* was found inviolate among the ashes, turned all my thoughts to flame beneath the gentle autumn sky.

Still haunted by these memories, we took the carriage road to Pisa, over which Shelley's friends had hurried to and fro through those last days. It passes an immense forest of stone-pines—aisles and avenues; undergrowth of ilex, laurustinus, gorse, and myrtle; the crowded cyclamens, the solemn silence of the trees; the winds hushed in their velvet roof and stationary domes of verdure.

[Pg 34]

MONTE OLIVETO.

I.

In former days the traveller had choice of two old hostelries in the chief street of Siena. Here, if he was fortunate, he might secure a prophet's chamber, with a view across tiled house-roofs to the distant Tuscan champaign—glimpses of russet field and olive-garden framed by jutting city walls, which in some measure compensated for much discomfort. He now betakes himself to the more modern Albergo di Siena, overlooking the public promenade La Lizza. Horse-chestnuts and acacias make a pleasant foreground to a prospect of considerable extent. The front of the house is turned toward Belcaro and the mountains between Grosseto and Volterra. Sideways its windows command the brown bulk of San Domenico, and the Duomo, set like a marble coronet upon the forehead of the town. When we arrived there one October afternoon the sun was setting amid flying clouds and watery yellow spaces of pure sky, with a wind blowing soft and humid from the sea. Long after he had sunk below the hills, a fading chord of golden and rose-coloured tints burned on the city. The cathedral bell-tower was glistening with recent rain, and we could see right through its lancet windows to the clear blue heavens beyond. Then, as the day descended into evening, the autumn trees assumed that wonderful effect of luminousness self- [Pg 35] evolved, and the red brick walls that crimson after-glow, which Tuscan twilight takes from singular transparency of atmosphere.

It is hardly possible to define the specific character of each Italian city, assigning its proper share to natural circumstances, to the temper of the population, and to the monuments of art in which these elements of nature and of human qualities are blended. The fusion is too delicate and subtle for complete analysis; and the total effect in each particular case may best be compared to that impressed on us by a strong personality, making itself felt in the minutest details. Climate, situation, ethnological conditions, the political vicissitudes of past ages, the bias of the people to certain industries and occupations, the emergence of distinguished men at critical epochs, have all contributed their quota to the composition of an individuality which abides long after the locality has lost its ancient vigour.

Since the year 1557, when Gian Giacomo de' Medici laid the country of Siena waste, levelled her luxurious suburbs, and delivered her famine-stricken citizens to the tyranny of the Grand Duke Cosimo, this town has gone on dreaming in suspended decadence. Yet the epithet which was given to her in her days of glory, the title of "Fair Soft Siena," still describes the city. She claims it by right of the gentle manners, joyous but sedate, of her inhabitants, by the grace of their pure Tuscan speech, and by the unique delicacy of her architecture. Those palaces of brick, with finely-moulded lancet windows, and the lovely use of sculptured marbles in pilastered colonnades, are fit abodes for the nobles who reared them five centuries ago, of whose refined [Pg 36] and costly living we read in the pages of Dante or of Folgore da San Gemignano. And though the necessities of modern life, the decay of wealth, the dwindling of old aristocracy, and the absorption of what was once an independent state in the Italian nation, have obliterated that large signorial splendour of the Middle Ages, we feel that the modern Sienese are not unworthy of their courteous ancestry.

Superficially, much of the present charm of Siena consists in the soft opening valleys, the glimpses of long blue hills and fertile country-side, framed by irregular brown houses stretching along the slopes on which the town is built, and losing themselves abruptly in olive fields and orchards. This element of beauty, which brings the city into immediate relation with the country,

is indeed not peculiar to Siena. We find it in Perugia, in Assisi, in Montepulciano, in nearly all the hill towns of Umbria and Tuscany. But their landscape is often tragic and austere, while this is always suave. City and country blend here in delightful amity. Neither yields that sense of aloofness which stirs melancholy.

The most charming district in the immediate neighbourhood of Siena lies westward, near Belcaro, a villa high up on a hill. It is a region of deep lanes and golden-green oak-woods, with cypresses and stone-pines, and little streams in all directions flowing over the brown sandstone. The country is like some parts of rural England—Devonshire or Sussex. Not only is the sandstone here, as there, broken into deep gullies; but the vegetation is much the same. Tufted spleen-wort, primroses, and broom tangle the hedges under boughs of hornbeam and sweet-chestnut. This is [Pg 37] the landscape which the two sixteenth century novelists of Siena, Fortini and Sermini, so lovingly depicted in their tales. Of literature absorbing in itself the specific character of a country, and conveying it to the reader less by description than by sustained quality of style, I know none to surpass Fortini's sketches. The prospect from Belcaro is one of the finest to be seen in Tuscany. The villa stands at a considerable elevation, and commands an immense extent of hill and dale. Nowhere, except Maremma-wards, a level plain. The Tuscan mountains, from Monte Amiata westward to Volterra, round Valdelsa, down to Montepulciano and Radicofani, with their innumerable windings and intricacies of descending valleys, are dappled with light and shade from flying storm-clouds, sunshine here and there cloud-shadows. Girdling the villa stands a grove of ilex-trees, cut so as to embrace its high-built walls with dark continuous green. In the courtyard are lemon-trees and pomegranates laden with fruit. From a terrace on the roof the whole wide view is seen; and here upon a parapet, from which we leaned one autumn afternoon, my friend discovered this *graffito*: "*E vidi e piansi il fato amaro!*"—"I gazed, and gazing, wept the bitterness of fate."

II.

The prevailing note of Siena and the Sienese seems, as I have said, to be a soft and tranquil grace; yet this people had one of the stormiest and maddest of Italian histories. They were passionate in love and hate, vehement in their popular amusements, almost frantic in their [Pg 38] political conduct of affairs. The luxury, for which Dante blamed them, the levity De Comines noticed in their government found counter-poise in more than usual piety and fervour. S. Bernardino, the great preacher and peace-maker of the Middle Ages; S. Catherine, the worthiest of all women to be canonised; the blessed Colombini, who founded the Order of the Gesuati or Brothers of the Poor in Christ; the blessed Bernardo, who founded that of Monte Oliveto; were all Sienese. Few cities have given four such saints to modern Christendom. The biography of one of these may serve as prelude to an account of the Sienese monastery of Oliveto Maggiore.

The family of Tolomei was among the noblest of the Sienese aristocracy. On May 10, 1272, Mino Tolomei and his wife Fulvia, of the Tancredi, had a son whom they christened Giovanni, but who, when he entered the religious life, assumed the name of Bernard, in memory of the great Abbot of Clairvaux. Of this child, Fulvia is said to have dreamed, long before his birth, that he assumed the form of a white swan, and sang melodiously, and settled in the boughs of an olive-tree, whence afterwards he winged his way to heaven amid a flock of swans as dazzling white as he. The boy was educated in the Dominican Cloister at Siena, under the care of his uncle Christoforo Tolomei. There, and afterwards in the fraternity of S. Ansano, he felt that impulse towards a life of piety, which after a short but brilliant episode of secular ambition, was destined to return with overwhelming force upon his nature. He was a youth of promise, and at the age of sixteen he obtained the doctorate in philosophy and both laws, civil and canonical. The Tolomei [Pg 39] upon this occasion adorned their palaces and threw them open to the people of Siena. The Republic hailed with acclamation the early honours of a noble, born to be one of their chief leaders. Soon after this event Mino obtained for his son from the Emperor the title of Cæsarian Knight; and when the diploma arrived, new festivities proclaimed the fortunate youth to his fellow-citizens. Bernardo cased his limbs in steel, and rode in procession with ladies and young nobles through the streets. The ceremonies of a knight's reception in Siena at that period were magnificent. From contemporary chronicles and from the sonnets written by Folgore da San Gemignano for a similar occasion, we gather that the whole resources of a wealthy family and all their friends were strained to the utmost to do honour to the order of chivalry. Open house was held for several days. Rich presents of jewels, armour, dresses, chargers were freely distributed. Tournaments alternated with dances. But the climax of the pageant was the novice's investiture with sword and spurs and belt in the cathedral. This, as it appears from a record of the year 1326, actually took place in the great marble pulpit carved by the Pisani; and the most illustrious knights of his acquaintance were summoned by the squire to act as sponsors for his fealty.

It is said that young Bernardo Tolomei's head was turned to vanity by these honours showered upon him in his earliest manhood. Yet, after a short period of aberration, he rejoined his confraternity and mortified his flesh by discipline and strict attendance on the poor. The time had come, however, when he should choose a career suitable to his high rank. He devoted himself to [Pg 40] jurisprudence, and began to lecture publicly on law. Already at the age of twenty-five his fellow-citizens admitted him to the highest political offices, and in the legend of his life it is written, not without exaggeration doubtless, that he ruled the State. There is, however, no reason to suppose that he did not play an important part in its government. Though a just and virtuous statesman, Bernardo now forgot the special service of God, and gave himself with heart and soul to mundane interests. At the age of forty, supported by the wealth, alliances, and reputation of his semi-

princely house, he had become one of the most considerable party-leaders in that age of faction. If we may trust his monastic biographer, he was aiming at nothing less than the tyranny of Siena. But in that year, when he was forty, a change, which can only be described as conversion, came over him. He had advertised a public disputation, in which he proposed before all comers to solve the most arduous problems of scholastic science. The concourse was great, the assembly brilliant; but the hero of the day, who had designed it for his glory, was stricken with sudden blindness. In one moment he comprehended the internal void he had created for his soul, and the blindness of the body was illumination to the spirit. The pride, power, and splendour of this world seemed to him a smoke that passes. God, penitence, eternity appeared in all the awful clarity of an authentic vision. He fell upon his knees and prayed to Mary that he might receive his sight again. This boon was granted; but the revelation which had come to him in blindness was not withdrawn. Meanwhile the hall of disputation was crowded with an expectant audience. Bernardo [Pg 41] rose from his knees, made his entry, and ascended the chair; but instead of the scholastic subtleties he had designed to treat, he pronounced the old text, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Afterwards, attended by two noble comrades, Patrizio Patrizzi and Ambrogio Piccolomini, he went forth into the wilderness. For the human soul, at strife with strange experience, betakes itself instinctively to solitude. Not only prophets of Israel, saints of the Thebaid, and founders of religions in the mystic East have done so; even the Greek Menander recognised, although he sneered at, the phenomenon. "The desert, they say, is the place for discoveries." For the mediæval mind it had peculiar attractions. The wilderness these comrades chose was Accona, a doleful place, hemmed in with earthen precipices, some fifteen miles to the south of Siena. Of his vast possessions Bernardo retained but this—

> The lonesome lodge,
> That stood so low in a lonely glen.

The rest of his substance he abandoned to the poor. This was in 1313, the very year of the Emperor Henry VII.'s death at Buonconvento, which is a little walled town between Siena and the desert of Accona. Whether Bernardo's retirement was in any way due to the extinction of immediate hope for the Ghibelline party by this event, we do not gather from his legend. That, as is natural, refers his action wholly to the operation of divine grace. Yet we may remember how a more illustrious refugee, the singer of the Divine Comedy, betook himself upon the same occasion to the lonely convent of Fonte Avellana on the Alps of Catria, and meditated there the cantos of his Purgatory. While Bernardo Tolomei was founding the Order of Monte Oliveto, Dante penned [Pg 42] his letter to the cardinals of Italy: *Quomodo sola sedet civitas plena populo: facta est quasi vidua domino gentium.*

Bernardo and his friends hollowed with their own hands grottos in the rock, and strewed their stone beds with withered chestnut-leaves. For S. Scolastica, the sister of S. Benedict, they built a little chapel. Their food was wild fruit, and their drink the water of the brook. Through the day they delved, for it was in their mind to turn the wilderness into a land of plenty. By night they meditated on eternal truth. The contrast between their rude life and the delicate nurture of Sienese nobles, in an age when Siena had become a by-word for luxury, must have been cruel. But it fascinated the mediæval imagination, and the three anchorites were speedily joined by recruits of a like temper. As yet the new-born order had no rules; for Bernardo, when he renounced the world, embraced humility. The brethren were bound together only by the ties of charity. They lived in common; and under their sustained efforts Accona soon became a garden.

The society could not, however, hold together without further organisation. It began to be ill spoken of, inasmuch as vulgar minds can recognise no good except in what is formed upon a pattern they are familiar with. Then Bernardo had a vision. In his sleep he saw a ladder of light ascending to the heavens. Above sat Jesus with Our Lady in white raiment, and the celestial hierarchies around them were attired in white. Up the ladder, led by angels, climbed men in vesture of dazzling white; and among these Bernardo recognised his own companions. Soon after this dream, he called Ambrogio Piccolomini, and bade him get ready for a journey to the Pope at [Pg 43] Avignon.

John XXII. received the pilgrims graciously, and gave them letters to the Bishop of Arezzo, commanding him to furnish the new brotherhood with one of the rules authorised by Holy Church for governance of a monastic order. Guido Tarlati, of the great Pietra-mala house, was Bishop and despot of Arezzo at this epoch. A man less in harmony with cœnobitical enthusiasm than this warrior prelate, could scarcely have been found. Yet attendance to such matters formed part of his business, and the legend even credits him with an inspired dream; for Our Lady appeared to him, and said: "I love the valley of Accona and its pious solitaries. Give them the rule of Benedict. But thou shalt strip them of their mourning weeds, and clothe them in white raiment, the symbol of my virgin purity. Their hermitage shall change its name, and henceforth shall be called Mount Olivet, in memory of the ascension of my divine Son, the which took place upon the Mount of Olives. I take this family beneath my own protection; and therefore it is my will it should be called henceforth the congregation of S. Mary of Mount Olivet." After this, the Blessed Virgin took forethought for the heraldic designs of her monks, dictating to Guido Tarlati the blazon they still bear; it is of three hills or, whereof the third and highest is surmounted with a cross gules, and from the meeting-point of the three hillocks upon either hand a branch of olive vert. This was in 1319. In 1324, John XXII. confirmed the order, and in 1344 it was further approved by Clement VI. Affiliated societies sprang up in several Tuscan cities; and in 1347, Bernardo Tolomei, at that [Pg 44] time General of the Order, held a chapter of its several houses. The next year was the year of the great plague or Black Death. Bernardo bade his brethren leave their seclusion, and go forth on

works of mercy among the sick. Some went to Florence, some to Siena, others to the smaller hill-set towns of Tuscany. All were bidden to assemble on the Feast of the Assumption at Siena. Here the founder addressed his spiritual children for the last time. Soon afterwards he died himself, at the age of seventy-seven, and the place of his grave is not known. He was beatified by the Church for his great virtues.

III.

At noon we started, four of us, in an open waggonette with a pair of horses, for Monte Oliveto, the luggage heaped mountain-high and tied in a top-heavy mass above us. After leaving the gateway, with its massive fortifications and frescoed arches, the road passes into a dull earthy country, very much like some parts—and not the best parts—of England. The beauty of the Sienese contado is clearly on the sandstone, not upon the clay. Hedges, haystacks, isolated farms—all were English in their details. Only the vines, and mulberries, and wattled waggons drawn by oxen, most Roman in aspect, reminded us we were in Tuscany. In such *carpenta* may the vestal virgins have ascended the Capitol. It is the primitive war-chariot also, capable of holding four with ease; and Romulus may have mounted with the images of Roman gods in even such a vehicle to Latiarian Jove upon the Alban hill. Nothing changes in Italy. The wooden ploughs are those [Pg 45] which Virgil knew. The sight of one of them would save an intelligent lad much trouble in mastering a certain passage of the Georgics.

Siena is visible behind us nearly the whole way to Buonconvento, a little town where the Emperor Henry VII. died, as it was supposed, of poison, in 1313. It is still circled with the wall and gates built by the Sienese in 1366, and is a fair specimen of an intact mediæval stronghold. Here we leave the main road, and break into a country-track across a bed of sandstone, with the delicate volcanic lines of Monte Amiata in front, and the aërial pile of Montalcino to our right. The pyracanthus bushes in the hedge yield their clusters of bright yellow berries, mingled with more glowing hues of red from haws and glossy hips. On the pale grey earthen slopes men and women are plying the long Sabellian hoes of their forefathers, and ploughmen are driving furrows down steep hills. The labour of the husbandmen in Tuscany is very graceful, partly, I think, because it is so primitive, but also because the people have an eminently noble carriage, and are fashioned on the lines of antique statues. I noticed two young contadini in one field, whom Frederick Walker might have painted with the dignity of Pheidian form. They were guiding their ploughs along a hedge of olive-trees, slanting upwards, the white-horned oxen moving slowly through the marl, and the lads bending to press the plough-shares home. It was a delicate piece of colour—the grey mist of olive branches, the warm smoking earth, the creamy flanks of the oxen, the brown limbs and dark eyes of the men, who paused awhile to gaze at us, with shadows cast upon the furrows from their tall straight figures. Then they turned to their work [Pg 46] again, and rhythmic movement was added to the picture. I wonder when an Italian artist will condescend to pluck these flowers of beauty, so abundantly offered by the simplest things in his own native land. Each city has an Accademia delle Belle Arti, and there is no lack of students. But the painters, having learned their trade, make copies ten times distant from the truth of famous masterpieces for the American market. Few seem to look beyond their picture galleries. Thus the democratic art, the art of Millet, the art of life and nature and the people, waits.

As we mount, the soil grows of a richer brown; and there are woods of oak where herds of swine are feeding on the acorns. Monte Oliveto comes in sight—a mass of red brick, backed up with cypresses, among dishevelled earthy precipices, *balze* as they are called—upon the hill below the village of Chiusure. This Chiusure was once a promising town; but the life was crushed out of it in the throes of mediæval civil wars, and since the thirteenth century it has been dwindling to a hamlet. The struggle for existence, from which the larger communes of this district, Siena and Montepulciano, emerged at the expense of their neighbours, must have been tragical. The *balze* now grow sterner, drier, more dreadful. We see how deluges outpoured from thunderstorms bring down their viscous streams of loam, destroying in an hour the terraces it took a year to build, and spreading wasteful mud upon the scanty cornfields. The people call this soil *creta*; but it seems to be less like a chalk than a marl, or *marna*. It is always washing away into ravines and gullies, exposing the roots of trees, and rendering the tillage of the land a [Pg 47] thankless labour. One marvels how any vegetation has the faith to settle on its dreary waste, or how men have the patience, generation after generation, to renew the industry, still beginning, never ending, which reclaims such wildernesses. Comparing Monte Oliveto with similar districts of cretaceous soil—with the country, for example, between Pienza and San Quirico—we perceive how much is owed to the monks whom Bernardo Tolomei planted here. So far as it is clothed at all with crop and wood, this is their service.

At last we climb the crowning hill, emerge from a copse of oak, glide along a terraced pathway through the broom, and find ourselves in front of the convent gateway. A substantial tower of red brick, machicolated at the top and pierced with small square windows, guards this portal, reminding us that at some time or other the monks found it needful to arm their solitude against a force descending from Chiusure. There is an avenue of slender cypresses; and over the gate, protected by a jutting roof, shines a fresco of Madonna and Child. Passing rapidly downwards, we are in the courtyard of the monastery, among its stables, barns, and out-houses, with the forlorn bulk of the huge red building spreading wide, and towering up above us. As good luck ruled our arrival, we came face to face with the Abbate de Negro, who administers the domain of Monte Oliveto for the Government of Italy, and exercises a kindly hospitality to chance-comers. He was standing near the church, which, with its tall square campanile, breaks the long stern outline of

the convent. The whole edifice, it may be said, is composed of a red brick inclining to purple in tone, which contrasts not unpleasantly with the lustrous green of the cypresses, and the glaucous sheen of olives. Advantage has been taken of a steep crest; and the monastery, enlarged from time to time through the last five centuries, has here and there been reared upon gigantic buttresses, which jut upon the *balze* at a sometimes giddy height. [Pg 48]

The Abbate received us with true courtesy, and gave us spacious rooms, three cells apiece, facing Siena and the western mountains. There is accommodation, he told us, for three hundred monks; but only three are left in it. As this order was confined to members of the nobility, each of the religious had his own apartment—not a cubicle such as the uninstructed dream of when they read of monks, but separate chambers for sleep and study and recreation.

In the middle of the vast sad landscape, the place is still, with a silence that can be almost heard. The deserted state of those innumerable cells, those echoing corridors and shadowy cloisters, exercises overpowering tyranny over the imagination. Siena is so far away, and Montalcino is so faintly outlined on its airy parapet, that these cities only deepen our sense of desolation. It is a relief to mark at no great distance on the hill-side a contadino guiding his oxen, and from a lonely farm yon column of ascending smoke. At least the world goes on, and life is somewhere resonant with song. But here there rests a pall of silence among the oak-groves and the cypresses and *balze*. As I leaned and mused, while Christian (my good friend and fellow-traveller from the Grisons) made our beds, a melancholy sunset flamed up from a rampart of cloud, built like a city of the air above the mountains of Volterra—fire issuing from its battlements, and smiting the fretted roof of heaven above. It was a conflagration of celestial rose upon the saddest purples and cavernous recesses of intensest azure. [Pg 49]

We had an excellent supper in the visitor's refectory—soup, good bread and country wine, ham, a roast chicken with potatoes, a nice white cheese made of sheep's milk, and grapes for dessert. The kind Abbate sat by, and watched his four guests eat, tapping his tortoise-shell snuff-box, and telling us many interesting things about the past and present state of the convent. Our company was completed with Lupo, the pet cat, and Pirro, a woolly Corsican dog, very good friends, and both enormously voracious. Lupo in particular engraved himself upon the memory of Christian, into whose large legs he thrust his claws, when the cheese-parings and scraps were not supplied him with sufficient promptitude. I never saw a hungrier and bolder cat. It made one fancy that even the mice had been exiled from this solitude. And truly the rule of the monastic order, no less than the habit of Italian gentlemen, is frugal in the matter of the table, beyond the conception of northern folk.

Monte Oliveto, the Superior told us, owned thirty-two *poderi*, or large farms, of which five have recently been sold. They are worked on the *mezzeria* system; whereby peasants and proprietors divide the produce of the soil; and which he thinks inferior for developing its resources to that of *affito*, or lease-holding.

The contadini live in scattered houses; and he says the estate would be greatly improved by doubling the number of these dwellings, and letting the sub-divided farms to more energetic people. The village of Chiusure is inhabited by labourers. The contadini are poor: a dower, for instance, of fifty *lire* is thought something: whereas near Genoa, upon the leasehold system, a farmer may sometimes provide a dower of twenty thousand *lire*. The country produces grain of different sorts, excellent oil, and timber. It also yields a tolerable red wine. The Government makes from eight to nine per cent upon the value of the land, employing him and his two religious brethren as agents. [Pg 50]

In such conversations the evening passed. We rested well in large hard beds with dry rough sheets. But there was a fretful wind abroad, which went wailing round the convent walls and rattling the doors in its deserted corridors. One of our party had been placed by himself at the end of a long suite of apartments, with balconies commanding the wide sweep of hills that Monte Amiata crowns. He confessed in the morning to having passed a restless night, tormented by the ghostly noises of the wind, a wanderer, "like the world's rejected guest," through those untenanted chambers. The olives tossed their filmy boughs in twilight underneath his windows, sighing and shuddering, with a sheen in them as eery as that of willows by some haunted mere.

IV.

The great attraction to students of Italian art in the convent of Monte Oliveto is a large square cloister, covered with wall-paintings by Luca Signorelli and Giovannantonio Bazzi, surnamed Il Sodoma. These represent various episodes in the life of S. Benedict; while one picture, in some respects the best of the whole series, is devoted to the founder of the Olivetan Order, Bernardo Tolomei, dispensing the rule of his institution to a consistory of white-robed monks. Signorelli, that great master of Cortona, may be studied to better advantage elsewhere, especially at Orvieto and in his native city. His work in this cloister, consisting of eight frescoes, has been much spoiled by time and restoration. Yet it can be referred to a good period of his artistic activity (the year 1497) and displays much which is specially characteristic of his manner. In Totila's barbaric train, he painted a crowd of fierce emphatic figures, combining all ages and the most varied attitudes, and reproducing with singular vividness the Italian soldiers of adventure of his day. We see before us the long-haired followers of Braccio and the Baglioni; their handsome savage faces; their brawny limbs clad in the parti-coloured hose and jackets of that period; feathered caps stuck sideways on their heads; a splendid swagger in their straddling legs. Female beauty lay [Pg 51]

outside the sphere of Signorelli's sympathy; and in the Monte Oliveto cloister he was not called upon to paint it. But none of the Italian masters felt more keenly, or more powerfully represented in their work, the muscular vigour of young manhood. Two of the remaining frescoes, different from these in motive, might be selected as no less characteristic of Signorelli's manner. One represents three sturdy monks, clad in brown, working with all their strength to stir a boulder, which has been bewitched, and needs a miracle to move it from its place. The square and powerfully outlined drawing of these figures is beyond all praise for its effect of massive solidity. [Pg 52] The other shows us the interior of a fifteenth century tavern, where two monks are regaling themselves upon the sly. A country girl, with shapely arms and shoulders, her upper skirts tucked round the ample waist to which broad sweeping lines of back and breasts descend, is serving wine. The exuberance of animal life, the freedom of attitude expressed in this, the mainly interesting figure of the composition, show that Signorelli might have been a great master of realistic painting. Nor are the accessories less effective. A wide-roofed kitchen chimney, a page-boy leaving the room by a flight of steps, which leads to the house door, and the table at which the truant monks are seated, complete a picture of homely Italian life. It may still be matched out of many an inn in this hill district.

Called to graver work at Orvieto, where he painted his gigantic series of frescoes illustrating the coming of Antichrist, the Destruction of the World, the Resurrection, the Last Judgment, and the final state of souls in Paradise and Hell, Signorelli left his work at Monte Oliveto unaccomplished. Seven years later it was taken up by a painter of very different genius. Sodoma was a native of Vercelli, and had received his first training in the Lombard schools, which owed so much to Lionardo da Vinci's influence. He was about thirty years of age when chance brought him to Siena. Here he made acquaintance with Pandolfo Petrucci, who had recently established himself in a species of tyranny over the Republic. The work he did for this patron and other nobles of Siena, brought him into notice. Vasari observes that his hot Lombard colouring, a something florid and attractive in his style, which contrasted with the severity of the Tuscan [Pg 53] school, rendered him no less agreeable as an artist than his free manners made him acceptable as a house-friend. Fra Domenico da Leccio, also a Lombard, was at that time General of the monks of Monte Oliveto. On a visit to this compatriot in 1505, Sodoma received a commission to complete the cloister; and during the next two years he worked there, producing in all twenty-five frescoes. For his pains he seemed to have received but little pay—Vasari says, only the expenses of some colour-grinders who assisted him; but from the books of the convent it appears that 241 ducats, or something over 60*l.* of our money, were disbursed to him.

Sodoma was so singular a fellow, even in that age of piquant personalities, that it may be worth while to translate a fragment of Vasari's gossip about him. We must, however, bear in mind that, for some unknown reason, the Aretine historian bore a rancorous grudge against this Lombard, whose splendid gifts and great achievements he did all he could by writing to depreciate. "He was fond," says Vasari, "of keeping in his house all sorts of strange animals: badgers, squirrels, monkeys, cat-a-mountains, dwarf-donkeys, horses, racers, little Elba ponies, jackdaws, bantams, doves of India, and other creatures of this kind, as many as he could lay his hands on. Over and above these beasts, he had a raven, which had learned so well from him to talk, that it could imitate its master's voice, especially in answering the door when some one knocked, and this it did so cleverly that people took it for Giovannantonio himself, as all the folk of Siena know quite well. In like manner, his other pets were so much at home with him that they never left his house, [Pg 54] but played the strangest tricks and maddest pranks imaginable, so that his house was like nothing more than a Noah's Ark." He was a bold rider, it seems; for with one of his racers, ridden by himself, he bore away the prize in that wild horse-race they run upon the Piazza at Siena. For the rest, "he attired himself in pompous clothes, wearing doublets of brocade, cloaks trimmed with gold lace, gorgeous caps, neck-chains, and other vanities of a like description, fit for buffoons and mountebanks." In one of the frescoes of Monte Oliveto, Sodoma painted his own portrait, with some of his curious pets around him. He there appears as a young man with large and decidedly handsome features, a great shock of dark curled hair escaping from a yellow cap, and flowing down over a rich mantle which drapes his shoulders. If we may trust Vasari, he showed his curious humours freely to the monks. "Nobody could describe the amusement he furnished to those good fathers, who christened him Mattaccio (the big madman), or the insane tricks he played there."

In spite of Vasari's malevolence, the portrait he has given us of Bazzi has so far nothing unpleasant about it. The man seems to have been a madcap artist, combining with his love for his profession a taste for fine clothes, and what was then perhaps rarer in people of his sort, a great partiality for living creatures of all kinds. The darker shades of Vasari's picture have been purposely omitted from these pages. We only know for certain, about Bazzi's private life, that he was married in 1510 to a certain Beatrice, who bore him two children, and who was still living [Pg 55] with him in 1541. The further suggestion that he painted at Monte Oliveto subjects unworthy of a religious house, is wholly disproved by the frescoes which still exist in a state of very tolerable preservation. They represent various episodes in the legend of S. Benedict; all marked by that spirit of simple, almost childish piety which is a special characteristic of Italian religious history. The series forms, in fact, a painted *novella* of monastic life; its petty jealousies, its petty trials, its tribulations and temptations, and its indescribably petty miracles. Bazzi was well fitted for the execution of this task. He had a swift and facile brush, considerable versatility in the treatment of monotonous subjects, and a never-failing sense of humour. His white-cowled monks, some of them with the rosy freshness of boys, some with the handsome brown faces of middle life, others astute and crafty, others again wrinkled with old age, have clearly been copied from real models. He puts them into action without the slightest effort, and surrounds them with landscapes,

architecture, and furniture, appropriate to each successive situation. The whole is done with so much grace, such simplicity of composition, and transparency of style, corresponding to the *naïf* and superficial legend, that we feel a perfect harmony between the artist's mind and the motives he was made to handle. In this respect Bazzi's portion of the legend of S. Benedict is more successful than Signorelli's. It was fortunate, perhaps, that the conditions of his task confined him to uncomplicated groupings, and a scale of colour in which white predominates. For Bazzi, as is shown by subsequent work in the Farnesina Villa at Rome, and in the church of S. Domenico at Siena, was no master of composition; and the tone, even of his masterpieces, inclines to heat. [Pg 56] Unlike Signorelli, Bazzi felt a deep artistic sympathy with female beauty; and the most attractive fresco in the whole series is that in which the evil monk Florentius brings a bevy of fair damsels to the convent. There is one group, in particular, of six women, so delicately varied in carriage of the head and suggested movement of the body, as to be comparable only to a strain of concerted music. This is perhaps the painter's masterpiece in the rendering of pure beauty, if we except his S. Sebastian of the Uffizzi.

We tire of studying pictures, hardly less than of reading about them! I was glad enough, after three hours spent among the frescoes of this cloister, to wander forth into the copses which surround the convent. Sunlight was streaming treacherously from flying clouds; and though it was high noon, the oak-leaves were still a-tremble with dew. Pink cyclamens and yellow amaryllis starred the moist brown earth; and under the cypress-trees, where alleys had been cut in former time for pious feet, the short firm turf was soft and mossy. Before bidding the hospitable Padre farewell, and starting in our waggonette for Asciano, it was pleasant to meditate awhile in these green solitudes. Generations of white-stoled monks who had sat or knelt upon the now deserted terraces, or had slowly paced the winding paths to Calvaries aloft and points of vantage high above the wood, rose up before me. My mind, still full of Bazzi's frescoes, peopled the wilderness with grave monastic forms, and gracious, young-eyed faces of boyish novices.

[Pg 57]

MONTEPULCIANO.

I.

For the sake of intending travellers to this, the lordliest of Tuscan hill-towns, it will be well to state at once and without circumlocution what does not appear upon the time-tables of the line from Empoli to Rome. Montepulciano has a station; but this railway station is at the distance of at least an hour and a half's drive from the mountain upon which the city stands.

The lumbering train which brought us one October evening from Asciano crawled into this station after dark, at the very moment when a storm, which had been gathering from the south-west, burst in deluges of rain and lightning. There was, however, a covered carriage going to the town. Into this we packed ourselves, together with a polite Italian gentleman who, in answer to our questions, consulted his watch, and smilingly replied that a little half-hour would bring us easily to Montepulciano. He was a native of the place. He knew perfectly well that he would be shut up with us in that carriage for two mortal hours of darkness and down-pour. And yet, such is the irresistible impulse in Italians to say something immediately agreeable, he fed us with false hopes and had no fear of consequences. What did it matter to him if we were pulling out our [Pg 58] watches and chattering in well-contented undertone about *vino nobile*, *biftek*, and possibly a *pollo arrosto*, or a dish of *tordi*? At the end of the half-hour, as he was well aware, self-congratulations and visions of a hearty supper would turn to discontented wailings, and the querulous complaining of defrauded appetites. But the end of half an hour was still half an hour off; and we meanwhile were comfortable.

The night was pitchy dark, and blazing flashes of lightning showed a white ascending road at intervals. Rain rushed in torrents, splashing against the carriage wheels, which moved uneasily, as though they could but scarcely stem the river that swept down upon them. Far away above us to the left, was one light on a hill, which never seemed to get any nearer. We could see nothing but a chasm of blackness below us on one side, edged with ghostly olive-trees, and a high bank on the other. Sometimes a star swam out of the drifting clouds; but then the rain hissed down again, and the flashes came in floods of livid light, illuminating the eternal olives and the cypresses which looked like huge black spectres. It seemed almost impossible for the horses to keep their feet, as the mountain road grew ever steeper and the torrent swelled around them. Still they struggled on. The promised half hour had been doubled, trebled, quadrupled, when at last we saw the great brown sombre walls of a city tower above us. Then we entered one of those narrow lofty Tuscan gates, and rolled upon the pavement of a street.

The inn at Montepulciano is called Marzocco, after the Florentine lion which stands upon its column in a little square before the house. The people there are hospitable, and more than once [Pg 59] on subsequent occasions have they extended to us kindly welcome. But on this, our first appearance, they had scanty room at their disposal. Seeing us arrive so late, and march into their dining-room, laden with sealskins, waterproofs, and ulsters, one of the party hugging a complete Euripides in Didot's huge edition, they were confounded. At last they conducted the whole

company of four into a narrow back bed-room, where they pointed to one fair-sized and one very little bed. This was the only room at liberty, they said; and could we not arrange to sleep here? *S'accomodi, Signore! S'accomodi, Signora!* These encouraging words, uttered in various tones of cheerful and insinuating politeness to each member of the party in succession, failed to make us comprehend how a gentleman and his wife, with a lean but rather lengthy English friend, and a bulky native of the Grisons, could "accommodate themselves" collectively and undividedly with what was barely sufficient for their just moiety, however much it might afford a night's rest to their worse half. Christian was sent out into the storm to look for supplementary rooms in Montepulciano, which he failed to get. Meanwhile we ordered supper, and had the satisfaction of seeing set upon the board a huge red flask of *vino nobile*. In copious draughts of this the King of Tuscan wines, we drowned our cares; and when the cloth was drawn, our friend and Christian passed their night upon the supper table. The good folk of the inn had recovered from their surprise, and from the inner recesses of their house had brought forth mattresses and blankets. So the better and larger half of the company enjoyed sound sleep. [Pg 60]

It rained itself out at night, and the morning was clear, with the transparent atmosphere of storm-clouds hurrying in broken squadrons from the bad sea quarter. Yet this is just the weather in which Tuscan landscape looks its loveliest. Those immense expanses of grey undulating uplands need the luminousness of watery sunshine, the colour added by cloud-shadows, and the pearly softness of rising vapours, to rob them of a certain awful grimness. The main street of Montepulciano goes straight uphill for a considerable distance between brown palaces; then mounts by a staircase-zigzag under huge impending masses of masonry; until it ends in a piazza. On the ascent, at intervals, the eye is fascinated by prospects to the north and east over Val di Chiana, Cortona, Thrasymene, Chiusi; to south and west over Monte Cetona, Radicofani, Monte Amiata, the Val d'Ombrone, and the Sienese Contado. Grey walls overgrown with ivy, arcades of time-toned brick, and the forbidding bulk of houses hewn from solid travertine, frame these glimpses of aërial space. The piazza is the top of all things. Here are the Duomo; the Palazzo del Comune, closely resembling that of Florence, with the Marzocco on its front; the fountain, between two quaintly sculptured columns; and the vast palace Del Monte, of heavy Renaissance architecture, said to be the work of Antonio di San Gallo.

We climbed the tower of the Palazzo del Comune, and stood at the altitude of 2000 feet above the sea. The view is finer in its kind than I have elsewhere seen, even in Tuscany, that land of panoramic prospects over memorable tracts of world-historic country. Such landscape cannot be [Pg 61] described in words. But the worst is that, even while we gaze, we know that nothing but the faintest memory of our enjoyment will be carried home with us. The atmospheric conditions were perfect that morning. The sun was still young; the sky sparkled after the night's thunderstorm; the whole immensity of earth around lay lucid, smiling, newly washed in baths of moisture. Masses of storm-cloud kept rolling from the west, where we seemed to feel the sea behind those intervening hills. But they did not form in heavy blocks or hang upon the mountain summits. They hurried and dispersed and changed and flung their shadows on the world below.

II.

The charm of this view is composed of so many different elements, so subtly blent, appealing to so many separate sensibilities; the sense of grandeur, the sense of space, the sense of natural beauty, and the sense of human pathos; that deep internal faculty we call historic sense; that it cannot be defined. First comes the immense surrounding space—a space measured in each arc of the circumference by sections of at least fifty miles, limited by points of exquisitely picturesque beauty, including distant cloud-like mountain ranges and crystals of sky-blue Apennines, circumscribing landscapes of refined loveliness in detail, always varied, always marked by objects of peculiar interest where the eye or memory may linger. Next in importance to this immensity of space, so powerfully affecting the imagination by its mere extent, and by the breadth of [Pg 62] atmosphere attuning all varieties of form and colour to one harmony beneath illimitable heaven, may be reckoned the episodes of rivers, lakes, hills, cities, with old historic names. For there spreads the lordly length of Thrasymene, islanded and citadelled, in hazy morning mist, still dreaming of the shock of Roman hosts with Carthaginian legions. There is the lake of Chiusi, set like a jewel underneath the copse-clad hills which hide the dust of a dead Tuscan nation. The streams of Arno start far far away, where Arezzo lies enfolded in bare uplands. And there at our feet rolls Tiber's largest affluent, the Chiana. And there is the canal which joins their fountains in the marsh that Lionardo would have drained. Monte Cetona is yonder height which rears its bristling ridge defiantly from neighbouring Chiusi. And there springs Radicofani, the eagle's eyrie of a brigand brood. Next, Monte Amiata stretches the long lines of her antique volcano; the swelling mountain flanks, descending gently from her cloud-capped top, are russet with autumnal oak and chestnut woods. On them our eyes rest lovingly; imagination wanders for a moment through those mossy glades, where cyclamens are growing now, and primroses in spring will peep amid anemones from rustling foliage strewn by winter's winds. The heights of Casentino, the Perugian highlands, Volterra, far withdrawn amid a wilderness of rolling hills, and solemn snow-touched ranges of the Spolentino, Sibyl-haunted fastnesses of Norcia, form the most distant horizon-lines of this unending panorama. And then there are the cities, placed each upon a point of vantage: Siena; olive-mantled Chiusi; Cortona, white upon her spreading throne; poetic [Pg 63] Montalcino, lifted aloft against the vaporous sky; San Quirico, nestling in pastoral tranquillity; Pienza, where Æneas Sylvius built palaces and called his birthplace after his own Papal name. Still closer to the town itself of Montepulciano, stretching along the irregular ridge which gave it

building ground, and trending out on spurs above deep orchards, come the lovely details of oak-copses, blending with grey tilth and fields rich with olive and vine. The gaze, exhausted with immensity, pierces those deeply cloven valleys, sheltered from wind and open to the sun—undulating folds of brown earth, where Bacchus, when he visited Tuscany, found the grape-juice that pleased him best, and crowned the wine of Montepulciano king. Here from our eyrie we can trace white oxen on the furrows, guided by brown-limbed, white-shirted contadini.

The morning glory of this view from Montepulciano, though irrecoverable by words, abides in the memory, and draws one back by its unique attractiveness. On a subsequent visit to the town in spring time, my wife and I took a twilight walk, just after our arrival, through its gloomy fortress streets, up to the piazza, where the impendent houses lowered like bastions, and all the masses of their mighty architecture stood revealed in shadow and dim lamplight. Far and wide, the country round us gleamed with bonfires; for it was the eve of the Ascension, when every contadino lights a beacon of chestnut logs and straw and piled-up leaves. Each castello on the plain, each village on the hills, each lonely farmhouse at the skirt of forest or the edge of lake, smouldered like a red Cyclopean eye beneath the vault of stars. The flames waxed and waned, [Pg 64] leapt into tongues, or disappeared. As they passed from gloom to brilliancy and died away again, they seemed almost to move. The twilight scene was like that of a vast city, filling the plain and climbing the heights in terraces. Is this custom, I thought, a relic of old Pales-worship?

III.

The early history of Montepulciano is buried in impenetrable mists of fable. No one can assign a date to the foundation of these high-hill cities. The eminence on which it stands belongs to the volcanic system of Monte Amiata, and must at some time have formed a portion of the crater which threw that mighty mass aloft. But æons have passed since the *gran sasso di Maremma* was a fire-vomiting monster, glaring like Etna in eruption on the Tyrrhene sea; and through those centuries how many races may have camped upon the summit we call Montepulciano! Tradition assigns the first quasi-historical settlement to Lars Porsena, who is said to have made it his summer residence, when the lower and more marshy air of Clusium became oppressive. Certainly it must have been a considerable town in the Etruscan period. Embedded in the walls of palaces may still be seen numerous fragments of sculptured bas-reliefs, the works of that mysterious people. A propos of Montepulciano's importance in the early years of Roman history, I lighted on a quaint story related by its very jejune annalist, Spinello Benci. It will be remembered that Livy attributes the invasion of the Gauls, who, after besieging Clusium, advanced on Rome, to the [Pg 65] persuasions of a certain Aruns. He was an exile from Clusium; and wishing to revenge himself upon his country-people, he allured the Senonian Gauls into his service by the promise of excellent wine, samples of which he had taken with him into Lombardy. Spinello Benci accepts the legend literally, and continues: "These wines were so pleasing to the palate of the barbarians, that they were induced to quit the rich and teeming valley of the Po, to cross the Apennines, and move in battle array against Chiusi. And it is clear that the wine which Aruns selected for the purpose was the same as that which is produced to this day at Montepulciano. For nowhere else in the Etruscan district can wines of equally generous quality and fiery spirit be found, so adapted for export and capable of such long preservation."

We may smile at the historian's *naïveté*. Yet the fact remains that good wine of Montepulciano can still allure barbarians of this epoch to the spot where it is grown. Of all Italian vintages, with the exception of some rare qualities of Sicily and the Valtellina, it is, in my humble opinion, the best. And when the time comes for Italy to develop the resources of her vineyards upon scientific principles, Montepulciano will drive Brolio from the field and take the same place by the side of Chianti which Volnay occupies by common Macon. It will then be quoted upon wine-lists throughout Europe, and find its place upon the tables of rich epicures in Hyperborean regions, and add its generous warmth to Transatlantic banquets. Even as it is now made, with very little care bestowed on cultivation and none to speak of on selection of the grape, the wine is rich and noble, slightly rough to a sophisticated palate, but clean in quality and powerful and racy. It [Pg 66] deserves the enthusiasm attributed by Redi to Bacchus:[A]—

> Fill, fill, let us all have our will!
> But with *what*, with *what*, boys, shall we fill?
> Sweet Ariadne—no, not *that* one—*ah* no;
> Fill me the manna of Montepulciano:
> Fill me a magnum and reach it me.—Gods!
> How it glides to my heart by the sweetest of roads!
> Oh, how it kisses me, tickles me, bites me!
> Oh, how my eyes loosen sweetly in tears!
> I'm ravished! I'm rapt! Heaven finds me admissible!
> Lost in an ecstasy! blinded! invisible!—
> Hearken all earth!
> We, Bacchus, in the might of our great mirth,
> To all who reverence us, are right thinkers;
> Hear, all ye drinkers!
> Give ear and give faith to the edict divine;
> Montepulciano's the King of all wine.

It is necessary, however, that our modern barbarian should travel to Montepulciano itself, and there obtain a flask of *manna* or *vino nobile* from some trusty cellar-master. He will not find it bottled in the inns or restaurants upon his road.

IV.

The landscape and the wine of Montepulciano are both well worth the trouble of a visit to this somewhat inaccessible city. Yet more remains to be said about the attractions of the town itself. In the Duomo, which was spoiled by unintelligent rebuilding at a dismal epoch of barren art, are fragments of one of the rarest monuments of Tuscan sculpture. This is the tomb of Bartolommeo [Pg 67] Aragazzi. He was a native of Montepulciano, and secretary to Pope Martin V., that *Papa Martino non vale un quattrino*, on whom, during his long residence in Florence, the street-boys made their rhymes. Twelve years before his death he commissioned Donatello and Michelozzo Michelozzi, who about that period were working together upon the monuments of Pope John XXIII. and Cardinal Brancacci, to erect his own tomb at the enormous cost of twenty-four thousand scudi. That thirst for immortality of fame, which inspired the humanists of the Renaissance, prompted Aragazzi to this princely expenditure. Yet, having somehow won the hatred of his fellow-students, he was immediately censured for excessive vanity. Lionardo Bruni makes his monument the theme of a ferocious onslaught. Writing to Poggio Bracciolini, Bruni tells a story how, while travelling through the country of Arezzo, he met a train of oxen dragging heavy waggons piled with marble columns, statues, and all the necessary details of a sumptuous sepulchre. He stopped, and asked what it all meant. Then one of the contractors for this transport, wiping the sweat from his forehead, in utter weariness of the vexatious labour, at the last end of his temper, answered: "May the gods destroy all poets, past, present, and future." I inquired what he had to do with poets, and how they had annoyed him. "Just this," he replied, "that this poet, lately deceased, a fool and windy-pated fellow, has ordered a monument for himself; and with a view to erecting it, these marbles are being dragged to Montepulciano; but I doubt whether we shall contrive to get them up there. The roads are too bad." "But," cried I, "do you believe *that* man was a poet—that dunce who had no science, nay, nor knowledge either? [Pg 68] who only rose above the heads of men by vanity and doltishness?" "I don't know," he answered, "nor did I ever hear tell, while he was alive, about his being called a poet; but his fellow-townsmen now decide he was one; nay, if he had but left a few more moneybags, they'd swear he was a god. Anyhow, but for his having been a poet, I would not have cursed poets in general." Whereupon, the malevolent Bruni withdrew, and composed a scorpion-tailed oration, addressed to his friend Poggio, on the suggested theme of "diuturnity in monuments," and false ambition. Our old friends of humanistic learning—Cyrus, Alexander, Cæsar—meet us in these frothy paragraphs. Cambyses, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Darius, are thrown in to make the gruel of rhetoric "thick and slab." The whole epistle ends in a long-drawn peroration of invective against "that excrement in human shape," who had had the ill-luck, by pretence to scholarship, by big gains from the Papal treasury, by something in his manners alien from the easy-going customs of the Roman Court, to rouse the rancour of his fellow-humanists.

I have dwelt upon this episode, partly because it illustrates the peculiar thirst for glory in the students of that time, but more especially because it casts a thin clear thread of actual light upon the masterpiece which, having been transported with this difficulty from Donatello's workshop, is now to be seen by all lovers of fine art, in part at least, at Montepulciano. In part at least: the phrase is pathetic. Poor Aragazzi, who thirsted so for "diuturnity in monuments," who had been so cruelly assaulted in the grave by humanistic jealousy, expressing its malevolence with humanistic crudity of satire, was destined after all to be defrauded of his well-paid tomb. The [Pg 69] monument, a master work of Donatello and his collaborator, was duly erected. The oxen and the contractors, it appears, had floundered through the mud of Valdichiana, and struggled up the mountain-slopes of Montepulciano. But when the church, which this triumph of art adorned, came to be repaired, the miracle of beauty was dismembered. The sculpture for which Aragazzi spent his thousands of crowns, which Donatello touched with his immortalising chisel, over which the contractors vented their curses and Bruni eased his bile; these marbles are now visible as mere *disjecta membra* in a church which, lacking them, has little to detain a traveller's haste.

On the left hand of the central door, as you enter, Aragazzi lies, in senatorial robes, asleep; his head turned slightly to the right upon the pillow, his hands folded over his breast. Very noble are the draperies, and dignified the deep tranquillity of slumber. Here, we say, is a good man fallen upon sleep, awaiting resurrection. The one commanding theme of Christian sculpture, in an age of Pagan feeling, has been adequately rendered. Bartolommeo Aragazzi, like Ilaria del Carretto at Lucca, like the canopied doges in S. Zanipolo at Venice, like the Acciauoli in the Florentine Certosa, like the Cardinal di Portogallo in Samminiato, is carved for us as he had been in life, but with that life suspended, its fever all smoothed out, its agitations over, its pettinesses dignified by death. This marmoreal repose of the once active man symbolises for our imagination the state into which he passed four centuries ago, but in which, according to the creed, he still abides, reserved for judgment and reincarnation. The flesh, clad with which he walked our earth, may [Pg 70] moulder in the vaults beneath. But it will one day rise again; and art has here presented it imperishable to our gaze. This is how the Christian sculptors, inspired by the majestic calm of classic art, dedicated a Christian to the genius of repose. Among the nations of antiquity this repose of death was eternal; and being unable to conceive of a man's body otherwise than for ever obliterated by the flames of funeral, they were perforce led back to actual life when they would carve his portrait on a tomb. But for Christianity the rest of the grave has ceased to be

eternal. Centuries may pass, but in the end it must be broken. Therefore art is justified in showing us the man himself in an imagined state of sleep. Yet this imagined state of sleep is so incalculably long, and by the will of God withdrawn from human prophecy, that the ages sweeping over the dead man before the trumpets of archangels wake him, shall sooner wear away memorial stone than stir his slumber. It is a slumber, too, unterrified, unentertained by dreams. Suspended animation finds no fuller symbolism than the sculptor here presents to us in abstract form.

The boys of Montepulciano have scratched Messer Aragazzi's sleeping figure with *graffiti* at their own free will. Yet they have had no power to erase the poetry of Donatello's mighty style. That, in spite of Bruni's envy, in spite of injurious time, in spite of the still worse insult of the modernised cathedral and the desecrated monument, embalms him in our memory and secures for him the diuturnity for which he paid his twenty thousand crowns. Money, methinks, beholding him, was rarely better expended on a similar ambition. And ambition of this sort, relying on the [Pg 71] genius of such a master to give it wings for perpetuity of time, is, *pace* Lionardo Bruni, not ignoble.

Opposite the figure of Messer Aragazzi are two square bas-reliefs from the same monument, fixed against piers of the nave. One represents Madonna enthroned among worshippers; members, it may be supposed, of Aragazzi's household. Three angelic children, supporting the child Christ upon her lap, complete that pyramidal form of composition which Fra Bartolommeo was afterwards to use with such effect in painting. The other bas-relief shows a group of grave men and youths, clasping hands with loveliest interlacement; the placid sentiment of human fellowship translated into harmonies of sculptured form. Children below run up to touch their knees, and reach out boyish arms to welcome them. Two young men, with half-draped busts and waving hair blown off their foreheads, anticipate the type of adolescence which Andrea del Sarto perfected in his S. John. We might imagine that this masterly panel was intended to represent the arrival of Messer Aragazzi in his home. It is a scene from the domestic life of the dead man, duly subordinated to the recumbent figure, which, when the monument was perfect, would have dominated the whole composition.

Nothing in the range of Donatello's work surpasses these two bas-reliefs for harmonies of line and grouping, for choice of form, for beauty of expression, and for smoothness of surface-working. The marble is of great delicacy, and is wrought to a wax-like surface. At the high altar are three more fragments from the mutilated tomb. One is a long low frieze of children bearing [Pg 72] garlands, which probably formed the base of Aragazzi's monument, and now serves for a predella. The remaining pieces are detached statues of Fortitude and Faith. The former reminds us of Donatello's S. George; the latter is twisted into a strained attitude, full of character, but lacking grace. What the effect of these emblematic figures would have been when harmonised by the architectural proportions of the sepulchre, the repose of Aragazzi on his sarcophagus, the suavity of the two square panels and the rhythmic beauty of the frieze, it is not easy to conjecture. But rudely severed from their surroundings, and exposed in isolation, one at each side of the altar, they leave an impression of awkward discomfort on the memory. A certain hardness, peculiar to the Florentine manner, is felt in them. But this quality may have been intended by the sculptors for the sake of contrast with what is eminently graceful, peaceful, and melodious in the other fragments of the ruined masterpiece.

V.

At a certain point in the main street, rather more than half way from the Albergo del Marzocco to the piazza, a tablet has been let into the wall upon the left-hand side. This records the fact that here in 1454 was born Angelo Ambrogini, the special glory of Montepulciano, the greatest classical scholar and the greatest Italian poet of the fifteenth century. He is better known in the history of literature as Poliziano, or Politianus, a name he took from his native city, when he came, a marvellous boy, at the age of ten, to Florence, and joined the household of Lorenzo de' Medici. He had already claims upon Lorenzo's hospitality. For his father, Benedetto, by adopting [Pg 73] the cause of Piero de' Medici in Montepulciano, had exposed himself to bitter feuds and hatred of his fellow-citizens. To this animosity of party warfare he fell a victim a few years previously. We only know that he was murdered, and that he left a helpless widow with five children, of whom Angelo was the eldest. The Ambrogini or Cini were a family of some importance in Montepulciano; and their dwelling-house is a palace of considerable size. From its eastern windows the eye can sweep that vast expanse of country, embracing the lakes of Thrasymene and Chiusi, which has been already described. What would have happened, we wonder, if Messer Benedetto, the learned jurist, had not espoused the Medicean cause and embroiled himself with murderous antagonists? Would the little Angelo have grown up in this quiet town, and practised law, and lived and died a citizen of Montepulciano? In that case the lecture-rooms of Florence would never have echoed to the sonorous hexameters of the "Rusticus" and "Ambra." Italian literature would have lacked the "Stanze" and "Orfeo." European scholarship would have been defrauded of the impulse given to it by the "Miscellanea." The study of Roman law would have missed those labours on the Pandects, with which the name of Politian is honourably associated. From the Florentine society of the fifteenth century would have disappeared the commanding central figure of humanism, which now contrasts dramatically with the stern monastic Prior of S. Mark. Benedetto's tragic death gave Poliziano to Italy and to posterity.

VI.

[Pg 74]

Those who have a day to spare at Montepulciano can scarcely spend it better than in an excursion to Pienza and San Quirico. Leaving the city by the road which takes a westerly direction, the first object of interest is the Church of San Biagio, placed on a fertile plateau immediately beneath the ancient acropolis. It was erected by Antonio di San Gallo in 1518, and is one of the most perfect specimens existing of the sober classical style. The Church consists of a Greek square, continued at the east end into a semicircular tribune, surmounted by a central cupola, and flanked by a detached bell-tower, ending in a pyramidal spire. The whole is built of solid yellow travertine, a material which, by its warmth of colour, is pleasing to the eye, and mitigates the mathematical severity of the design. Upon entering, we feel at once what Alberti called the music of this style; its large and simple harmonies, depending for effect upon sincerity of plan and justice of balance. The square masses of the main building, the projecting cornices and rounded tribune, meet together and soar up into the cupola; while the grand but austere proportions of the arches and the piers compose a symphony of perfectly concordant lines. The music is grave and solemn, architecturally expressed in terms of measured space and outlined symmetry. The whole effect is that of one thing pleasant to look upon, agreeably appealing to our sense of unity, charming us by grace and repose; not stimulative nor suggestive, not multiform nor mysterious. We are reminded of the temples imagined by Francesco Colonna, and figured in his *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. One of these shrines has, we feel, come into actual existence here; [Pg 75] and the religious ceremonies for which it is adapted are not those of the Christian worship. Some more primitive, less spiritual rites, involving less of tragic awe and deep-wrought symbolism, should be here performed. It is better suited for Polifilo's lustration by Venus Physizoe than for the mass on Easter morning. And in this respect, the sentiment of the architecture is exactly faithful to that mood of religious feeling which appeared in Italy under the influences of the classical revival—when the essential doctrines of Christianity were blurred with Pantheism; when Jehovah became *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*; and Jesus was the *Heros* of Calvary, and nuns were *Virgines Vestales*. In literature this mood often strikes us as insincere and artificial. But it admitted of realisation and showed itself to be profoundly felt in architecture.

After leaving Madonna di San Biagio, the road strikes at once into an open country, expanding on the right towards the woody ridge of Monte Fallonica, on the left toward Cetona and Radicofani, with Monte Amiata full in front—its double crest and long volcanic slope recalling Etna; the belt of embrowned forest on its flank, made luminous by sunlight. Far away stretches the Sienese Maremma; Siena dimly visible upon her gentle hill; and still beyond, the pyramid of Volterra, huge and cloud-like, piled against the sky. The road, as is almost invariable in this district, keeps to the highest line of ridges, winding much, and following the dimplings of the earthy hills. Here and there a solitary castello, rusty with old age, and turned into a farm, juts into picturesqueness from some point of vantage on a mound surrounded with green tillage. But [Pg 76] soon the dull and intolerable *creta*, ash-grey earth, without a vestige of vegetation, furrowed by rain, and desolately breaking into gullies, swallows up variety and charm. It is difficult to believe that this *creta* of Southern Tuscany, which has all the appearance of barrenness, and is a positive deformity in the landscape, can be really fruitful. Yet we are frequently being told that it only needs assiduous labour to render it enormously productive.

When we reached Pienza we were already in the middle of a country without cultivation, abandoned to the marl. It is a little place, perched upon the ledge of a long sliding hill, which commands the vale of Orcia; Monte Amiata soaring in aërial majesty beyond. Its old name was Cosignano. But it had the honour of giving birth to Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who, when he was elected to the Papacy and had assumed the title of Pius II., determined to transform and dignify his native village, and to call it after his own name. From that time forward Cosignano has been known as Pienza.

Pius II. succeeded effectually in leaving his mark upon the town. And this forms its main interest at the present time. We see in Pienza how the most active-minded and intelligent man of his epoch, the representative genius of Italy in the middle of the fifteenth century, commanding vast wealth and the Pontifical prestige, worked out his whim of city-building. The experiment had to be made upon a small scale; for Pienza was then and was destined to remain a village. Yet here, upon this miniature piazza—in modern as in ancient Italy the meeting-point of civic life, the [Pg 77] forum—we find a cathedral, a palace of the bishop, a palace of the feudal lord, and a palace of the commune, arranged upon a well-considered plan, and executed after one design in a consistent style. The religious, municipal, signorial, and ecclesiastical functions of the little town are centralised around the open market-place, on which the common people transacted business and discussed affairs. Pius entrusted the realization of his scheme to a Florentine architect; whether Bernardo Rossellino, or a certain Bernardo di Lorenzo, is still uncertain. The same artist, working in the flat manner of Florentine domestic architecture, with rusticated basements, rounded windows and bold projecting cornices—the manner which is so nobly illustrated by the Rucellai and Strozzi palaces at Florence—executed also for Pius the monumental Palazzo Piccolomini at Siena. It is a great misfortune for the group of buildings he designed at Pienza, that they are huddled together in close quarters on a square too small for their effect. A want of space is peculiarly injurious to the architecture of this date, 1462, which, itself geometrical and spatial, demands a certain harmony and liberty in its surroundings, a proportion between the room occupied by each building and the masses of the edifice. The style is severe and prosaic. Those charming episodes and accidents of fancy, in which the Gothic style and the style of the earlier Lombard Renaissance abounded, are wholly wanting to the rigid, mathematical, hard-headed genius of the Florentine quattrocento. Pienza, therefore, disappoints us. Its heavy palace

frontispieces shut the spirit up in a tight box. We seem unable to breathe, and lack that element of life and picturesqueness which the splendid retinues of nobles in the age of Pinturicchio might have added to the now forlorn Piazza. [Pg 78]

Yet the material is a fine warm travertine, mellowing to dark red, brightening to golden, with some details, especially the tower of the Palazzo Communale, in red brick. This building, by the way, is imitated in miniature from that of Florence. The cathedral is a small church of three aisles, equally high, ending in what the French would call a *chevet*. Pius had observed this plan of construction somewhere in Austria, and commanded his architect, Bernardo, to observe it in his plan. He was attracted by the facilities for window-lighting which it offered; and what is very singular, he provided by the Bull of his foundation for keeping the walls of the interior free from frescoes and other coloured decorations. The result is that, though the interior effect is pleasing, the church presents a frigid aspect to eyes familiarised with warmth of tone in other buildings of that period. The details of the columns and friezes are classical; and the façade, strictly corresponding to the structure, and very honest in its decorative elements, is also of the earlier Renaissance style. But the vaulting and some of the windows are pointed.

The Palazzo Piccolomini, standing at the right hand of the Duomo, is a vast square edifice. The walls are flat and even, pierced at regular intervals with windows, except upon the south-west side, where the rectangular design is broken by a noble double Loggiata, gallery rising above gallery—serene curves of arches, grandly proportioned columns, massive balustrades, a spacious corridor, a roomy vaulting—opening out upon the palace garden, and offering fair prospect over the wooded heights of Castiglione and Rocca d'Orcia, up to Radicofani and shadowy Amiata. It was in these double tiers of galleries, in the garden beneath and in the open inner square of the palazzo, that the great life of Italian aristocracy displayed itself. Four centuries ago these spaces, now so desolate in their immensity, echoed to the tread of serving-men, the songs of pages; horse-hooves struck upon the pavement of the court; spurs jingled on the staircases; the brocaded trains of ladies sweeping from their chambers rustled on the marbles of the loggia; knights let their hawks fly from the garden-parapets; cardinals and abbreviators gathered round the doors from which the Pope would issue, when he rose from his siesta to take the cool of evening in those airy colonnades. How impossible it is to realise that scene amid this solitude! The palazzo still belongs to the Piccolomini family. But it has fallen into something worse than ruin—the squalor of half-starved existence, shorn of all that justified its grand proportions. Partition-walls have been run up across its halls to meet the requirements of our contracted modern customs. Nothing remains of the original decorations except one carved chimney-piece, an emblazoned shield, and a frescoed portrait of the founder. All movable treasures have been made away with. And yet the carved heraldics of the exterior, the coat of Piccolomini, "argent, on a cross azure five crescents or," the Papal ensigns, keys, and tiara, and the monogram of Pius, prove that this country dwelling of a Pope must once have been rich in details befitting its magnificence. With the exception of the very small portion reserved for the Signori, when they visit Pienza, the palace has become a granary for country produce in a starveling land. There was one redeeming point about it to my mind. That was the handsome young man, with earnest Tuscan eyes and a wonderfully sweet voice, the servant of the Piccolomini family, who lives here with his crippled father, and who showed us over the apartments. [Pg 79] [Pg 80]

We left Pienza and drove on to S. Quirico, through the same wrinkled wilderness of marl; wasteful, uncultivated, bare to every wind that blows. A cruel blast was sweeping from the sea, and Monte Amiata darkened with rain clouds. Still the pictures, which formed themselves at intervals, as we wound along these barren ridges, were very fair to look upon, especially one, not far from S. Quirico. It had for foreground a stretch of tilth—olive-trees, honeysuckle hedges, and cypresses. Beyond soared Amiata in all its breadth and blue air-blackness, bearing on its mighty flanks the broken cliffs and tufted woods of Castiglione and the Rocca d'Orcia; eagles' nests emerging from a fertile valley-champaign, into which the eye was led for rest. It so chanced that a band of sunlight, escaping from filmy clouds, touched this picture with silvery greys and soft greens—a suffusion of vaporous radiance, which made it for one moment a Claude landscape.

S. Quirico was keeping *festa*. The streets were crowded with healthy handsome men and women from the contado. This village lies on the edge of a great oasis in the Sienese desert—an oasis, formed by the waters of the Orcia and Asso sweeping down to join Ombrone, and stretching on to Montalcino. We put up at the sign of the "Two Hares," where a notable housewife gave us a dinner of all we could desire; *frittata di cervelle*, good fish, roast lamb stuffed with rosemary, salad and cheese, with excellent wine and black coffee, at the rate of three *lire* a head. [Pg 81]

The attraction of S. Quirico is its gem-like little collegiata, a Lombard church of the ninth century, with carved portals of the thirteenth. It is built of golden travertine; some details in brown sandstone. The western and southern portals have pillars resting on the backs of lions. On the western side these pillars are four slender columns, linked by snake-like ligatures. On the southern side they consist of two carved figures—possibly S. John and the Archangel Michael. There is great freedom and beauty in these statues, as also in the lions which support them, recalling the early French and German manner. In addition, one finds the usual Lombard grotesques—two sea-monsters, biting each other; harpy-birds; a dragon with a twisted tail; little men grinning and squatting in adaptation to coigns and angles of the windows. The toothed and chevron patterns of the north are quaintly blent with rude acanthus scrolls and classical egg-mouldings. Over the western porch is a Gothic rose window. Altogether this church must be reckoned one of the most curious specimens of that hybrid architecture, fusing and appropriating different manners, which perplexes the student in Central Italy. It seems strangely out of place in

Tuscany. Yet, if what one reads of Toscanella, a village between Viterbo and Orbetello, be true, there exist examples of a similar fantastic Lombard style even lower down.

The interior was most disastrously gutted and "restored" in 1731: its open wooden roof masked by a false stucco vaulting. A few relics, spared by the eighteenth century Vandals, show that the [Pg 82] church was once rich in antique curiosities. A marble knight in armour lies on his back, half hidden by the pulpit stairs. And in the choir are half a dozen rarely beautiful panels of tarsia, executed in a bold style and on a large scale. One design—a man throwing his face back, and singing, while he plays a mandoline; with long thick hair and fanciful berretta; behind him a fine line of cypresses and other trees—struck me as singularly lovely. In another I noticed a branch of peach, broad leaves and ripe fruit, not only drawn with remarkable grace and power, but so modelled as to stand out with the roundness of reality.

The whole drive of three hours back to Montepulciano was one long banquet of inimitable distant views. Next morning, having to take farewell of the place, we climbed to the Castello, or *arx* of the old city! It is a ruined spot, outside the present walls, upon the southern slope, where there is now a farm, and a fair space of short sheep-cropped turf, very green and grassy, and gemmed with little pink geraniums as in England in such places. The walls of the old castle, overgrown with ivy, are broken down to their foundations. This may possibly have been done when Montepulciano was dismantled by the Sienese in 1232. At that date the Commune succumbed to its more powerful neighbours. The half of its inhabitants were murdered, and its fortifications were destroyed. Such episodes are common enough in the history of that internecine struggle for existence between the Italian municipalities, which preceded the more famous strife of Guelfs and Ghibellines. Stretched upon the smooth turf of the Castello, we bade adieu to the divine landscape bathed in light and mountain air—to Thrasymene and Chiusi and [Pg 83] Cetona; to Amiata, Pienza, and S. Quirico; to Montalcino and the mountains of Volterra; to Siena and Cortona; and, closer to Monte Fallonica, Madonna di Biagio, the house-roofs and the Palazzo tower of Montepulciano.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] From Leigh Hunt's Translation.

[Pg 84]

SPRING WANDERINGS.

Ana-Capri.

The storm-clouds at this season, though it is the bloom of May, are daily piled in sulky or menacing masses over Vesuvius and the Abruzzi, frothing out their curls of moulded mist across the bay, and climbing the heavens with toppling castle towers and domes of alabaster.

We made the most of a tranquil afternoon, where there was an armistice of storm, to climb the bluff of Mount Solaro. A ruined fort caps that limestone bulwark; and there we lay together, drinking the influences of sea, sun, and wind. Immeasurably deep beneath us plunged the precipices, deep, deep descending to a bay where fisher boats were rocking, diminished to a scale that made the fishermen in them invisible. Low down above the waters wheeled white gulls, and higher up the hawks and ospreys of the cliff sailed out of sunlight into shadow. Immitigable strength is in the moulding of this limestone, and sharp, clear definiteness marks yon clothing of scant brushwood where the fearless goats are browsing. The sublime of sculpturesque in crag structure is here, refined and modulated by the sweetness of sea distances. For the air came pure and yielding to us over the unfooted sea; and at the basement of those fortress-cliffs the sea was [Pg 85] dreaming in its caves; and far away, to east and south and west, soft light was blent with mist upon the surface of the shimmering waters.

The distinction between prospects viewed from a mountain overlooking a great plain, or viewed from heights that, like this, dominate the sea, principally lies in this: that while the former only offer cloud shadows cast upon the fields below our feet, in the latter these shadows are diversified with cloud reflections. This gives superiority in qualities of colour, variety of tone, and luminous effect to the sea, compensating in some measure for the lack of those associations which render the outlook over a wide extent of populated land so thrilling. The emergence of towered cities into sunlight at the skirts of moving shadows, the liquid lapse of rivers half disclosed by windings among woods, the upturned mirrors of unruffled lakes, are wanting to the sea. For such episodes the white sails of vessels, with all their wistfulness of going to and fro on the mysterious deep, are but a poor exchange. Yet the sea-lover may justify his preference by appealing to the beauty of empurpled shadows, toned by amethyst or opal or shining with violet light, reflected from the clouds that cross and find in those dark shields a mirror. There are suggestions, too, of immensity, of liberty, of action, presented by the boundless horizons and the changeful changeless tracts of ocean which no plain possesses.

It was nigh upon sunset when we descended to Ana-Capri. That evening the clouds assembled suddenly. The armistice of storm was broken. They were terribly blue, and the sea grew dark as

steel beneath them, till the moment when the sun's lip reached the last edge of the waters. Then [Pg 86] a courier of rosy flame sent forth from him passed swift across the gulf, touching, where it trod, the waves with accidental fire. The messenger reached Naples; and in a moment, as by some diabolical illumination, the sinful city kindled into light like glowing charcoal. From Posilippo on the left, along the palaces of the Chiaja, up to S. Elmo on the hill, past Santa Lucia, down on the Marinella, beyond Portici, beyond Torre del Greco, where Vesuvius towered up aloof, an angry mount of amethystine gloom, the conflagration spread and reached Pompeii, and dwelt on Torre dell'Annunziata. Stationary, lurid, it smouldered while the day died slowly. The long, densely populated sea-line from Pozzuoli to Castellammare burned and smoked with intensest incandescence, sending a glare of fiery mist against the threatening blue behind, and fringing with pomegranate-coloured blots the water where no light now lingered. It is difficult to bend words to the use required. The scene in spite of natural suavity and grace, had become like Dante's first glimpse of the City of Dis—like Sodom and Gomorrah when fire from heaven descended on their towers before they crumbled into dust.

From Capri to Ischia.

After this, for several days, Libeccio blew harder. No boats could leave or come to Capri. From the piazza parapet we saw the wind scooping the surface of the waves, and flinging spray-fleeces in sheets upon the churning water. As they broke on Cape Campanella, the rollers climbed in foam—how many feet?—and blotted out the olive trees above the headland. The sky was always [Pg 87] dark with hanging clouds and masses of low-lying vapour, very moist, but scarcely raining—lightning without thunder in the night.

Such weather is unexpected in the middle month of May, especially when the olives are blackened by December storms, and the orange-trees despoiled of foliage, and the tendrils of the vines yellow with cold. The walnut-trees have shown no sign of making leaves. Only the figs seem to have suffered little.

It had been settled that we should start upon the first seafaring dawn for Ischia or Sorrento, according as the wind might set; and I was glad when, early one morning, the captain of the *Serena* announced a moderate sirocco. When we reached the little quay we found the surf of the libeccio still rolling heavily into the gulf. A gusty south-easter crossed it, tearing spray-crests from the swell as it went plunging onward. The sea was rough enough; but we made fast sailing, our captain steering with a skill which it was beautiful to watch, his five oarsmen picturesquely grouped beneath the straining sail. The sea slapped and broke from time to time on our windward quarter, drenching the boat with brine; and now and then her gunwale scooped into the shoulder of a wave as she shot sidling up it. Meanwhile enormous masses of leaden-coloured clouds formed above our heads and on the sea-line; but these were always shifting in the strife of winds, and the sun shone through them petulantly. As we climbed the rollers, or sank into their trough, the outline of the bay appeared in glimpses, shyly revealed, suddenly withdrawn from sight; the immobility and majesty of mountains contrasted with the weltering waste of water [Pg 88] round us—now blue and garish where the sunlight fell, now shrouded in squally rain-storms, and then again sullen beneath a vaporous canopy. Each of these vignettes was photographed for one brief second on the brain, and swallowed by the hurling drift of billows. The painter's art could but ill have rendered that changeful colour in the sea, passing from tawny cloud-reflections and surfaces of glowing violet to bright blue or impenetrable purple flecked with boiling foam, according as a light-illuminated or a shadowed facet of the moving mass was turned to sight.

Half-way across the gulf the sirocco lulled; the sail was lowered, and we had to make the rest of the passage by rowing. Under the lee of Ischia we got into comparatively quiet water; though here the beautiful Italian sea was yellowish green with churned-up sand, like an unripe orange. We passed the castle on its rocky island, with the domed church which has been so often painted in *gouache* pictures through the last two centuries, and soon after noon we came to Casamicciola.

La Piccola Sentinella.

Casamicciola is a village on the north side of the island, in its centre, where the visitors to the mineral baths of Ischia chiefly congregate. One of its old-established inns is called La Piccola Sentinella. The first sight on entrance is an open gallery, with a pink wall on which bloom magnificent cactuses, sprays of thick-clustering scarlet and magenta flowers. This is a rambling house, built in successive stages against a hill, with terraces and verandahs opening on [Pg 89] unexpected gardens to the back and front. Beneath its long irregular façade there spreads a wilderness of orange-trees and honeysuckles and roses, verbenas, geraniums and mignonette, snapdragons, gazenias and stocks, exceeding bright and fragrant, with the green slopes of Monte Epomeo for a background and Vesuvius for far distance. There are wonderful bits of detail in this garden. One dark, thick-foliaged olive, I remember, leaning from the tufa over a lizard-haunted wall, feathered waist-high in huge acanthus-leaves. The whole rich orchard ground of Casamicciola is dominated by Monte Epomeo, the extinct volcano which may be called the *raison d'être* of Ischia; for this island is nothing but a mountain lifted by the energy of fire from the sea-basement. Its fantastic peaks and ridges, sulphur-coloured, dusty grey, and tawny, with brushwood in young leaf upon the cloven flanks, form a singular pendant to the austere but more

artistically modelled limestone crags of Capri. Not two islands that I know, within so short a space of sea, offer two pictures so different in style and quality of loveliness. The inhabitants are equally distinct in type. Here, in spite of what De Musset wrote somewhat affectedly about the peasant girls—

> Ischia! c'est là qu'on a des yeux,
> C'est là qu'un corsage amoureux
> Serre la hanche.
> Sur un bas rouge bien tiré
> Brille, sous le jupon doré,
> La mule blanche—

in spite of these lines I did not find the Ischia women eminent, as those of Capri are, for beauty. But the young men have fine, loose, faun-like figures, and faces that would be strikingly handsome but for too long and prominent noses. They are a singular race, graceful in movement. [Pg 90]

Evening is divine in Ischia. From the topmost garden terrace of the inn one looks across the sea toward Terracina, Gaeta, and those descending mountain buttresses, the Phlegræan plains and the distant snows of the Abruzzi. Rain-washed and luminous, the sunset sky held Hesper trembling in a solid green of beryl. Fireflies flashed among the orange blossoms. Far away in the obscurity of eastern twilight glared the smouldering cone of Vesuvius—a crimson blot upon the darkness—a Cyclop's eye, bloodshot and menacing.

The company in the Piccola Sentinella, young and old, were decrepit, with an odd, rheumatic, shrivelled look upon them. The dining-room reminded me, as certain rooms are apt to do, of a ship's saloon. I felt as though I had got into the cabin of the *Flying Dutchman*, and that all these people had been sitting there at meat a hundred years, through storm and shine, for ever driving onward over immense waves in an enchanted calm.

Ischia and Forio.

One morning we drove along the shore, up hill, and down, by the Porto d'Ischia to the town and castle. This country curiously combines the qualities of Corfu and Catania. The near distance, so richly cultivated, with the large volcanic slopes of Monte Epomeo rising from the sea, is like Catania. Then, across the gulf, are the bold outlines and snowy peaks of the Abruzzi, recalling Albanian ranges. Here, as in Sicily, the old lava is overgrown with prickly pear and red valerian. Mesembrianthemums—I must be pardoned this word; for I cannot omit those fleshy-leaved creepers, with their wealth of gaudy blossoms, shaped like sea anemones, coloured like strawberry and pine-apple cream-ices—mesembrianthemums, then, tumble in torrents from the walls, and large-cupped white convolvuluses curl about the hedges. The Castle Rock, with Capri's refined sky-coloured outline relieving its hard profile on the horizon, is one of those exceedingly picturesque objects just too theatrical to be artistic. It seems ready-made for a back scene in *Masaniello*, and cries out to the chromo-lithographer, "Come and make the most of me!" Yet this morning all things, in sea, earth, and sky, were so delicately tinted and bathed in pearly light that it was difficult to be critical. [Pg 91]

In the afternoon we took the other side of the island, driving through Lacca to Forio. One gets right round the bulk of Epomeo, and looks up into a weird region called Le Falange, where white lava streams have poured in two broad irregular torrents among broken precipices. Florio itself is placed at the end of a flat headland, boldly thrust into the sea; and its furthest promontory bears a pilgrimage church, intensely white and glaring.

There is something arbitrary in the memories we make of places casually visited, dependent as they are upon our mood at the moment, or on an accidental interweaving of impressions which the *genius loci* blends for us. Of Forio two memories abide with me. The one is of a young woman, with very fair hair, in a light blue dress, standing beside an older woman in a garden. There was a flourishing pomegranate-tree above them. The whiteness and the dreamy smile of the young woman seemed strangely out of tune with her strong-toned southern surroundings. I could have fancied her a daughter of some moist north-western isle of Scandinavian seas. My other memory is of a lad, brown, handsome, powerfully-featured, thoughtful, lying curled up in the sun upon a sort of ladder in his house-court, profoundly meditating. He had a book in his hand, and his finger still marked the place where he had read. He looked as though a Columbus or a Campanella might emerge from his earnest, fervent, steadfast adolescence. Driving rapidly along, and leaving Forio in all probability for ever, I kept wondering whether these two lives, discerned as though in vision, would meet—whether she was destined to be his evil genius, whether posterity would hear of him and journey to his birthplace in this world-neglected Forio. Such reveries are futile. Yet who entirely resists them? [Pg 92]

Monte Epomeo.

About three on the morning which divides the month of May into two equal parts I woke and saw the waning moon right opposite my window, stayed in her descent upon the slope of Epomeo. Soon afterwards Christian called me, and we settled to ascend the mountain. Three horses and a stout black donkey, with their inevitable grooms, were ordered; and we took for

guide a lovely faun-like boy, goat-faced, goat-footed, with gentle manners and pliant limbs swaying beneath the breath of impulse. He was called Giuseppe. [Pg 93]

The way leads past the mineral baths and then strikes uphill, at first through lanes cut deep in the black lava. The trees met almost overhead. It is like Devonshire, except that one half hopes to see tropical foxgloves with violet bells and downy leaves sprouting among the lush grasses and sweet-scented ferns upon those gloomy, damp, warm walls. After this we skirted a thicket of arbutus, and came upon the long volcanic ridge, with divinest outlook over Procida and Miseno toward Vesuvius. Then once more we had to dive into brown sandstone gullies, extremely steep, where the horses almost burst their girths in scrambling, and the grooms screamed, exasperating their confusion with encouragement and curses. Straight or bending like a willow wand, Giuseppe kept in front. I could have imagined he had stepped to life from one of Lionardo's fancy-sprighted studies.

After this fashion we gained the spine of mountain which composes Ischia—the smooth ascending ridge that grows up from those eastern waves to what was once the apex of fire-vomiting Inarime, and breaks in precipices westward, a ruin of gulfed lava, tortured by the violence of pent Typhœus. Under a vast umbrella pine we dismounted, rested, and saw Capri. Now the road skirts slanting-wise along the further flank of Epomeo, rising by muddy earth-heaps and sandstone hollows to the quaint pinnacles which build the summit. There is no inconsiderable peril in riding over this broken ground; for the soil crumbles away, and the ravines open downward, treacherously masked with brushwood. [Pg 94]

On Epomeo's topmost cone a chapel dedicated to S. Niccolo da Bari, the Italian patron of seamen, has been hollowed from the rock. Attached to it is the dwelling of two hermits, subterranean, with long dark corridors and windows opening on the western seas. Church and hermitage alike are scooped, with slight expenditure of mason's skill, from solid mountain. The windows are but loopholes, leaning from which the town of Forio is seen, 2500 feet below; and the jagged precipices of the menacing Falange toss their contorted horror forth to sea and sky. Through gallery and grotto we wound in twilight under a monk's guidance, and came at length upon the face of the crags above Casamicciola. A few steps upward, cut like a ladder in the stone, brought us to the topmost peak—a slender spire of soft, yellowish tufa. It reminded me (with differences) of the way one climbs the spire at Strasburg, and stands upon that temple's final crocket, with nothing but a lightning conductor to steady swimming senses. Different indeed are the views unrolled beneath the peak of Epomeo and the pinnacle of Strasburg! Vesuvius, with the broken lines of Procida, Miseno, and Lago Fusaro for foreground; the sculpturesque beauty of Capri, buttressed in everlasting calm upon the waves; the Phlegræan plains and champaign of Volturno, stretching between smooth seas and shadowy hills; the mighty sweep of Naples' bay; all merged in blue; aërial, translucent, exquisitely frail. In this ethereal fabric of azure the most real of realities, the most solid of substances, seem films upon a crystal sphere.

The hermit produced some flasks of amber-coloured wine from his stores in the grotto. These we drank, lying full-length upon the tufa in the morning sunlight. The panorama of sea, sky, and long-drawn lines of coast, breathless, without a ripple or a taint of cloud, spread far and wide around us. Our horses and donkey cropped what little grass, blent with bitter herbage, grew on that barren summit. Their grooms helped us out with the hermit's wine, and turned to sleep face downward. The whole scene was very quiet, islanded in immeasurable air. Then we asked the boy, Giuseppe, whether he could guide us on foot down the cliffs of Monte Epomeo to Casamicciola. This he was willing and able to do; for he told me that he had spent many months each year upon the hill-side, tending goats. When rough weather came, he wrapped himself in a blanket from the snow that falls and melts upon the ledges. In summer time he basked the whole day long, and slept the calm ambrosial nights away. Something of this free life was in the burning eyes, long clustering dark hair, and smooth brown bosom of the faun-like creature. His graceful body had the brusque, unerring movement of the goats he shepherded. Human thought and emotion seemed a-slumber in this youth who had grown one with nature. As I watched his careless incarnate loveliness I remembered lines from an old Italian poem of romance, describing a dweller of the forest, who [Pg 95]

> Haunteth the woodland aye 'neath verdurous shade,
> Eateth wild fruit, drinketh of running stream;
> And such-like is his nature, as 'tis said,
> That ever weepeth he when clear skies gleam,
> Seeing of storms and rain he then hath dread,
> And feareth lest the sun's heat fail for him; [Pg 96]
> But when on high hurl winds and clouds together,
> Full glad is he and waiteth for fair weather.

Giuseppe led us down those curious volcanic *balze*, where the soil is soft as marl, with tints splashed on it of pale green and rose and orange, and a faint scent in it of sulphur. They break away into wild chasms, where rivulets begin; and here the narrow watercourses made for us plain going. The turf beneath our feet was starred with cyclamens and wavering anemones. At last we reached the chestnut woods, and so by winding paths descended on the village. Giuseppe told me, as we walked, that in a short time he would be obliged to join the army. He contemplated this duty with a dim and undefined dislike. Nor could I, too, help dreading and misliking it for him. The untamed, gentle creature, who knew so little but his goats as yet, whose nights had been passed from childhood *à la belle étoile*, whose limbs had never been cumbered with broadcloth or belt—for him to be shut up in the barrack of some Lombard city, packed in

white conscript's sacking, drilled, taught to read and write, and weighted with the knapsack and the musket! There was something lamentable in the prospect. But such is the burden of man's life, of modern life especially. United Italy demands of her children that by this discipline they should be brought into that harmony which builds a nation out of diverse elements.

[Pg 97]

From Ischia to Naples.

Ischia showed a new aspect on the morning of our departure. A sea-mist passed along the skirts of the island, and rolled in heavy masses round the peaks of Monte Epomeo, slowly condensing into summer clouds, and softening each outline with a pearly haze, through which shone emerald glimpses of young vines and fig-trees.

We left in a boat with four oarsmen for Pozzuoli. For about an hour the breeze carried us well, while Ischia behind grew ever lovelier, soft as velvet, shaped like a gem. The mist had become a great white luminous cloud—not dense and alabastrine, like the clouds of thunder; but filmy, tender, comparable to the atmosphere of Dante's moon. Porpoises and sea-gulls played and fished about our bows, dividing the dark brine in spray. The mountain distances were drowned in bluish vapour—Vesuvius quite invisible. About noon the air grew clearer, and Capri reared her fortalice of sculptured rock, aërially azure, into liquid ether. I know not what effect of atmosphere or light it is that lifts an island from the sea by interposing that thin edge of lustrous white between it and the water. But this phenomenon to-day was perfectly exhibited. Like a mirage on the wilderness, like Fata Morgana's palace ascending from the deep, the pure and noble vision stayed suspense 'twixt heaven and ocean. At the same time the breeze failed, and we rowed slowly between Procida and Capo Miseno—a space in old-world history athrong with Cæsar's navies. When we turned the point, and came in sight of Baiæ, the wind freshened and [Pg 98] took us flying into Pozzuoli. The whole of this coast has been spoiled by the recent upheaval of Monte Nuovo with its lava floods and cindery deluges. Nothing remains to justify its fame among the ancient Romans and the Neapolitans of Boccaccio's and Pontano's age. It is quite wrecked, beyond the power even of hendecasyllables to bring again its breath of beauty:

> Mecum si sapies, Gravina, mecum
> Baias, et placidos coles recessus,
> Quos ipsæ et veneres colunt, et illa
> Quæ mentes hominum regit voluptas.
> Hic vina et choreæ jocique regnant,
> Regnant et charites facetiæque.
> Has sedes amor, has colit cupido.
> Hic passim juvenes puellulæque
> Ludunt, et tepidis aquis lavantur,
> Cœnantque et dapibus leporibusque
> Miscent delitias venustiores:
> Miscent gaudia et osculationes,
> Atque una sociis toris foventur,
> Has te ad delitias vocant camœnæ;
> Invitat mare, myrteumque littus;
> Invitaut volucres canoræ, et ipse
> Gaurus pampineas parat corollas.[B]

At Pozzuoli we dined in the Albergo del Ponte di Caligola (Heaven save the mark!), and drank [Pg 99] Falernian wine of modern and indifferent vintage. Then Christian hired two open carriages for Naples. He and I sat in the second. In the first we placed the two ladies of our party. They had a large, fat driver. Just after we had all passed the gate a big fellow rushed up, dragged the corpulent coachman from his box, pulled out a knife, and made a savage thrust at the man's stomach. At the same moment a *guardia-porta*, with drawn cutlass, interposed and struck between the combatants. They were separated. Their respective friends assembled in two jabbering crowds, and the whole party, uttering vociferous objurgations, marched off, as I imagined, to the watch-house. A very shabby lazzarone, without more ado, sprang on the empty box, and we made haste for Naples. Being only anxious to get there, and not at all curious about the squabble which had deprived us of our fat driver, I relapsed into indifference when I found that neither of the men to whose lot we had fallen was desirous of explaining the affair. It was sufficient cause for self-congratulation that no blood had been shed, and that the Procuratore del Rè would not require our evidence.

The Grotta di Posilippo was a sight of wonder, with the afternoon sun slanting on its festoons of [Pg 100] creeping plants above the western entrance—the gas lamps, dust, huge carts, oxen, and *contadini* in its subterranean darkness—and then the sudden revelation of the bay and city as we jingled out into the summery air again by Virgil's tomb.

Night at Pompeii.

On to Pompeii in the clear sunset, falling very lightly upon mountains, islands, little ports, and indentations of the bay.

From the railway station we walked above half a mile to the Albergo del Sole under a lucid heaven of aqua-marine colour, with Venus large in it upon the border line between the tints of green and blue.

The Albergo del Sole is worth commemorating. We stepped, without the intervention of courtyard or entrance hall, straight from the little inn garden into an open, vaulted room. This was divided into two compartments by a stout column supporting round arches. Wooden gates furnished a kind of fence between the atrium and what an old Pompeian would have styled the triclinium. For in the further part a table was laid for supper and lighted with suspended lamps. And here a party of artists and students drank and talked and smoked. A great live peacock, half asleep and winking his eyes, sat perched upon a heavy wardrobe watching them. The outer chamber, where we waited in arm-chairs of ample girth, had its *loggia* windows and doors open to the air. There were singing-birds in cages; and plants of rosemary, iris, and arundo sprang [Pg 101] carelessly from holes in the floor. A huge vase filled to overflowing with oranges and lemons, the very symbol of generous prodigality, stood in the midst, and several dogs were lounging round. The outer twilight, blending with the dim sheen of the lamps, softened this pretty scene to picturesqueness. Altogether it was a strange and unexpected place. Much experienced as the nineteenth-century nomad may be in inns, he will rarely receive a more powerful and refreshing impression, entering one at evenfall, than here.

There was no room for us in the inn. We were sent, attended by a boy with a lantern, through fields of dew-drenched barley and folded poppies, to a farmhouse overshadowed by four spreading pines. Exceedingly soft and grey, with rose-tinted weft of steam upon its summit, stood Vesuvius above us in the twilight. Something in the recent impression of the dimly-lighted supper-room, and in the idyllic simplicity of this lantern-litten journey through the barley, suggested, by one of those inexplicable stirrings of association which affect tired senses, a dim, dreamy thought of Palestine and Bible stories. The feeling of the *cenacolo* blent here with feelings of Ruth's cornfields, and the white square houses with their flat roofs enforced the illusion. Here we slept in the middle of a *contadino* colony. Some of the folk had made way for us; and by the wheezing, coughing, and snoring of several sorts and ages in the chamber next me, I imagine they must have endured considerable crowding. My bed was large enough to have contained a family. Over its head there was a little shrine, hollowed in the thickness of the wall, with several sacred emblems and a shallow vase of holy water. On dressers at each end of the [Pg 102] room stood glass shrines, occupied by finely-dressed Madonna dolls and pots of artificial flowers. Above the doors S. Michael and S. Francis, roughly embossed in low relief and boldly painted, gave dignity and grandeur to the walls. These showed some sense for art in the first builders of the house. But the taste of the inhabitants could not be praised. There were countless gaudy prints of saints, and exactly five pictures of the Bambino, very big, and sprawling in a field alone. A crucifix, some old bottles, a gun, old clothes suspended from pegs, pieces of peasant pottery and china, completed the furniture of the apartment.

But what a view it showed when Christian next morning opened the door! From my bed I looked across the red-tiled terrace to the stone pines with their velvet roofage and the blue-peaked hills of Stabiæ.

San Germano.

No one need doubt about his quarters in this country town. The Albergo di Pompeii is a truly sumptuous place. Sofas, tables, and chairs in our sitting-room are made of buffalo horns, very cleverly pieced together, but torturing the senses with suggestions of impalement. Sitting or standing, one felt insecure. When would the points run into us? when should we begin to break these incrustations off? and would the whole fabric crumble at a touch into chaotic heaps of horns?

It is market day, and the costumes in the streets are brilliant. The women wear a white [Pg 103] petticoat, a blue skirt made straight and tightly bound above it, a white richly-worked bodice, and the white square-folded napkin of the Abruzzi on their heads. Their jacket is of red or green—pure colour. A rug of striped red, blue, yellow, and black protects the whole dress from the rain. There is a very noble quality of green—sappy and gemmy—like some of Titian's or Giorgione's—in the stuffs they use. Their build and carriage are worthy of goddesses.

Rain falls heavily, persistently. We must ride on donkeys, in waterproofs, to Monte Cassino. Mountain and valley, oak wood and ilex grove, lentisk thicket and winding river-bed, are drowned alike in soft-descending, soaking rain. Far and near the landscape swims in rain, and the hill-sides send down torrents through their watercourses.

The monastery is a square, dignified building, of vast extent and princely solidity. It has a fine inner court, with sumptuous staircases of slabbed stone leading to the church. This public portion of the edifice is both impressive and magnificent, without sacrifice of religious severity to parade. We acknowledge a successful compromise between the austerity of the order and the grandeur befitting the fame, wealth, prestige, and power of its parent foundation. The church itself is a tolerable structure of the Renaissance—costly marble incrustations and mosaics, meaningless Neapolitan frescoes. One singular episode in the mediocrity of art adorning it, is the tomb of Pietro dei Medici. Expelled from Florence in 1494, he never returned, but was drowned in the Garigliano. Clement VII. ordered, and Duke Cosimo I. erected, this marble monument—the [Pg 104] handicraft, in part at least, of Francesco di San Gallo—to their relative. It is singularly stiff, ugly,

out of place—at once obtrusive and insignificant.

A gentle old German monk conducted Christian and me over the convent—boy's school, refectory printing press, lithographic workshop, library, archives. We then returned to the church, from which we passed to visit the most venerable and sacred portion of the monastery. The cell of S. Benedict is being restored and painted in fresco by the Austrian Benedictines; a pious but somewhat frigid process of re-edification. This so-called cell is a many-chambered and very ancient building, with a tower which is now embedded in the massive superstructure of the modern monastery. The German artists adorning it contrive to blend the styles of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Egypt, and Byzance, not without force and a kind of intense frozen pietism. S. Mauro's vision of his master's translation to heaven—the ladder of light issuing between two cypresses, and the angels watching on the tower walls—might even be styled poetical. But the decorative angels on the roof and other places, being adapted from Egyptian art, have a strange, incongruous appearance.

Monasteries are almost invariably disappointing to one who goes in search of what gives virtue and solidity to human life; and even Monte Cassino was no exception. This ought not to be otherwise, seeing what a peculiar sympathy with the monastic institution is required to make these cloisters comprehensible. The atmosphere of operose indolence, prolonged through centuries and centuries, stifles; nor can antiquity and influence impose upon a mind which resents monkery itself as an essential evil. That Monte Cassino supplied the Church with several potentates is incontestable. That mediæval learning and morality would have suffered more without this brotherhood cannot be doubted. Yet it is difficult to name men of very eminent genius whom the Cassinesi claim as their alumni; nor, with Boccaccio's testimony to their carelessness, and with the evidence of their library before our eyes, can we rate their services to civilised erudition very highly. I longed to possess the spirit, for one moment, of Montalembert. I longed for what is called historical imagination, for the indiscriminate voracity of those men to whom world-famous sites are in themselves soul-stirring. [Pg 105]

FOOTNOTES:

[B] These verses are extracted from the second book of Pontano's *Hendecasyllabi* (Aldus, 1513, p. 208). They so vividly paint the amusements of a watering-place in the fifteenth century that I have translated them:

> With me, let but the mind be wise, Gravina,
> With me haste to the tranquil haunts of Baiæ,
> Haunts that pleasure hath made her home, and she who
> Sways all hearts, the voluptuous Aphrodite.
> Here wine rules, and the dance, and games and laughter;
> Graces reign in a round of mirthful madness;
> Love hath built, and desire, a palace here too,
> Where glad youths and enamoured girls on all sides
> Play and bathe in the waves in sunny weather,
> Dine and sup, and the merry mirth of banquets
> Blend with dearer delights and love's embraces,
> Blend with pleasures of youth and honeyed kisses,
> Till, sport-tired, in the couch inarmed they slumber.
> Thee our Muses invite to these enjoyments;
> Thee those billows allure, the myrtled seashore,
> Birds allure with a song, and mighty Gaurus
> Twines his redolent wreath of vines and ivy.

[Pg 106]

MAY IN UMBRIA.

From Rome to Terni.

We left Rome in clear sunset light. The Alban Hills defined themselves like a cameo of amethyst upon a pale blue distance; and over the Sabine Mountains soared immeasurable moulded domes of alabaster thunder-clouds, casting deep shadows, purple and violet, across the slopes of Tivoli. To westward the whole sky was lucid, like some half-transparent topaz, flooded with slowly yellowing sunbeams. The Campagna has often been called a garden of wild-flowers. Just now poppy and aster, gladiolus and thistle, embroider it with patterns infinite and intricate beyond the power of art. They have already mown the hay in part; and the billowy tracts of greyish green, where no flowers are now in bloom, supply a restful groundwork to those brilliant patches of diapered *fioriture*. These are like praying-carpets spread for devotees upon the pavement of a mosque whose roof is heaven. In the level light the scythes of the mowers flash as we move past. From their bronzed foreheads the men toss masses of dark curls. Their muscular flanks and shoulders sway sideways from firm yet pliant reins. On one hill, fronting the sunset, there stands

a herd of some thirty huge grey oxen, feeding and raising their heads to look at us, with just a flush of crimson on their horns and dewlaps. This is the scale of Mason's and of Costa's colouring. [Pg 107] This is the breadth and magnitude of Rome.

Thus, through dells of ilex and oak, yielding now a glimpse of Tiber and S. Peter's, now opening on a purple section of the distant Sabine Hills, we came to Monte Rotondo. The sun sank; and from the flames where he had perished, Hesper and the thin moon, very white and keen, grew slowly into sight. Now we follow the Tiber, a swollen, hurrying, turbid river, in which the mellowing Western sky reflects itself. This changeful mirror of swift waters spreads a dazzling foreground to valley, hill and lustrous heaven. There is orange on the far horizon, and a green ocean above, in which sea-monsters fashioned from the clouds are floating. Yonder swims an elf with luminous hair astride upon a sea-horse, and followed by a dolphin plunging through the fiery waves. The orange deepens into dying red. The green divides into daffodil and beryl. The blue above grows fainter, and the moon and stars shine stronger.

Through these celestial changes we glide into a landscape fit for Francia and the early Umbrian painters. Low hills to right and left; suavely modelled heights in the far distance; a very quiet width of plain, with slender trees ascending into the pellucid air; and down in the mystery of the middle distance a glimpse of heaven-reflecting water. The magic of the moon and stars lends enchantment to this scene. No painting could convey their influences. Sometimes both luminaries tremble, all dispersed and broken, on the swirling river. Sometimes they sleep above the calm cool reaches of a rush-grown mere. And here and there a ruined turret, with a broken window [Pg 108] and a tuft of shrubs upon the rifted battlement, gives value to the fading pallor of the West. The last phase in the sunset is a change to blue-grey monochrome, faintly silvered with starlight; hills, Tiber, fields and woods all floating in aërial twilight. There is no definition of outline now. The daffodil of the horizon has faded into scarcely perceptible pale greenish yellow.

We have passed Stimigliano. Through the mystery of darkness we hurry past the bridges of Augustus and the lights of Narni.

The Cascades of Terni.

The Velino is a river of considerable volume which rises in the highest region of the Abruzzi, threads the upland valley of Rieti, and precipitates itself by an artificial channel over cliffs about seven hundred feet in height into the Nera. The water is densely charged with particles of lime. This calcareous matter not only tends continually to choke its bed, but clothes the precipices over which the torrent thunders with fantastic drapery of stalactite; and, carried on the wind in foam, incrusts the forests that surround the falls with fine white dust. These famous cascades are undoubtedly the most sublime and beautiful which Europe boasts; and their situation is worthy of so great a natural wonder. We reach them through a noble mid-Italian landscape, where the mountain forms are austere and boldly modelled, but the vegetation, both wild and cultivated, has something of the South-Italian richness. The hill-sides are a labyrinth of box and arbutus, with coronilla in golden bloom. The turf is starred with cyclamens and orchises. Climbing the [Pg 109] staircase paths beside the falls in morning sunlight, or stationed on the points of vantage that command their successive cataracts, we enjoyed a spectacle which might be compared in its effect upon the mind to the impression left by a symphony or a tumultuous lyric. The turbulence and splendour, the swiftness and resonance, the veiling of the scene in smoke of shattered water-masses, the withdrawal of these veils according as the volume of the river slightly shifted in its fall, the rainbows shimmering on the silver spray, the shivering of poplars hung above impendent precipices, the stationary grandeur of the mountains keeping watch around, the hurry and the incoherence of the cataracts, the immobility of force and changeful changelessness in nature, were all for me the elements of one stupendous poem. It was like an ode of Shelley translated into symbolism, more vivid through inarticulate appeal to primitive emotion than any words could be.

Montefalco.

The rich land of the Clitumnus is divided into meadows by transparent watercourses, gliding with a glassy current over swaying reeds. Through this we pass, and leave Bevagna to the right, and ascend one of those long gradual roads which climb the hills where all the cities of the Umbrians perch. The view expands, revealing Spello, Assisi, Perugia on its mountain buttress, and the far reaches northward of the Tiber valley. Then Trevi and Spoleto came into sight, and the severe hill-country above Gubbio in part disclosed itself. Over Spoleto the fierce witch- [Pg 110] haunted heights of Norcia rose forbidding. This is the kind of panorama that dilates the soul. It is so large, so dignified, so beautiful in tranquil form. The opulent abundance of the plain contrasts with the severity of mountain ranges desolately grand; and the name of each of all those cities thrills the heart with memories.

The main object of a visit to Montefalco is to inspect its many excellent frescoes; painted histories of S. Francis and S. Jerome, by Benozzo Gozzoli; saints, angels, and Scripture episodes by the gentle Tiberio d'Assisi. Full justice had been done to these, when a little boy, seeing us lingering outside the church of S. Chiara, asked whether we should not like to view the body of the saint. This privilege could be purchased at the price of a small fee. It was only necessary to call the guardian of her shrine at the high altar. Indolent, and in compliant mood, with languid

curiosity and half-an-hour to spare, we assented. A handsome young man appeared, who conducted us with decent gravity into a little darkened chamber behind the altar. There he lighted wax tapers, opened sliding doors in what looked like a long coffin, and drew curtains. Before us in the dim light there lay a woman covered with a black nun's dress. Only her hands, and the exquisitely beautiful pale contour of her face (forehead, nose, mouth, and chin, modelled in purest outline, as though the injury of death had never touched her) were visible. Her closed eyes seemed to sleep. She had the perfect peace of Luini's S. Catherine borne by the angels to her grave on Sinai. I have rarely seen anything which surprised and touched me more. The [Pg 111] religious earnestness of the young custode, the hushed adoration of the country-folk who had silently assembled round us, intensified the sympathy-inspiring beauty of the slumbering girl. Could Julia, daughter of Claudius, have been fairer than this maiden, when the Lombard workmen found her in her Latin tomb, and brought her to be worshipped on the Capitol? S. Chiara's shrine was hung round with her relics; and among these the heart extracted from her body was suspended. Upon it, apparently wrought into the very substance of the mummied flesh, were impressed a figure of the crucified Christ, the scourge, and the five stigmata. The guardian's faith in this miraculous witness to her sainthood, the gentle piety of the men and women who knelt before it, checked all expressions of incredulity. We abandoned ourselves to the genius of the place; forgot even to ask what Santa Chiara was sleeping here; and withdrew, toned to a not unpleasing melancholy. The world-famous Saint Clair, the spiritual sister of S. Francis, lies in Assisi. I have often asked myself, Who, then, was this nun? What history had she? And I think now of this girl as of a damsel of romance, a Sleeping Beauty in the wood of time, secluded from intrusive elements of fact, and folded in the love and faith of her own simple worshippers. Among the hollows of Arcadia, how many rustic shrines in ancient days held saints of Hellas, apocryphal, perhaps, like this, but hallowed by tradition and enduring homage![C]

[Pg 112]

Foligno.

In the landscape of Raphael's votive picture, known as the Madonna di Foligno, there is a town with a few towers, placed upon a broad plain at the edge of some blue hills. Allowing for that license as to details which imaginative masters permitted themselves in matters of subordinate importance, Raphael's sketch is still true to Foligno. The place has not materially changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Indeed relatively to the state of Italy at large, it is still the same as in the days of ancient Rome. Foligno forms a station of commanding interest between Rome and the Adriatic upon the great Flaminian Way. At Foligno the passes of the Apennines debouch into the Umbrian plain, which slopes gradually toward the valley of the Tiber, and from it the valley of the Nera is reached by an easy ascent beneath the walls of Spoleto. An army advancing from the north by the Metaurus and the Furlo Pass must find itself at Foligno; and the level champaign round the city is well adapted to the maintenance and exercises of a garrison. In the days of the Republic and the Empire, the value of this position was well understood; but Foligno's importance, as the key to the Flaminian Way, was eclipsed by two flourishing cities in its immediate vicinity, Hispellum and Mevania, the modern Spello and Bevagna. We might hazard a conjecture that the Lombards, when they ruled the Duchy of Spoleto, following their usual [Pg 113] policy of opposing new military centres to the ancient Roman municipia, encouraged Fulginium at the expense of her two neighbours. But of this there is no certainty to build upon. All that can be affirmed with accuracy is that in the Middle Ages, while Spello and Bevagna declined into the inferiority of dependent burghs, Foligno grew in power and became the chief commune of this part of Umbria. It was famous during the last centuries of struggle between the Italian burghers and their native despots, for peculiar ferocity in civil strife. Some of the bloodiest pages in mediæval Italian history are those which relate the vicissitudes of the Trinci family, the exhaustion of Foligno by internal discord, and its final submission to the Papal power. Since railways have been carried from Rome through Narni and Spoleto to Ancona and Perugia, Foligno has gained considerably in commercial and military status. It is the point of intersection for three lines; the Italian government has made it a great cavalry dépôt, and there are signs of reviving traffic in its decayed streets. Whether the presence of a large garrison has already modified the population, or whether we may ascribe something to the absence of Roman municipal institutions in the far past, and to the savagery of the mediæval period, it is difficult to say. Yet the impression left by Foligno upon the mind is different from that of Assisi, Spello, and Montefalco, which are distinguished for a certain grace and gentleness in their inhabitants.

My window in the city wall looks southward across the plain to Spoleto, with Montefalco perched aloft upon the right, and Trevi on its mountain-bracket to the left. From the topmost peaks of the Sabine Apennines, gradual tender sloping lines descend to find their quiet in the [Pg 114] valley of Clitumnus. The space between me and that distance is infinitely rich with every sort of greenery, dotted here and there with towers and relics of baronial houses. The little town is in commotion; for the working-men of Foligno and its neighbourhood have resolved to spend their earnings on a splendid festa—horse-races, and two nights of fireworks. The acacias and pawlonias on the ramparts are in full bloom of creamy white and lilac. In the glare of Bengal lights these trees, with all their pendulous blossoms, surpassed the most fantastic of artificial decorations. The rockets sent aloft into the sky amid that solemn Umbrian landscape were nowise out of harmony with nature. I never sympathised with critics who resent the intrusion of fireworks upon scenes of natural beauty. The Giessbach, lighted up at so much per head on stated evenings, with a band playing and a crowd of cockneys staring, presents perhaps an incongruous spectacle. But where, as here at Foligno, a whole city has made itself a festival, where there are multitudes of citizens and soldiers and country-people slowly moving and gravely

admiring, with the decency and order characteristic of an Italian crowd, I have nothing but a sense of satisfaction.

It is sometimes the traveller's good fortune in some remote place to meet with an inhabitant who incarnates and interprets for him the *genius loci* as he has conceived it. Though his own subjectivity will assuredly play a considerable part in such an encounter, transferring to his chance acquaintance qualities he may not possess, and connecting this personality in some purely imaginative manner with thoughts derived from study, or impressions made by nature; yet [Pg 115] the stranger will henceforth become the meeting-point of many memories, the central figure in a composition which derives from him its vividness. Unconsciously and innocently he has lent himself to the creation of a picture, and round him, as around the hero of a myth, have gathered thoughts and sentiments of which he had himself no knowledge. On one of these nights I had been threading the aisles of acacia-trees, now glaring red, now azure, as the Bengal lights kept changing. My mind instinctively went back to scenes of treachery and bloodshed in the olden time, when Corrado Trinci paraded the mangled remnants of three hundred of his victims, heaped on muleback, through Foligno, for a warning to the citizens. As the procession moved along the ramparts, I found myself in contact with a young man, who readily fell into conversation. He was very tall, with enormous breadth of shoulders, and long sinewy arms, like Michelangelo's favourite models. His head was small, curled over with crisp black hair. Low forehead, and thick level eyebrows absolutely meeting over intensely bright fierce eyes. The nose descending straight from the brows, as in a statue of Hadrian's age. The mouth full-lipped, petulant, and passionate above a firm round chin. He was dressed in the shirt, white trousers, and loose white jacket of a contadino; but he did not move with a peasant's slouch, rather with the elasticity and alertness of an untamed panther. He told me that he was just about to join a cavalry regiment; and I could well imagine, when military dignity was added to that gait, how grandly he would go. This young man, of whom I heard nothing more after our half-hour's conversation among the crackling fireworks and roaring cannon, left upon my mind an [Pg 116] indescribable impression of dangerousness—of "something fierce and terrible, eligible to burst forth." Of men like this, then, were formed the Companies of Adventure who flooded Italy with villany, ambition, and lawlessness in the fifteenth century. Gattamelata, who began life as a baker's boy at Narni and ended it with a bronze statue by Donatello on the public square in Padua, was of this breed. Like this were the Trinci and their bands of murderers. Like this were the bravi who hunted Lorenzaccio to death at Venice. Like this was Pietro Paolo Baglioni, whose fault, in the eyes of Machiavelli, was that he could not succeed in being "perfettamente tristo." Beautiful, but inhuman; passionate, but cold; powerful, but rendered impotent for firm and lofty deeds by immorality and treason; how many centuries of men like this once wasted Italy and plunged her into servitude! Yet what material is here, under sterner discipline, and with a nobler national ideal, for the formation of heroic armies. Of such stuff, doubtless, were the Roman legionaries. When will the Italians learn to use these men as Fabius or as Cæsar, not as the Vitelli and the Trinci used them? In such meditations, deeply stirred by the meeting of my own reflections with one who seemed to represent for me in life and blood the spirit of the place which had provoked them, I said farewell to Cavallucci, and returned to my bed-room on the city-wall. The last rockets had whizzed and the last cannons had thundered ere I fell asleep.

[Pg 117]

SPELLO.

Spello contains some not inconsiderable antiquities—the remains of a Roman theatre, a Roman gate with the heads of two men and a woman leaning over it, and some fragments of Roman sculpture scattered through its buildings. The churches, especially those of S. M. Maggiore and S. Francesco, are worth a visit for the sake of Pinturicchio. Nowhere, except in the Piccolomini Library at Siena, can that master's work in fresco be better studied than here. The satisfaction with which he executed the wall paintings in S. Maria Maggiore is testified by his own portrait introduced upon a panel in the decoration of the Virgin's chamber. The scrupulously rendered details of books, chairs, window seats, &c., which he here has copied, remind one of Carpaccio's study of S. Benedict at Venice. It is all sweet, tender, delicate, and carefully finished; but without depth, not even the depth of Perugino's feeling. In S. Francesco, Pinturicchio, with the same meticulous refinement, painted a letter addressed to him by Gentile Baglioni. It lies on a stool before Madonna and her court of saints. Nicety of execution, technical mastery of fresco as a medium for Dutch detail-painting, prettiness of composition, and cheerfulness of colouring, are noticeable throughout his work here rather than either thought or sentiment. S. Maria Maggiore can boast a fresco of Madonna between a young episcopal saint and Catherine of Alexandria from the hand of Perugino. The rich yellow harmony of its tones, and the graceful dignity of its emotion, conveyed no less by a certain Raphaelesque pose and outline than by suavity of facial [Pg 118] expression, enable us to measure the distance between this painter and his quasi-pupil Pinturicchio.

We did not, however, drive to Spello to inspect either Roman antiquities or frescoes, but to see an inscription on the city walls about Orlando. It is a rude Latin elegiac couplet, saying that, "from the sign below, men may conjecture the mighty members of Roland, nephew of Charles; his deeds are written in history." Three agreeable old gentlemen of Spello, who attended us with much politeness, and were greatly interested in my researches, pointed out a mark waist-high upon the wall, where Orlando's knee is reported to have reached. But I could not learn anything about a phallic monolith, which is said by Guérin or Panizzi to have been identified with the Roland myth at Spello. Such a column either never existed here, or had been removed before the

memory of the present generation.

Easter Morning at Assisi.

We are in the lower church of S. Francesco. High mass is being sung, with orchestra and organ and a choir of many voices. Candles are lighted on the altar, over-canopied with Giotto's allegories. From the low southern windows slants the sun, in narrow bands, upon the many-coloured gloom and embrowned glory of these painted aisles. Women in bright kerchiefs kneel upon the stones, and shaggy men from the mountains stand or lean against the wooden benches. There is no moving from point to point. Where we have taken our station, at the north-western angle of the transept, there we stay till mass be over. The whole low-vaulted building glows [Pg 119] duskily; the frescoed roof, the stained windows, the figure-crowded pavements blending their rich but subdued colours, like hues upon some marvellous moth's wings, or like a deep-toned rainbow mist discerned in twilight dreams, or like such tapestry as Eastern queens, in ancient days, wrought for the pavilion of an empress. Forth from this maze of mingling tints, indefinite in shade and sunbeams, lean earnest, saintly faces—ineffably pure—adoring, pitying, pleading; raising their eyes in ecstasy to heaven, or turning them in ruth toward earth. Men and women of whom the world was not worthy—at the hands of those old painters they have received the divine grace, the dove-like simplicity, whereof Italians in the fourteenth century possessed the irrecoverable secret. Each face is a poem; the counterpart in painting to a chapter from the Fioretti di San Francesco. Over the whole scene—in the architecture, in the frescoes, in the coloured windows, in the gloom, on the people, in the incense, from the chiming bells, through the music—broods one spirit: the spirit of him who was "the co-espoused, co-transforate with Christ;" the ardent, the radiant, the beautiful in soul; the suffering, the strong, the simple, the victorious over self and sin; the celestial who trampled upon earth and rose on wings of ecstasy to heaven; the Christ-inebriated saint of visions supersensual and life beyond the grave. Far down below the feet of those who worship God through him, S. Francis sleeps; but his soul, the incorruptible part of him, the message he gave the world, is in the spaces round us. This is his temple. He fills it like an unseen god. Not as Phœbus or Athene, from their marble pedestals; but as an abiding spirit, felt everywhere, nowhere seized, absorbing in itself all mysteries, all myths, [Pg 120] all burning exaltations, all abasements, all love, self-sacrifice, pain, yearning, which the thought of Christ, sweeping the centuries, hath wrought for men. Let, therefore, choir and congregation raise their voices on the tide of prayers and praises; for this is Easter morning—Christ is risen! Our sister, Death of the Body, for whom S. Francis thanked God in his hymn, is reconciled to us this day, and takes us by the hand, and leads us to the gate whence floods of heavenly glory issue from the faces of a multitude of saints. Pray, ye poor people; chant and pray. If all be but a dream, to wake from this were loss for you indeed!

Perusia Augusta.

The piazza in front of the Prefettura is my favourite resort on these nights of full moon. The evening twilight is made up partly of sunset fading over Thrasymene and Tuscany; partly of moonrise from the mountains of Gubbio and the passes toward Ancona. The hills are capped with snow, although the season is so forward. Below our parapets the bulk of S. Domenico, with its gaunt, perforated tower, and the finer group of S. Pietro, flaunting the arrowy "Pennacchio di Perugia," jut out upon the spine of hill which dominates the valley of the Tiber. As the night gloom deepens, and the moon ascends the sky, these buildings seem to form the sombre foreground to some French etching. Beyond them spreads the misty moon-irradiated plain of Umbria. Over all rise shadowy Apennines, with dim suggestions of Assisi, Spello, Foligno, [Pg 121] Montefalco, and Spoleto on their basements. Little thin whiffs of breezes, very slight and searching, flit across, and shiver as they pass from Apennine to plain. The slowly moving population—women in veils, men winter-mantled—pass to and fro between the buildings and the grey immensity of sky. Bells ring. The bugles of the soldiers blow retreat in convents turned to barracks. Young men roam the streets beneath, singing May songs. Far, far away upon the plain, red through the vitreous moonlight ringed with thundery gauze, fires of unnamed castelli smoulder. As we lean from ledges eighty feet in height, gas vies with moon in chequering illuminations on the ancient walls; Etruscan mouldings, Roman letters, high-piled hovels, suburban world-old dwellings plastered like martins' nests against the masonry.

Sunlight adds more of detail to this scene. To the right of Subasio, where the passes go from Foligno towards Urbino and Ancona, heavy masses of thunder-cloud hang every day; but the plain and hill-buttresses are clear transparent blueness. First comes Assisi, with S. M. degli Angeli below; then Spello; then Foligno; then Trevi; and, far away, Spoleto; with, reared against those misty battlements, the village height of Montefalco—the "ringhiera dell'Umbria," as they call it in this country. By daylight, the snow on yonder peaks is clearly visible, where the Monti della Sibilla tower up above the sources of the Nera and Velino from frigid wastes of Norcia. The lower ranges seem as though painted, in films of airiest and palest azure, upon china; and then comes the broad, green champaign, flecked with villages and farms. Just at the basement of Perugia winds Tiber, through sallows and grey poplar-trees, spanned by ancient arches of red [Pg 122] brick, and guarded here and there by castellated towers. The mills beneath their dams and weirs are just as Raphael drew them; and the feeling of air and space reminds one, on each coign of vantage, of some Umbrian picture. Every hedgerow is hoary with May-bloom and honeysuckle.

The oaks hang out their golden-dusted tassels. Wayside shrines are decked with laburnum boughs and iris blossoms plucked from the copse-woods, and where spires of purple and pink orchis variegate the thin, fine grass. The land waves far and wide with young corn, emerald green beneath the olive-trees, which take upon their underfoliage tints reflected from this verdure or red tones from the naked earth. A fine race of *contadini*, with large, heroically-graceful forms, and beautiful dark eyes and noble faces, move about this garden, intent on ancient, easy tillage of the kind Saturnian soil.

La Magione.

On the road from Perugia to Cortona, the first stage ends at La Magione, a high hill-village commanding the passage from the Umbrian champaign to the lake of Thrasymene. It has a grim square fortalice above it, now in ruins, and a stately castle to the south-east, built about the time of Braccio. Here took place that famous diet of Cesare Borgia's enemies, when the son of Alexander VI. was threatening Bologna with his arms, and bidding fair to make himself supreme tyrant of Italy in 1502. It was the policy of Cesare to fortify himself by reducing the fiefs of the Church to submission, and by rooting out the dynasties which had acquired a sort of tyranny in [Pg 123] Papal cities. The Varani of Camerino and the Manfredi of Faenza had been already extirpated. There was only too good reason to believe that the turn of the Vitelli at Città di Castello, of the Baglioni at Perugia, and of the Bentivogli at Bologna would come next. Pandolfo Petrucci at Siena, surrounded on all sides by Cesare's conquests, and specially menaced by the fortification of Piombino, felt himself in danger. The great house of the Orsini, who swayed a large part of the Patrimony of S. Peter's, and were closely allied to the Vitelli, had even graver cause for anxiety. But such was the system of Italian warfare, that nearly all these noble families lived by the profession of arms, and most of them were in the pay of Cesare. When, therefore, the conspirators met at La Magione, they were plotting against a man whose money they had taken, and whom they had hitherto aided in his career of fraud and spoliation.

The diet consisted of the Cardinal Orsini, an avowed antagonist of Alexander VI.; his brother Paolo, the chieftain of the clan; Vitellozzo Vitelli, lord of Città di Castello; Gian-Paolo Baglioni, made undisputed master of Perugia by the recent failure of his cousin Grifonetto's treason; Oliverotto, who had just acquired the March of Fermo by the murder of his uncle Giovanni da Fogliani; Ermes Bentivoglio, the heir of Bologna; and Antonio da Venafro, the secretary of Pandolfo Petrucci. These men vowed hostility on the basis of common injuries and common fear against the Borgia. But they were for the most part stained themselves with crime, and dared not trust each other, and could not gain the confidence of any respectable power in Italy except the [Pg 124] exiled Duke of Urbino. Procrastination was the first weapon used by the wily Cesare, who trusted that time would sow among his rebel captains suspicion and dissension. He next made overtures to the leaders separately, and so far succeeded in his perfidious policy as to draw Vitellezzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, Paolo Orsini, and Francesco Orsini, Duke of Gravina, into his nets at Sinigaglia. Under pretext of fair conference and equitable settlement of disputed claims, he possessed himself of their persons, and had them strangled—two upon December 31, and two upon January 18, 1503. Of all Cesare's actions, this was the most splendid for its successful combination of sagacity and policy in the hour of peril, of persuasive diplomacy, and of ruthless decision when the time to strike his blow arrived.

Cortona.

After leaving La Magione, the road descends upon the Lake of Thrasymene through oak-woods full of nightingales. The Lake lay basking, leaden-coloured, smooth and waveless, under a misty, rain-charged, sun-irradiated sky. At Passignano, close beside its shore, we stopped for mid-day. This is a little fishing village of very poor people, who live entirely by labour on the waters. They showed us huge eels coiled in tanks, and some fine specimens of the silver carp—Reina del Lago. It was off one of the eels that we made our lunch; and taken, as he was, alive from his cool lodging, he furnished a series of dishes fit for a king.

Climbing the hill of Cortona seemed a quite interminable business. It poured a deluge. Our horses were tired, and one lean donkey, who, after much trouble, was produced from a [Pg 125] farmhouse and yoked in front of them, rendered but little assistance.

Next day we duly saw the Muse and Lamp in the Museo, the Fra Angelicos, and all the Signorellis. One cannot help thinking that too much fuss is made nowadays about works of art—running after them for their own sakes, exaggerating their importance, and detaching them as objects of study, instead of taking them with sympathy and carelessness as pleasant or instructive adjuncts to our actual life. Artists, historians of art, and critics are forced to isolate pictures; and it is of profit to their souls to do so. But simple folk, who have no æsthetic vocation, whether
reative or critical, suffer more than is good for them by compliance
with mere fashion. Sooner or later we shall return to the spirit of the ages which produced these pictures, and which regarded them with less of an industrious bewilderment than they evoke at present.

I am far indeed from wishing to decry art, the study of art, or the benefits to be derived from its intelligent enjoyment. I only mean to suggest that we go the wrong way to work at present in this

matter. Picture and sculpture galleries accustom us to the separation of art from life. Our methods of studying art, making a beginning of art-study while travelling, tend to perpetuate this separation. It is only on reflection, after long experience, that we come to perceive that the most fruitful moments in our art education have been casual and unsought, in quaint nooks and unexpected places, where nature, art, and life are happily blent.

The Palace of the Commune at Cortona is interesting because of the shields of Florentine governors, sculptured on blocks of grey stone, and inserted in its outer walls—Peruzzi, Albizzi, Strozzi, Salviati, among the more ancient—de' Medici at a later epoch. The revolutions in the Republic of Florence may be read by a herald from these coats of arms and the dates beneath them. [Pg 126]

The landscape of this Tuscan highland satisfies me more and more with sense of breadth and beauty. From S. Margherita above the town the prospect is immense and wonderful and wild—up into those brown, forbidding mountains; down to the vast plain; and over to the cities of Chiusi, Montepulciano, and Foiano. The jewel of the view is Trasimeno, a silvery shield encased with serried hills, and set upon one corner of the scene, like a precious thing apart and meant for separate contemplation. There is something in the singularity and circumscribed completeness of the mountain-girded lake, diminished by distance, which would have attracted Lionardo da Vinci's pencil, had he seen it.

Cortona seems desperately poor, and the beggars are intolerable. One little blind boy, led by his brother, both frightfully ugly and ragged urchins, pursued us all over the city, incessantly whining "Signore! Padrone!" It was only on the threshold of the inn that I ventured to give them a few coppers, for I knew well that any public beneficence would raise the whole swarm of the begging population round us. Sitting later in the day upon the piazza of S. Domenico, I saw the same blind boy taken by his brother to play. The game consisted in the little creature throwing his arms about the trunk of a big tree, and running round and round it, clasping it. This seemed to make him quite inexpressibly happy. His face lit up and beamed with that inner beatitude blind people show—a kind of rapture shining over it, as though nothing could be more altogether delightful. This little boy had the small pox at eight months, and has never been able to see since. He looks sturdy, and may live to be of any age—doomed always, is that possible, to beg? [Pg 127]

Chiusi.

What more enjoyable dinner can be imagined than a flask of excellent Montepulciano, a well-cooked steak, and a little goat's cheese in the inn of the Leone d'Oro at Chiusi? The windows are open, and the sun is setting. Monte Cetona bounds the view to the right, and the wooded hills of Città della Pieve to the left. The deep green dimpled valley goes stretching away toward Orvieto; and at its end a purple mountain mass, distinct and solitary, which may peradventure be Soracte! The near country is broken into undulating hills, forested with fine olives and oaks; and the composition of the landscape, with its crowning villages, is worthy of a background to an Umbrian picture. The breadth and depth and quiet which those painters loved, the space of lucid sky, the suggestion of winding waters in verdant fields, all are here. The evening is beautiful—golden light streaming softly from behind us on this prospect, and gradually mellowing to violet and blue with stars above.

At Chiusi we visited several Etruscan tombs, and saw their red and black scrawled pictures. One of the sepulchres was a well-jointed vault of stone with no wall-paintings. The rest had been scooped out of the living tufa. This was the excuse for some pleasant hours spent in walking and driving through the country. Chiusi means for me the mingling of grey olives and green oaks in limpid sunlight; deep leafy lanes; warm sandstone banks; copses with nightingales and cyclamens and cuckoos; glimpses of a silvery lake; blue shadowy distances; the bristling ridge of Monte Cetona; the conical towers, Becca di Questo and Becca di Quello, over against each other on the borders; ways winding among hedgerows like some bit of England in June, but not so full of flowers. It means all this, I fear, for me far more than theories about Lars Porsena and Etruscan ethnology. [Pg 128]

Gubbio.

Gubbio ranks among the most ancient of Italian hill-towns. With its back set firm against the spine of central Apennines, and piled, house over house, upon the rising slope, it commands a rich tract of upland champaign, bounded southward toward Perugia and Foligno by peaked and rolling ridges. This amphitheatre, which forms its source of wealth and independence, is admirably protected by a chain of natural defences; and Gubbio wears a singularly old-world aspect of antiquity and isolation. Houses climb right to the crests of gaunt bare peaks; and the brown mediæval walls with square towers which protected them upon the mountain side, following the inequalities of the ground, are still a marked feature in the landscape. It is a town of steep streets and staircases, with quaintly framed prospects, and solemn vistas opening at every turn across the lowland. One of these views might be selected for especial notice. In front, irregular buildings losing themselves in country as they straggle by the roadside; then the open post-road with a cypress to the right; afterwards, the rich green fields, and on a bit of rising ground an ancient farmhouse with its brown dependencies; lastly, the blue hills above Fossato, and far away a wrack of tumbling clouds. All this enclosed by the heavy archway of the Porta [Pg 129]

Romana, where sunlight and shadow chequer the mellow tones of a dim fresco, indistinct with age, but beautiful.

Gubbio has not greatly altered since the middle ages. But poor people are now living in the palaces of noblemen and merchants. These new inhabitants have walled up the fair arched windows and slender portals of the ancient dwellers, spoiling the beauty of the streets without materially changing the architectural masses. In that witching hour when the Italian sunset has faded, and a solemn grey replaces the glowing tones of daffodil and rose, it is not difficult, here dreaming by oneself alone, to picture the old noble life—the ladies moving along those open loggias, the young men in plumed caps and curling hair with one foot on those doorsteps, the knights in armour and the sumpter mules and red-robed Cardinals defiling through those gates into the courts within. The modern bricks and mortar with which that picturesque scene has been overlaid, the ugly oblong windows and bright green shutters which now interrupt the flowing lines of arch and gallery; these disappear beneath the fine remembered touch of a sonnet sung by Folgore, when still the Parties had their day, and this deserted city was the centre of great aims and throbbing aspirations. [Pg 130]

The names of the chief buildings in Gubbio are strongly suggestive of the middle ages. They abut upon a Piazza de' Signori. One of them, the Palazzo del Municipio, is a shapeless unfinished block of masonry. It is here that the Eugubine tables, plates of brass with Umbrian and Roman incised characters, are shown. The Palazzo de' Consoli has higher architectural qualities, and is indeed unique among Italian palaces for the combination of massiveness with lightness in a situation of unprecedented boldness. Rising from enormous substructures morticed into the solid hill-side, it rears its vast rectangular bulk to a giddy height above the town; airy loggias imposed on great forbidding masses of brown stone, shooting aloft into a light aërial tower. The empty halls inside are of fair proportions and a noble size, and the views from the open colonnades in all directions fascinate. But the final impression made by the building is one of square, tranquil, massive strength—perpetuity embodied in masonry—force suggesting facility by daring and successful addition of elegance to hugeness. Vast as it is, this pile is not forbidding, as a similarly weighty structure in the North would be. The fine quality of the stone and the delicate though simple mouldings of the windows give it an Italian grace.

These public palaces belong to the age of the Communes, when Gubbio was a free town, with a policy of its own, and an important part to play in the internecine struggles of Pope and Empire, Guelf and Ghibelline. The ruined, deserted, degraded Palazzo Ducale reminds us of the advent of the despots. It has been stripped of all its tarsia-work and sculpture. Only here and there a Fe. D., with the cupping-glass of Federigo di Montefeltro, remains to show that Gubbio once became the fairest fief of the Urbino duchy. S. Ubaldo, who gave his name to this duke's son, was the patron of Gubbio, and to him the cathedral is dedicated—one low enormous vault, like a cellar or feudal banqueting hall, roofed with a succession of solid Gothic arches. This strange old church, and the House of Canons, buttressed on the hill beside it, have suffered less from modernisation than most buildings in Gubbio. The latter, in particular, helps one to understand what this city of grave palazzi must have been, and how the mere opening of old doors and windows would restore it to its primitive appearance. The House of the Canons has, in fact, not yet been given over to the use of middle-class and proletariate. [Pg 131]

At the end of a day in Gubbio, it is pleasant to take our ease in the primitive hostelry, at the back of which foams a mountain-torrent, rushing downward from the Apennines. The Gubbio wine is very fragrant, and of a rich ruby colour. Those to whom the tints of wine and jewels give a pleasure not entirely childish, will take delight in its specific blending of tawny hues with rose. They serve the table still, at Gubbio, after the antique Italian fashion, covering it with a cream-coloured linen cloth bordered with coarse lace—the creases of the press, the scent of old herbs from the wardrobe, are still upon it—and the board is set with shallow dishes of warm, white earthenware, basket-worked in open lattice at the edge, which contain little separate messes of meat, vegetables, cheese, and comfits. The wine stands in strange, slender phials of smooth glass, with stoppers; and the amber-coloured bread lies in fair round loaves upon the cloth. Dining thus is like sitting down to the supper at Emmaus, in some picture of Gian Bellini or of Masolino. The very bareness of the room—its open rafters, plastered walls, primitive settees, and red-brick floor, on which a dog sits waiting for a bone—enhances the impression of artistic delicacy in the table. [Pg 132]

From Gubbio to Fano.

The road from Gubbio, immediately after leaving the city, enters a narrow Alpine ravine, where a thin stream dashes over dark, red rocks, and pendent saxifrages wave to the winds. The carriage in which we travelled at the end of May, one morning, had two horses, which our driver soon supplemented with a couple of white oxen. Slowly and toilsomely we ascended between the flanks of barren hills—gaunt masses of crimson and grey crag, clothed at their summits with short turf and scanty pasture. The pass leads first to the little town of Scheggia, and is called the Monte Calvo, or bald mountain. At Scheggia, it joins the great Flaminian Way, or North road of the Roman armies. At the top there is a fine view over the conical hills that dominate Gubbio, and, far away, to noble mountains above the Furlo and the Foligno line of railway to Ancona. Range rises over range, crossing at unexpected angles, breaking into sudden precipices, and stretching out long, exquisitely-modelled outlines, as only Apennines can do, in silvery sobriety of colours toned by clearest air. Every square piece of this austere, wild landscape forms a varied [Pg 133]

picture, whereof the composition is due to subtle arrangements of lines always delicate; and these lines seem somehow to have been determined in their beauty by the vast antiquity of the mountain system, as though they all had taken time to choose their place and wear down into harmony. The effect of tempered sadness was heightened for us by stormy lights and dun clouds, high in air, rolling vapours and flying shadows, over all the prospect, tinted in ethereal grisaille.

After Scheggia, one enters a land of meadow and oak-trees. This is the sacred central tract of Jupiter Apenninus, whose fane—

> Delubra Jovis saxoque minantes
> Apenninigenis cultæ pastoribus aræ

—once rose behind us on the bald Iguvian summits. A second little pass leads from this region to the Adriatic side of the Italian water-shed, and the road now follows the Barano downward toward the sea. The valley is fairly green with woods, where misletoe may here and there be seen on boughs of oak, and rich with cornfields. Cagli is the chief town of the district, and here they show one of the best pictures left to us by Raphael's father, Giovanni Santi. It is a Madonna, attended by S. Peter, S. Francis, S. Dominic, S. John, and two angels. One of the angels is traditionally supposed to have been painted from the boy Raphael, and the face has something which reminds us of his portraits. The whole composition, excellent in modelling, harmonious in grouping, soberly but strongly coloured, with a peculiar blending of dignity and sweetness, grace [Pg 134] and vigour, makes one wonder why Santi thought it necessary to send his son from his own workshop to study under Perugino. He was himself a master of his art, and this, perhaps the most agreeable of his paintings, has a masculine sincerity which is absent from at least the later works of Perugino.

Some miles beyond Cagli, the real pass of the Furlo begins. It owes its name to a narrow tunnel bored by Vespasian in the solid rock, where limestone crags descend on the Barano. The Romans called this gallery Petra Pertusa, or Intercisa, or more familiarly Forulus, whence comes the modern name. Indeed, the stations on the old Flaminian Way are still well marked by Latin designations; for Cagli is the ancient Calles, and Fossombrone is Forum Sempronii, and Fano the Fanum Fortunæ. Vespasian commemorated this early achievement in engineering by an inscription carved on the living stone, which still remains; and Claudian, when he sang the journey of his Emperor Honorius from Rimini to Rome, speaks thus of what was even then an object of astonishment to travellers:—

> Lætior hinc fano recipit fortuna vetusto,
> Despiciturque vagus prærupta valle Metaurus,
> Qua mons arte patens vivo se perforat arcu
> Admittitque viam sectæ per viscera rupis.

The Forulus itself may now be matched, on any Alpine pass, by several tunnels of far mightier dimensions; for it is narrow, and does not extend more than 126 feet in length. But it occupies a fine position at the end of a really imposing ravine. The whole Furlo Pass might, without too much exaggeration, be described as a kind of Cheddar on the scale of the Via Mala. The [Pg 135] limestone rocks, which rise on either hand above the gorge to an enormous height, are noble in form and solemn, like a succession of gigantic portals, with stupendous flanking obelisks and pyramids. Some of these crag-masses rival the fantastic cliffs of Capri, and all consist of that southern mountain limestone which changes from pale yellow to blue grey and dusky orange. A river roars precipitately through the pass, and the road-sides wave with many sorts of campanulas—a profusion of azure and purple bells upon the hard white stone. Of Roman remains there is still enough (in the way of Roman bridges and bits of broken masonry) to please an antiquary's eye. But the lover of nature will dwell chiefly on the picturesque qualities of this historic gorge, so alien to the general character of Italian scenery, and yet so remote from anything to which Swiss travelling accustoms one.

The Furlo breaks out into a richer land of mighty oaks and waving cornfields, a fat pastoral country, not unlike Devonshire in detail, with green uplands, and wild-rose tangled hedgerows, and much running water, and abundance of summer flowers. At a point above Fossombrone, the Barano joins the Metauro, and here one has a glimpse of far-away Urbino, high upon its mountain eyrie. It is so rare, in spite of immemorial belief, to find in Italy a wilderness of wild flowers, that I feel inclined to make a list of those I saw from our carriage windows as we rolled down lazily along the road to Fossombrone. Broom, and cytisus, and hawthorn mingled with roses, gladiolus, and saintfoil. There were orchises, and clematis, and privet, and wild-vine, vetches of all hues, red poppies, sky-blue cornflowers, and lilac pimpernel. In the rougher hedges, dogwood, [Pg 136] honeysuckle, pyracanth, and acacia made a network of white bloom and blushes. Milk-worts of all bright and tender tints combined with borage, iris, hawkweeds, harebells, crimson clover, thyme, red snapdragon, golden asters, and dreamy love-in-a-mist, to weave a marvellous carpet such as the looms of Shiraz or of Cashmere never spread. Rarely have I gazed on Flora in such riot, such luxuriance, such self-abandonment to joy. The air was filled with fragrances. Songs of cuckoos and nightingales echoed from the copses on the hill-sides. The sun was out, and dancing over all the landscape.

After all this, Fano was very restful in the quiet sunset. It has a sandy stretch of shore, on which the long, green-yellow rollers of the Adriatic broke into creamy foam, beneath the waning saffron light over Pesaro and the rosy rising of a full moon. This Adriatic sea carries an English mind home to many a little watering-place upon our coast. In colour and the shape of waves it resembles our Channel.

The seashore is Fano's great attraction; but the town has many churches, and some creditable pictures, as well as Roman antiquities. Giovanni Santi may here be seen almost as well as at Cagli; and of Perugino there is one truly magnificent altar-piece—lunette, great centre panel, and predella—dusty in its present condition, but splendidly painted, and happily not yet restored or cleaned. It is worth journeying to Fano to see this. Still better would the journey be worth the traveller's while if he could be sure to witness such a game of *Pallone* as we chanced upon in the Via dell'Arco di Augusto—lads and grown-men, tightly girt, in shirt sleeves, driving the great ball aloft into the air with cunning bias and calculation of projecting house-eaves. I do not understand [Pg 137] the game; but it was clearly played something after the manner of our football, that is to say, with sides, and front and back players so arranged as to cover the greatest number of angles of incidence on either wall.

Fano still remembers that it is the Fane of Fortune. On the fountain in the market-place stands a bronze Fortuna, slim and airy, offering her veil to catch the wind. May she long shower health and prosperity upon the modern watering-place of which she is the patron saint!

FOOTNOTES:

[C] There is in reality no doubt or problem about this Saint Clair. She was born in 1275, and joined the Augustinian Sisterhood, dying young, in 1308, as Abbess of her convent. Continual and impassioned meditation on the Passion of our Lord impressed her heart with the signs of His suffering which have been described above. I owe this note to the kindness of an anonymous correspondent, whom I here thank.

[Pg 138]

THE PALACE OF URBINO.

I.

At Rimini, one spring, the impulse came upon my wife and me to make our way across San Marino to Urbino. In the Piazza, called apocryphally after Julius Cæsar, I found a proper *vetturino*, with a good carriage and two indefatigable horses. He was a splendid fellow, and bore a great historic name, as I discovered when our bargain was completed. "What are you called?" I asked him. "*Filippo Visconti, per servirla!*" was the prompt reply. Brimming over with the darkest memories of the Italian Renaissance, I hesitated when I heard this answer. The associations seemed too ominous. And yet the man himself was so attractive—tall, stalwart, and well-looking—no feature of his face or limb of his athletic form recalling the gross tyrant who concealed worse than Caligula's ugliness from sight in secret chambers—that I shook this preconception from my mind. As it turned out, Filippo Visconti had nothing in common with his infamous namesake but the name. On a long and trying journey, he showed neither sullen nor yet ferocious tempers; nor, at the end of it, did he attempt by any masterstroke of craft to wheedle from me more than his fair pay; but took the meerschaum pipe I gave him for a keepsake, with the frank good-will of an accomplished gentleman. The only exhibition of his hot Italian blood which I remember did his [Pg 139] humanity credit. While we were ascending a steep hillside, he jumped from his box to thrash a ruffian by the roadside for brutal treatment to a little boy. He broke his whip, it is true, in this encounter; risked a dangerous quarrel; and left his carriage, with myself and wife inside it, to the mercy of his horses in a somewhat perilous position. But when he came back, hot and glowing, from this deed of justice, I could only applaud his zeal.

An Italian of this type, handsome as an antique statue, with the refinement of a modern gentleman and that intelligence which is innate in a race of immemorial culture, is a fascinating being. He may be absolutely ignorant in all book-learning. He may be as ignorant as a Bersagliere from Montalcino with whom I once conversed at Rimini, who gravely said that he could walk in three months to North America, and thought of doing it when his term of service was accomplished. But he will display, as this young soldier did, a grace and ease of address which are rare in London drawing-rooms; and by his shrewd remarks upon the cities he has visited, will show that he possesses a fine natural taste for things of beauty. The speech of such men, drawn from the common stock of the Italian people, is seasoned with proverbial sayings, the wisdom of centuries condensed in a few nervous words. When emotion fires their brain, they break into spontaneous eloquence, or suggest the motive of a poem by phrases pregnant with imagery.

For the first stage of the journey out of Rimini, Filippo's two horses sufficed. The road led almost straight across the level between quickset hedges in white bloom. But when we reached [Pg 140] the long steep hill which ascends to San Marino, the inevitable oxen were called out, and we toiled upwards leisurely through cornfields bright with red anemones and sweet narcissus. At this point pomegranate hedges replaced the May-thorns of the plain. In course of time our *bovi* brought us to the Borgo, or lower town, whence there is a further ascent of seven hundred feet to the topmost hawk's-nest or acropolis of the republic. These we climbed on foot, watching the view expand around us and beneath. Crags of limestone here break down abruptly to the rolling hills, which go to lose themselves in field and shore. Misty reaches of the Adriatic close the world

to eastward. Cesena, Rimini, Verucchio, and countless hill-set villages, each isolated on its tract of verdure conquered from the stern grey soil, define the points where Montefeltri wrestled with Malatestas in long bygone years. Around are marly mountain-flanks in wrinkles and gnarled convolutions like some giant's brain, furrowed by rivers crawling through dry wasteful beds of shingle. Interminable ranges of gaunt Apennines stretch, tier by tier, beyond; and over all this landscape, a grey-green mist of rising crops and new-fledged oak-trees lies like a veil upon the nakedness of Nature's ruins.

Nothing in Europe conveys a more striking sense of geological antiquity than such a prospect. The denudation and abrasion of innumerable ages, wrought by slow persistent action of weather and water on an upheaved mountain mass, are here made visible. Every wave in that vast sea of hills, every furrow in their worn flanks, tells its tale of a continuous corrosion still in progress. The dominant impression is one of melancholy. We forget how Romans, countermarching [Pg 141] Carthaginians, trod the land beneath us. The marvel of San Marino, retaining independence through the drums and tramplings of the last seven centuries, is swallowed in a deeper sense of wonder. We turn instinctively in thought to Leopardi's musings on man's destiny at war with unknown nature-forces and malignant rulers of the universe.

> Omai disprezza
> Te, la natura, il brutto
> Poter che, ascoso, a comun danno impera,
> E l'infinita vanità dell tutto.

And then, straining our eyes southward, we sweep the dim blue distance for Recanati, and remember that the poet of modern despair and discouragement was reared in even such a scene as this.

The town of San Marino is grey, narrow-streeted, simple; with a great, new, decent, Greek-porticoed cathedral, dedicated to the eponymous saint. A certain austerity defines it from more picturesque hill-cities with a less uniform history. There is a marble statue of S. Marino in the choir of his church; and in his cell is shown the stone bed and pillow on which he took austere repose. One narrow window near the saint's abode commands a proud but melancholy landscape of distant hills and seaboard. To this, the great absorbing charm of San Marino, our eyes instinctively, recurrently, take flight. It is a landscape which by variety and beauty thralls attention, but which by its interminable sameness might grow almost overpowering. There is no relief. The gladness shed upon far humbler Northern lands in May is ever absent here. The German word *Gemüthlichkeit*, the English phrase "a home of ancient peace," are here alike by art [Pg 142] and nature untranslated into visibilities. And yet (as we who gaze upon it thus are fain to think) if peradventure the intolerable *ennui* of this panorama should drive a citizen of San Marino into outlands, the same view would haunt him whithersoever he went—the swallows of his native eyrie would shrill through his sleep—he would yearn to breathe its fine keen air in winter, and to watch its iris-hedges deck themselves with blue in spring;—like Virgil's hero, dying, he would think of San Marino: *Aspicit, et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos*. Even a passing stranger may feel the mingled fascination and oppression of this prospect—the monotony which maddens, the charm which at a distance grows upon the mind, environing it with memories.

Descending to the Borgo, we found that Filippo Visconti had ordered a luncheon of excellent white bread, pigeons, and omelette, with the best red muscat wine I ever drank, unless the sharp air of the hills deceived my appetite. An Italian history of San Marino, including its statutes, in three volumes, furnished intellectual food. But I confess to having learned from these pages little else than this: first, that the survival of the Commonwealth through all phases of European politics had been semi-miraculous; secondly, that the most eminent San Marinesi had been lawyers. It is possible on a hasty deduction from these two propositions (to which, however, I am far from wishing to commit myself), that the latter is a sufficient explanation of the former.

From San Marino the road plunges at a break-neck pace. We are now in the true Feltrian highlands, whence the Counts of Montefeltro issued in the twelfth century. Yonder eyrie is San [Pg 143] Leo, which formed the key of entrance to the duchy of Urbino in campaigns fought many hundred years ago. Perched on the crest of a precipitous rock, this fortress looks as though it might defy all enemies but famine. And yet San Leo was taken and re-taken by strategy and fraud, when Montefeltro, Borgia, Malatesta, Rovere, contended for dominion in these valleys. Yonder is Sta. Agata, the village to which Guidobaldo fled by night when Valentino drove him from his dukedom. A little farther towers Carpegna, where one branch of the Montefeltro house maintained a countship through seven centuries, and only sold their fief to Rome in 1815. Monte Coppiolo lies behind, Pietra Rubia in front: two other eagle's-nests of the same brood. What a road it is! It beats the tracks on Exmoor. The uphill and downhill of Devonshire scorns compromise or mitigation by *détour* and zigzag. But here geography is on a scale so far more vast, and the roadway is so far worse metalled than with us in England—knotty masses of talc and nodes of sandstone cropping up at dangerous turnings—that only Dante's words describe the journey:—

> Vassi in Sanleo, e discendesi in Noli,
> Montasi su Bismantova in cacume
> Con esso i piè; ma qui convien ch'uom voli.

Of a truth, our horses seemed rather to fly than scramble up and down these rugged precipices; Visconti cheerily animating them with the brave spirit that was in him, and lending them his wary driver's help of hand and voice at need.

We were soon upon a cornice-road between the mountains and the Adriatic: following the [Pg 144]
curves of gulch and cleft ravine: winding round ruined castles set on points of vantage; the sea-line high above their grass-grown battlements, the shadow-dappled champaign girdling their bastions mortised on the naked rock. Except for the blue lights across the distance, and the ever-present sea, these earthy Apennines would be too grim. Infinite air and this spare veil of spring-tide greenery on field and forest soothe their sternness. Two rivers, swollen by late rains, had to be forded. Through one of these, the Foglia, bare-legged peasants led the way. The horses waded to their bellies in the tawny water. Then more hills and vales; green nooks with rippling corn-crops; secular oaks attired in golden leafage. The clear afternoon air rang with the voices of a thousand larks overhead. The whole world seemed quivering with light and delicate ethereal sound. And yet my mind turned irresistibly to thoughts of war, violence, and pillage. How often has this intermediate land been fought over by Montefeltro and Brancaleoni, by Borgia and Malatesta, by Medici and Della Rovere! Its *contadini* are robust men, almost statuesque in build, and beautiful of feature. No wonder that the Princes of Urbino, with such materials to draw from, sold their service and their troops to Florence, Rome, S. Mark, and Milan. The bearing of these peasants is still soldierly and proud. Yet they are not sullen or forbidding like the Sicilians, whose habits of life, for the rest, much resemble theirs. The villages, there as here, are few and far between, perched high on rocks, from which the folk descend to till the ground and reap the harvest. But the southern *brusquerie* and brutality are absent from this district. The men have [Pg 145]
something of the dignity and slow-eyed mildness of their own huge oxen. As evening fell, more solemn Apennines upreared themselves to southward. The Monte d'Asdrubale, Monte Nerone, and Monte Catria hove into sight. At last, when light was dim, a tower rose above the neighbouring ridge, a broken outline of some city barred the sky-line. Urbino stood before us. Our long day's march was at an end.

The sunset was almost spent, and a four days' moon hung above the western Apennines, when we took our first view of the palace. It is a fancy-thralling work of wonder seen in that dim twilight; like some castle reared by Atlante's magic for imprisonment of Ruggiero, or palace sought in fairyland by Astolf winding his enchanted horn. Where shall we find its like, combining, as it does, the buttressed battlemented bulk of mediæval strongholds with the airy balconies, suspended gardens, and fantastic turrets of Italian pleasure-houses? This unique blending of the feudal past with the Renaissance spirit of the time when it was built, connects it with the art of Ariosto—or more exactly with Boiardo's epic. Duke Federigo planned his palace at Urbino just at the moment when the Count of Scandiano had began to chaunt his lays of Roland in the Castle of Ferrara. Chivalry, transmuted by the Italian genius into something fanciful and quaint, survived as a frail work of art. The men-at-arms of the Condottieri still glittered in gilded hauberks. Their helmets waved with plumes and bizarre crests. Their surcoats blazed with heraldries; their velvet caps with medals bearing legendary emblems. The pomp and circumstance of feudal war had not
yet yielded to the cannon of the Gascon or the Switzer's pike. The fatal age of foreign invasions [Pg 146]
had not begun for Italy. Within a few years Charles VIII.'s holiday excursion would reveal the internal rottenness and weakness of her rival states, and the peninsula for half a century to come would be drenched in the blood of Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards, fighting for her cities as their prey. But now Lorenzo de' Medici was still alive. The famous policy which bears his name held Italy suspended for a golden time in false tranquillity and independence. The princes who shared his culture and his love of art were gradually passing into modern noblemen, abandoning the savage feuds and passions of more virile centuries, yielding to luxury and scholarly enjoyments. The castles were becoming courts, and despotisms won by force were settling into dynasties.

It was just at this epoch that Duke Federigo built his castle at Urbino. One of the ablest and wealthiest Condottieri of his time, one of the best instructed and humanest of Italian princes, he combined in himself the qualities which mark that period of transition. And these he impressed upon his dwelling-house, which looks backward to the mediæval fortalice and forward to the modern palace. This makes it the just embodiment in architecture of Italian romance, the perfect analogue of the *Orlando Innamorato*. By comparing it with the castle of the Estes at Ferrara and the Palazzo del Te of the Gonzagas at Mantua, we place it in its right position between mediæval and Renaissance Italy, between the age when principalities arose upon the ruins of commercial independence and the age when they became dynastic under Spain.

The exigencies of the ground at his disposal forced Federigo to give the building an irregular [Pg 147]
outline. The fine façade, with its embayed *logge* and flanking turrets, is placed too close upon the city ramparts for its due effect. We are obliged to cross the deep ravine which separates it from a lower quarter of the town, and take our station near the Oratory of S. Giovanni Battista, before we can appreciate the beauty of its design, or the boldness of the group it forms with the cathedral dome and tower and the square masses of numerous out-buildings. Yet this peculiar position of the palace, though baffling to a close observer of its details, is one of singular advantage to the inhabitants. Set on the verge of Urbino's towering eminence, it fronts a wave-tossed sea of vales and mountain summits toward the rising and the setting sun. There is nothing but illimitable air between the terraces and loggias of the Duchess's apartments and the spreading pyramid of Monte Catria.

A nobler scene is nowhere swept from palace windows than this, which Castiglione touched in a memorable passage at the end of his *Cortegiano*. To one who in our day visits Urbino, it is singular how the slight indications of this sketch, as in some silhouette, bring back the antique life, and link the present with the past—a hint, perhaps, for reticence in our descriptions. The gentlemen and ladies of the court had spent a summer night in long debate on love, rising to the height of mystical Platonic rapture on the lips of Bembo, when one of them exclaimed, "The day

has broken!" "He pointed to the light which was beginning to enter by the fissures of the windows. Whereupon we flung the casements wide upon that side of the palace which looks [Pg 148] toward the high peak of Monte Catria, and saw that a fair dawn of rosy hue was born already in the eastern skies, and all the stars had vanished except the sweet regent of the heaven of Venus, who holds the borderlands of day and night; and from her sphere it seemed as though a gentle wind were breathing, filling the air with eager freshness, and waking among the numerous woods upon the neighbouring hills the sweet-toned symphonies of joyous birds."

II.

The House of Montefeltro rose into importance early in the twelfth century. Frederick Barbarossa erected their fief into a county in 1160. Supported by imperial favour, they began to exercise an undefined authority over the district, which they afterwards converted into a duchy. But, though Ghibelline for several generations, the Montefeltri were too near neighbours of the Papal power to free themselves from ecclesiastical vassalage. Therefore in 1216 they sought and obtained the title of Vicars of the Church. Urbino acknowledged them as semi-despots in their double capacity of Imperial and Papal deputies. Cagli and Gubbio followed in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth, Castel Durante was acquired from the Brancaleoni by warfare, and Fossombrone from the Malatestas by purchase. Numerous fiefs and villages fell into their hands upon the borders of Rimini in the course of a continued struggle with the House of Malatesta: and when Fano and Pesaro were added at the opening of the sixteenth century, the domain over which they ruled was a compact territory, some forty miles square, between the Adriatic and [Pg 149] Apennines. From the close of the thirteenth century they bore the title of Counts of Urbino. The famous Conte Guido, whom Dante placed among the fraudulent in hell, supported the honours of the house and increased its power by his political action, at this epoch. But it was not until the year 1443 that the Montefeltri acquired their ducal title. This was conferred by Eugenius IV. upon Oddantonio, over whose alleged crimes and indubitable assassination a veil of mystery still hangs. He was the son of Count Guidantonio, and at his death the Montefeltri of Urbino were extinct in the legitimate line. A natural son of Guidantonio had been, however, recognised in his father's lifetime, and married to Gentile, heiress of Mercatello. This was Federigo, a youth of great promise, who succeeded his half-brother in 1444 as Count of Urbino. It was not until 1474 that the ducal title was revived for him.

Duke Frederick was a prince remarkable among Italian despots for private virtues and sober use of his hereditary power. He spent his youth at Mantua, in that famous school of Vittorino da Feltre, where the sons and daughters of the first Italian nobility received a model education in humanities, good manners, and gentle physical accomplishments. More than any of his fellow-students Frederick profited by this rare scholar's discipline. On leaving school he adopted the profession of arms, as it was then practised, and joined the troop of the Condottiere Niccolò Piccinino. Young men of his own rank, especially the younger sons and bastards of ruling families, sought military service under captains of adventure. If they succeeded they were sure to [Pg 150] make money. The coffers of the Church and the republics lay open to their not too scrupulous hands; the wealth of Milan and Naples was squandered on them in retaining-fees and salaries for active service. There was always the further possibility of placing a coronet upon their brows before they died, if haply they should wrest a town from their employers, or obtain the cession of a province from a needy Pope. The neighbours of the Montefeltri in Umbria, Romagna, and the Marches of Ancona were all of them Condottieri. Malatestas of Rimini and Pesaro, Vitelli of Città di Castello, Varani of Camerino, Baglioni of Perugia, to mention only a few of the most eminent nobles, enrolled themselves under the banners of plebeian adventurers like Piccinino and Sforza Attendolo. Though their family connections gave them a certain advantage, the system was essentially democratic. Gattamelata and Carmagnola sprang from obscurity by personal address and courage to the command of armies. Colleoni fought his way up from the grooms to princely station and the *bâton* of S. Mark. Francesco Sforza, whose father had begun life as a tiller of the soil, seized the ducal crown of Milan, and founded a house which ranked among the first in Europe.

It is not needful to follow Duke Frederick in his military career. We may briefly remark that when he succeeded to Urbino by his brother's death in 1444, he undertook generalship on a grand scale. His own dominions supplied him with some of the best troops in Italy. He was careful to secure the good-will of his subjects by attending personally to their interests, relieving [Pg 151] them of imposts, and executing equal justice. He gained the then unique reputation of an honest prince, paternally disposed toward his dependants. Men flocked to his standards willingly, and he was able to bring an important contingent into any army. These advantages secured for him alliances with Francesco Sforza, and brought him successively into connection with Milan, Venice, Florence, the Church of Naples. As a tactician in the field he held high rank among the generals of the age, and so considerable were his engagements that he acquired great wealth in the exercise of his profession. We find him at one time receiving 8000 ducats a month as war-pay from Naples, with a peace pension of 6000. While Captain-General of the League, he drew for his own use in war 45,000 ducats of annual pay. Retaining-fees and pensions in the name of past services swelled his income, the exact extent of which has not, so far as I am aware, been estimated, but which must have made him one of the richest of Italian princes. All this wealth he spent upon his duchy, fortifying its cities, drawing youths of promise to his court, maintaining a great train of life, and keeping his vassals in good-humour by the lightness of a rule which contrasted favourably with the exactions of needier despots.

While fighting for the masters who offered him *condotta* in the complicated wars of Italy, Duke Frederick used his arms, when occasion served, in his own quarrels. Many years of his life were spent in a prolonged struggle with his neighbour Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, the bizarre and brilliant tyrant of Rimini, who committed the fatal error of embroiling himself beyond all hope of [Pg 152] pardon with the Church, and who died discomfited in the duel with his warier antagonist. Urbino profited by each mistake of Sigismondo, and the history of this long desultory strife with Rimini is a history of gradual aggrandisement and consolidation for the Montefeltrian duchy.

In 1459, Duke Frederick married his second wife, Battista, daughter of Alessandro Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. Their portraits, painted by Piero della Francesca, are to be seen in the Uffizzi. Some years earlier, Frederick lost his right eye and had the bridge of his nose broken in a jousting match outside the town-gate of Urbino. After this accident, he preferred to be represented in profile—the profile so well known to students of Italian art on medals and bas-reliefs. It was not without medical aid and vows fulfilled by a mother's self-sacrifice to death, if we may trust the diarists of Urbino, that the ducal couple got an heir. In 1472, however a son was born to them, whom they christened Guido Paolo Ubaldo. He proved a youth of excellent parts and noble nature —apt at study, perfect in all chivalrous accomplishments. But he inherited some fatal physical debility, and his life was marred with a constitutional disease, which then received the name of gout, and which deprived him of the free use of his limbs. After his father's death in 1482, Naples, Florence, and Milan continued Frederick's war engagements to Guidobaldo. The prince was but a boy of ten. Therefore these important *condotte* must be regarded as compliments and pledges for the future. They prove to what a pitch Duke Frederick had raised the credit of his state and war establishment. Seven years later, Guidobaldo married Elisabetta, daughter of [Pg 153] Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. This union, though a happy one, was never blessed with children; and in the certainty of barrenness, the young Duke thought it prudent to adopt a nephew as heir to his dominions. He had several sisters, one of whom, Giovanna, had been married to a nephew of Sixtus IV., Giovanni della Rovere, Lord of Sinigaglia and Prefect of Rome. They had a son, Francesco Maria, who, after his adoption by Guidobaldo, spent his boyhood at Urbino.

The last years of the fifteenth century were marked by the sudden rise of Cesare Borgia to a power which threatened the liberties of Italy. Acting as General for the Church, he carried his arms against the petty tyrants of Romagna, whom he dispossessed and extirpated. His next move was upon Camerino and Urbino. He first acquired Camerino, having lulled Guidobaldo into false security by treacherous professions of good-will. Suddenly the Duke received intelligence that the Borgia was marching on him over Cagli. This was in the middle of June 1502. It is difficult to comprehend the state of weakness in which Guidobaldo was surprised, or the panic which then seized him. He made no efforts to rouse his subjects to resistance, but fled by night with his nephew through rough mountain roads, leaving his capital and palace to the marauder. Cesare Borgia took possession without striking a blow, and removed the treasures of Urbino to the Vatican. His occupation of the duchy was not undisturbed, however; for the people rose in several places against him, proving that Guidobaldo had yielded too hastily to alarm. By this time the fugitive was safe in Mantua, whence he returned, and for a short time succeeded in [Pg 154] establishing himself again at Urbino. But he could not hold his own against the Borgias, and in December, by a treaty, he resigned his claims and retired to Venice, where he lived upon the bounty of S. Mark. It must be said, in justice to the Duke, that his constitutional debility rendered him unfit for active operations in the field. Perhaps he could not have done better than thus to bend beneath the storm.

The sudden death of Alexander VI. and the election of a Della Rovere to the Papacy in 1503 changed Guidobaldo's prospects. Julius II. was the sworn foe of the Borgias and the close kinsman of Urbino's heir. It was therefore easy for the Duke to walk into his empty palace on the hill, and to reinstate himself in the domains from which he had so recently been ousted. The rest of his life was spent in the retirement of his court, surrounded with the finest scholars and the noblest gentlemen of Italy. The ill-health which debarred him from the active pleasures and employments of his station, was borne with uniform sweetness of temper and philosophy.

When he died, in 1508, his nephew, Francesco Maria della Rovere, succeeded to the duchy, and once more made the palace of Urbino the resort of men-at-arms and captains. He was a prince of very violent temper: of its extravagance history has recorded three remarkable examples. He murdered the Cardinal of Pavia with his own hand in the streets of Ravenna; stabbed a lover of his sister to death at Urbino; and in a council of war knocked Francesco Guicciardini down with a blow of his fist. When the history of Italy came to be written, Guicciardini was probably mindful [Pg 155] of that insult, for he painted Francesco Maria's character and conduct in dark colours. At the same time this Duke of Urbino passed for one of the first generals of the age. The greatest stain upon his memory is his behaviour in the year 1527, when, by dilatory conduct of the campaign in Lombardy, he suffered the passage of Frundsberg's army unopposed, and afterwards hesitated to relieve Rome from the horrors of the sack. He was the last Italian Condottiere of the antique type; and the vices which Machiavelli exposed in that bad system of mercenary warfare were illustrated on these occasions. During his lifetime, the conditions of Italy were so changed by Charles V.'s imperial settlement in 1530, that the occupation of Condottiere ceased to have any meaning. Strozzi and Farnesi, who afterwards followed this profession, enlisted in the ranks of France or Spain, and won their laurels in Northern Europe.

While Leo X. held the Papal chair, the duchy of Urbino was for a while wrested from the house of Della Rovere, and conferred upon Lorenzo de' Medici. Francesco Maria made a better fight for his heritage than Guidobaldo had done. Yet he could not successfully resist the power of Rome.

The Pope was ready to spend enormous sums of money on this petty war; the Duke's purse was shorter, and the mercenary troops he was obliged to use, proved worthless in the field. Spaniards, for the most part, pitted against Spaniards, they suffered the campaigns to degenerate into a guerrilla warfare of pillage and reprisals. In 1517 the duchy was formally ceded to Lorenzo. But this Medici did not live long to enjoy it, and his only child Catherine, the future Queen of France, never exercised the rights which had devolved upon her by inheritance. [Pg 156] The shifting scene of Italy beheld Francesco Maria reinstated in Urbino after Leo's death in 1522.

This Duke married Leonora Gonzaga, a princess of the house of Mantua. Their portraits, painted by Titian, adorn the Venetian room of the Uffizzi. Of their son, Guidobaldo II., little need be said. He was twice married, first to Giulia Varano, Duchess by inheritance of Camerino; secondly, to Vittoria Farnese, daughter of the Duke of Parma. Guidobaldo spent a lifetime in petty quarrels with his subjects, whom he treated badly, attempting to draw from their pockets the wealth which his father and the Montefeltri had won in military service. He intervened at an awkward period of Italian politics. The old Italy of despots, commonwealths, and Condottieri, in which his predecessors played substantial parts, was at an end. The new Italy of Popes and Austro-Spanish dynasties had hardly settled into shape. Between these epochs, Guidobaldo II., of whom we have a dim and hazy presentation on the page of history, seems somehow to have fallen flat. As a sign of altered circumstances, he removed his court to Pesaro, and built the great palace of the Della Roveres upon the public square.

Guidobaldaccio, as he was called, died in 1574, leaving an only son, Francesco Maria II., whose life and character illustrate the new age which had begun for Italy. He was educated in Spain at the court of Philip II., where he spent more than two years. When he returned, his Spanish haughtiness, punctilious attention to etiquette, and superstitious piety attracted observation. The violent temper of the Della Roveres, which Francesco Maria I. displayed in acts of homicide, and [Pg 157] which had helped to win his bad name for Guidobaldaccio, took the form of sullenness in the last Duke. The finest episode in his life was the part he played in the battle of Lepanto, under his old comrade, Don John of Austria. His father forced him to an uncongenial marriage with Lucrezia d'Este, Princess of Ferrara. She left him, and took refuge in her native city, then honoured by the presence of Tasso and Guarini. He bore her departure with philosophical composure, recording the event in his diary as something to be dryly grateful for. Left alone, the Duke abandoned himself to solitude, religious exercises, hunting, and the economy of his impoverished dominions. He became that curious creature, a man of narrow nature and mediocre capacity, who, dedicated to the cult of self, is fain to pass for saint and sage in easy circumstances. He married, for the second time, a lady, Livia della Rovere, who belonged to his own family, but had been born in private station. She brought him one son, the Prince Federigo-Ubaldo. This youth might have sustained the ducal honours of Urbino, but for his sage-saint father's want of wisdom. The boy was a spoiled child in infancy. Inflated with Spanish vanity from the cradle, taught to regard his subjects as dependants on a despot's will, abandoned to the caprices of his own ungovernable temper, without substantial aid from the paternal piety or stoicism, he rapidly became a most intolerable princeling. His father married him, while yet a boy, to Claudia de' Medici, and virtually abdicated in his favour. Left to his own devices, Federigo chose companions from the troupes of players whom he drew from Venice. He filled his palaces with harlots, and degraded himself upon the stage in parts of mean buffoonery. The resources of the duchy were racked to [Pg 158] support these parasites. Spanish rules of etiquette and ceremony were outraged by their orgies. His bride brought him one daughter, Vittoria, who afterwards became the wife of Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Then in the midst of his low dissipation and offences against ducal dignity, he died of apoplexy at the early age of eighteen—the victim, in the severe judgment of history, of his father's selfishness and want of practical ability.

This happened in 1623. Francesco Maria was stunned by the blow. His withdrawal from the duties of the sovereignty in favour of such a son had proved a constitutional unfitness for the duties of his station. The life he loved was one of seclusion in a round of pious exercises, petty studies, peddling economies, and mechanical amusements. A powerful and grasping Pope was on the throne of Rome. Urban at this juncture pressed Francesco Maria hard; and in 1624 the last Duke of Urbino devolved his lordships to the Holy See. He survived the formal act of abdication seven years; when he died, the Pontiff added his duchy to the Papal States, which thenceforth stretched from Naples to the bounds of Venice on the Po.

III.

Duke Frederick began the palace at Urbino in 1454, when he was still only Count. The architect was Luziano of Lauranna, a Dalmatian; and the beautiful white limestone, hard as marble, used in the construction, was brought from the Dalmatian coast. This stone, like the Istrian stone of [Pg 159] Venetian buildings, takes and retains the chisel mark with wonderful precision. It looks as though, when fresh, it must have had the pliancy of clay, so delicately are the finest curves in scroll or foliage scooped from its substance. And yet it preserves each cusp and angle of the most elaborate pattern with the crispness and the sharpness of a crystal. When wrought by a clever craftsman, its surface has neither the waxiness of Parian, nor the brittle edge of Carrara marble; and it resists weather better than marble of the choicest quality. This may be observed in many monuments of Venice, where the stone has been long exposed to sea-air. These qualities of the Dalmatian limestone, no less than its agreeable creamy hue and smooth dull polish, adapt it to decoration in low relief. The most attractive details in the palace at Urbino are friezes carved of this material in choice designs of early Renaissance dignity and grace. One chimney-piece in the

Sala degli Angeli deserves especial comment. A frieze of dancing Cupids, with gilt hair and wings, their naked bodies left white on a ground of ultra-marine, is supported by broad flat pilasters. These are engraved with children holding pots of flowers; roses on one side, carnations on the other. Above the frieze another pair of angels, one at each end, hold lighted torches; and the pyramidal cap of the chimney is carved with two more, flying, and supporting the eagle of the Montefeltri on a raised medallion. Throughout the palace we notice emblems appropriate to the Houses of Montefeltro and Della Rovere: their arms, three golden bends upon a field of azure: the Imperial eagle, granted when Montefeltro was made a fief of the Empire: the Garter of England, [Pg 160] worn by the Dukes Federigo and Guidobaldo: the ermine of Naples: the *ventosa*, or cupping-glass, adopted for a private badge by Frederick: the golden oak-tree on an azure field of Della Rovere: the palm-tree, bent beneath a block of stone, with its accompanying motto, *Inclinata Resurgam*: the cypher, FE DX. Profile medallions of Federigo and Guidobaldo, wrought in the lowest possible relief, adorn the staircases. Round the great courtyard runs a frieze of military engines and ensigns, trophies, machines, and implements of war, alluding to Duke Frederick's profession of Condottiere. The doorways are enriched with scrolls of heavy-headed flowers, acanthus foliage, honeysuckles, ivy-berries, birds and boys and sphinxes, in all the riot of Renaissance fancy.

This profusion of sculptured *rilievo* is nearly all that remains to show how rich the palace was in things of beauty. Castiglione, writing in the reign of Guidobaldo, says that "in the opinion of many it is the fairest to be found in Italy; and the Duke filled it so well with all things fitting its magnificence, that it seemed less like a palace than a city. Not only did he collect articles of common use, vessels of silver, and trappings for chambers of rare cloths of gold and silk, and such like furniture, but he added multitudes of bronze and marble statues, exquisite pictures, and instruments of music of all sorts. There was nothing but was of the finest and most excellent quality to be seen there. Moreover, he gathered together at a vast cost a large number of the best and rarest books in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, all of which he adorned with gold and silver, esteeming them the chiefest treasure of his spacious palace." When Cesare Borgia entered [Pg 161] Urbino as conqueror in 1502, he is said to have carried off loot to the value of 150,000 ducats, or perhaps about a quarter of a million sterling. Vespasiano, the Florentine bookseller, has left us a minute account of the formation of the famous library of MSS., which he valued at considerably over 30,000 ducats. Yet wandering now through these deserted halls, we seek in vain for furniture or tapestry or works of art. The books have been removed to Rome. The pictures are gone, no man knows whither. The plate has long been melted down. The instruments of music are broken. If frescoes adorned the corridors, they have been whitewashed; the ladies' chambers have been stripped of their rich arras. Only here and there we find a raftered ceiling, painted in fading colours, which, taken with the stonework of the chimney, and some fragments of inlaid panel-work on door or window, enables us to reconstruct the former richness of these princely rooms.

Exception must be made in favour of two apartments between the towers upon the southern façade. These were apparently the private rooms of the Duke and Duchess, and they are still approached by a great winding staircase in one of the *torricini*. Adorned in indestructible or irremovable materials, they retain some traces of their ancient splendour. On the first floor, opening on the vaulted loggia, we find a little chapel encrusted with lovely work in stucco and marble; friezes of bulls, sphinxes, sea-horses, and foliage; with a low relief of Madonna and Child in the manner of Mino da Fiesole. Close by is a small study with inscriptions to the Muses and Apollo. The cabinet connecting these two cells has a Latin legend, to say that Religion here [Pg 162] dwells near the temple of the liberal arts:

> Bina vides parvo discrimine juncta sacella,
> Altera pars Musis altera sacra Deo est.

On the floor above, corresponding in position to this apartment, is a second, of even greater interest, since it was arranged by the Duke Frederick for his own retreat. The study is panelled in tarsia of beautiful design and execution. Three of the larger compartments show Faith, Hope, and Charity; figures not unworthy of a Botticelli or a Filippino Lippi. The occupations of the Duke are represented on a smaller scale by armour, *bâtons* of command, scientific instruments, lutes, viols, and books, some open and some shut. The Bible, Homer, Virgil, Seneca, Tacitus, and Cicero, are lettered; apparently to indicate his favourite authors. The Duke himself, arrayed in his state robes, occupies a fourth great panel; and the whole of this elaborate composition is harmonised by emblems, badges, and occasional devices of birds, articles of furniture, and so forth. The tarsia, or inlaid wood of different kinds and colours, is among the best in this kind of art to be found in Italy, though perhaps it hardly deserves to rank with the celebrated choir-stalls of Bergamo and Monte Oliveto. Hard by is a chapel, adorned, like the lower one, with excellent reliefs. The Loggia to which these rooms have access looks across the Apennines, and down on what was once a private garden. It is now enclosed and paved for the exercise of prisoners who are confined in one part of the desecrated palace!

A portion of the pile is devoted to more worthy purposes; for the Academy of Raphael here [Pg 163] holds its sittings, and preserves a collection of curiosities and books illustrative of the great painter's life and works. They have recently placed in a tiny oratory, scooped by Guidobaldo II. from the thickness of the wall, a cast of Raphael's skull, which will be studied with interest and veneration. It has the fineness of modelling combined with shapeliness of form and smallness of scale which is said to have characterised Mozart and Shelley.

The impression left upon the mind after traversing this palace in its length and breadth is one

of weariness and disappointment. How shall we reconstruct the long-past life which filled its rooms with sound, the splendour of its pageants, the thrill of tragedies enacted here? It is not difficult to crowd its doors and vacant spaces with liveried servants, slim pages in tight hose, whose well-combed hair escapes from tiny caps upon their silken shoulders. We may even replace the tapestries of Troy which hung one hall, and build again the sideboards with their embossed gilded plate. But are these chambers really those where Emilia Pia held debate on love with Bembo and Castiglione; where Bibbiena's witticisms and Fra Serafino's pranks raised smiles on courtly lips; where Bernardo Accolti, "the Unique," declaimed his verses to applauding crowds? Is it possible that into yonder hall, where now the lion of S. Mark looks down alone on staring desolation, strode the Borgia in all his panoply of war, a gilded glittering dragon, and from the daïs tore the Montefeltri's throne, and from the arras stripped their ensigns, replacing these with his own Bull and Valentinus Dux? Here Tasso tuned his lyre for Francesco Maria's wedding-feast, [Pg 164] and read "Aminta" to Lucrezia d'Este. Here Guidobaldo listened to the jests and whispered scandals of the Aretine. Here Titian set his easel up to paint; here the boy Raphael, cap in hand, took signed and sealed credentials from his Duchess to the Gonfalonier of Florence. Somewhere in these huge chambers, the courtiers sat before a torch-lit stage, when Bibbiena's "Calandria" and Castiglione's "Tirsi," with their miracles of masques and mummers, whiled the night away. Somewhere, we know not where, Giuliano de' Medici made love in these bare rooms to that mysterious mother of ill-fated Cardinal Ippolito; somewhere, in some darker nook, the bastard Alessandro sprang to his strange-fortuned life of tyranny and license, which Brutus-Lorenzino cut short with a traitor's poignard-thrust in Via Larga. How many men, illustrious for arts and letters, memorable by their virtues or their crimes, have trod these silent corridors, from the great Pope Julius down to James III., self-titled King of England, who tarried here with Clementina Sobieski through some twelve months of his ex-royal exile! The memories of all this folk, flown guests and masters of the still-abiding palace-chambers, haunt us as we hurry through. They are but filmy shadows. We cannot grasp them, localise them, people surrounding emptiness with more than withering cobweb forms.

Death takes a stronger hold on us than bygone life. Therefore, returning to the vast Throne-room, we animate it with one scene it witnessed on an April night in 1508. Duke Guidobaldo had died at Fossombrone, repeating to his friends around his bed these lines of Virgil: [Pg 165]

> Me circum limus niger et deformis arundo
> Cocyti tardaque palus inamabilis unda
> Alligat, et novies Styx interfusa coercet.

His body had been carried on the shoulders of servants through those mountain ways at night, amid the lamentations of gathering multitudes and the baying of dogs from hill-set farms alarmed by flaring flambeaux. Now it is laid in state in the great hall. The daïs and the throne are draped in black. The arms and *bâtons* of his father hang about the doorways. His own ensigns are displayed in groups and trophies, with the banners of S. Mark, the Montefeltrian eagle, and the cross keys of S. Peter. The hall itself is vacant, save for the high-reared catafalque of sable velvet and gold damask, surrounded with wax-candles burning steadily. Round it passes a ceaseless stream of people, coming and going, gazing at their Duke. He is attired in crimson hose and doublet of black damask. Black velvet slippers are on his feet, and his ducal cap is of black velvet. The mantle of the Garter, made of dark-blue Alexandrine velvet, hooded with crimson, lined with white silk damask, and embroidered with the badge, drapes the stiff sleeping form.

It is easier to conjure up the past of this great palace, strolling round it in free air and twilight; perhaps because the landscape and the life still moving on the city streets bring its exterior into harmony with real existence. The southern façade, with its vaulted balconies and flanking towers, takes the fancy, fascinates the eye, and lends itself as a fit stage for puppets of the musing mind. Once more imagination plants trim orange-trees in giant jars of Gubbio ware upon the pavement [Pg 166] where the garden of the Duchess lay—the pavement paced in these bad days by convicts in grey canvas jackets—that pavement where Monsignor Bembo courted "dear dead women" with Platonic phrase, smothering the Menta of his natural man in lettuce culled from Academe and thyme of Mount Hymettus. In yonder *loggia*, lifted above the garden and the court, two lovers are in earnest converse. They lean beneath the coffered arch, against the marble of the balustrade, he fingering his dagger under the dark velvet doublet, she playing with a clove carnation, deep as her own shame. The man is Giannandrea, broad-shouldered bravo of Verona, Duke Guidobaldo's favourite and carpet-count. The lady is Madonna Maria, daughter of Rome's Prefect, widow of Venanzio Varano, whom the Borgia strangled. On their discourse a tale will hang of woman's frailty and man's boldness—Camerino's Duchess yielding to a low-born suitor's stalwart charms. And more will follow, when that lady's brother, furious Francesco Maria della Rovere, shall stab the bravo in torch-litten palace rooms with twenty poignard strokes twixt waist and throat, and their Pandarus shall be sent down to his account by a varlet's *coltellata* through the midriff. Imagination shifts the scene, and shows in that same *loggia* Rome's warlike Pope, attended by his cardinals and all Urbino's chivalry. The snowy beard of Julius flows down upon his breast, where jewels clasp the crimson mantle, as in Raphael's picture. His eyes are bright with wine; for he has come to gaze on sunset from the banquet-chamber, and to watch the line of lamps which soon will leap along that palace cornice in his honour. Behind him lies Bologna humbled. The Pope [Pg 167] returns, a conqueror, to Rome. Yet once again imagination is at work. A gaunt, bald man, close-habited in Spanish black, his spare, fine features carved in purest ivory, leans from that balcony. Gazing with hollow eyes, he tracks the swallows in their flight, and notes that winter is at hand. This is the last Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II., he whose young wife deserted him, who made for himself alone a hermit-pedant's round of petty cares and niggard avarice and mean-

brained superstition. He drew a second consort from the convent, and raised up seed unto his line by forethought, but beheld his princeling fade untimely in the bloom of boyhood. Nothing is left but solitude. To the mortmain of the Church reverts Urbino's lordship, and even now he meditates the terms of devolution. Jesuits cluster in the rooms behind, with comfort for the ducal soul and calculations for the interests of Holy See.

A farewell to these memories of Urbino's dukedom should be taken in the crypt of the cathedral, where Francesco Maria II., the last Duke, buried his only son and all his temporal hopes. The place is scarcely solemn. Its dreary *barocco* emblems mar the dignity of death. A bulky *Pietà* by Gian Bologna, with Madonna's face unfinished, towers up and crowds the narrow cell. Religion has evanished from this late Renaissance art, nor has the after-glow of Guido Reni's hectic piety yet overflushed it. Chilled by the stifling humid sense of an extinct race here entombed in its last representative, we gladly emerge from the sepulchral vault into the air of day.

Filippo Visconti, with a smile on his handsome face, is waiting for us at the inn. His horses, sleek, well-fed, and rested, toss their heads impatiently. We take our seats in the carriage, open [Pg 168] wide beneath a sparkling sky, whirl past the palace and its ghost-like recollections, and are half way on the road to Fossombrone in a cloud of dust and whirr of wheels before we think of looking back to greet Urbino. There is just time. The last decisive turning lies in front. We stand bare-headed to salute the grey mass of buildings ridged along the sky. Then the open road invites us with its varied scenery and movement. From the shadowy past we drive into the world of human things, for ever changefully unchanged, unrestfully the same. This interchange between dead memories and present life is the delight of travel.

[Pg 169]

A VENETIAN MEDLEY.

I.—First Impressions and Familiarity.

It is easy to feel and to say something obvious about Venice. The influence of this sea-city is unique, immediate, and unmistakable. But to express the sober truth of those impressions which remain when the first astonishment of the Venetian revelation has subsided, when the spirit of the place has been harmonised through familiarity with our habitual mood, is difficult.

Venice inspires at first an almost Corybantic rapture. From our earliest visits, if these have been measured by days rather than weeks, we carry away with us the memory of sunsets emblazoned in gold and crimson upon cloud and water; of violet domes and bell-towers etched against the orange of a western sky; of moonlight silvering breeze-rippled breadths of liquid blue; of distant islands shimmering in sunlitten haze; of music and black gliding boats; of labyrinthine darkness made for mysteries of love and crime; of statue-fretted palace fronts; of brazen clangour and a moving crowd; of pictures by earth's proudest painters, cased in gold on walls of council chambers where Venice sat enthroned a queen, where nobles swept the floors with robes of Tyrian brocade. These reminiscences will be attended by an ever-present sense of loneliness and [Pg 170] silence in the world around; the sadness of a limitless horizon, the solemnity of an unbroken arch of heaven, the calm and greyness of evening on the lagoons, the pathos of a marble city crumbling to its grave in mud and brine.

These first impressions of Venice are true. Indeed they are inevitable. They abide, and form a glowing background for all subsequent pictures, toned more austerely, and painted in more lasting hues of truth upon the brain. Those have never felt Venice at all who have not known this primal rapture, or who perhaps expected more of colour, more of melodrama, from a scene which nature and the art of man have made the richest in these qualities. Yet the mood engendered by this first experience is not destined to be permanent. It contains an element of unrest and unreality which vanishes upon familiarity. From the blare of that triumphal bourdon of brass instruments emerge the delicate voices of violin and clarinette. To the contrasted passions of our earliest love succeed a multitude of sweet and fanciful emotions. It is my present purpose to recapture some of the impressions made by Venice in more tranquil moods. Memory might be compared to a kaleidoscope. Far away from Venice I raise the wonder-working tube, allow the glittering fragments to settle as they please, and with words attempt to render something of the patterns I behold.

II.—A Lodging in San Vio.

I have escaped from the hotels with their bustle of tourists and crowded tables-d'hôte. My garden stretches down to the Grand Canal, closed at the end with a pavilion, where I lounge and [Pg 171] smoke and watch the cornice of the Prefettura fretted with gold in sunset light. My sitting-room and bed-room face the southern sun. There is a canal below, crowded with gondolas, and across its bridge the good folk of San Vio come and go the whole day long—men in blue shirts with enormous hats, and jackets slung on their left shoulder; women in kerchiefs of orange and

crimson. Bare-legged boys sit upon the parapet, dangling their feet above the rising tide. A hawker passes, balancing a basket full of live and crawling crabs. Barges filled with Brenta water or Mirano wine take up their station at the neighbouring steps, and then ensues a mighty splashing and hurrying to and fro of men with tubs upon their heads. The brawny fellows in the winebarge are red from brows to breast with drippings of the vat. And now there is a bustle in the quarter. A *barca* has arrived from S. Erasmo, the island of the market-gardens. It is piled with gourds and pumpkins, cabbages and tomatoes, pomegranates and pears—a pyramid of gold and green and scarlet. Brown men lift the fruit aloft, and women bending from the pathway bargain for it. A clatter of chaffering tongues, a ring of coppers, a Babel of hoarse sea-voices, proclaim the sharpness of the struggle. When the quarter has been served, the boat sheers off diminished in its burden. Boys and girls are left seasoning their polenta with a slice of *zucca*, while the mothers of a score of families go pattering up yonder courtyard with the material for their husbands' supper in their handkerchiefs. Across the canal, or more correctly the *Rio*, opens a wide grass-grown court. It is lined on the right hand by a row of poor dwellings, swarming with [Pg 172] gondoliers' children. A garden wall runs along the other side, over which I can see pomegranate-trees in fruit and pergolas of vines. Far beyond are more low houses, and then the sky, swept with sea-breezes, and the masts of an ocean-going ship against the dome and turrets of Palladio's Redentore.

This is my home. By day it is as lively as a scene in *Masaniello*. By night, after nine o'clock, the whole stir of the quarter has subsided. Far away I hear the bell of some church tell the hours. But no noise disturbs my rest, unless perhaps a belated gondolier moors his boat beneath the window. My one maid, Catina, sings at her work the whole day through. My gondolier, Francesco, acts as valet. He wakes me in the morning, opens the shutters, brings sea-water for my bath, and takes his orders for the day. "Will it do for Chioggia, Francesco;" "Sissignore! The Signorino has set off in his *sandolo* already with Antonio. The Signora is to go with us in the gondola." "Then get three more men, Francesco, and see that all of them can sing."

III.—To Chioggia with Oar and Sail.

The *sandolo* is a boat shaped like the gondola, but smaller and lighter, without benches, and without the high steel prow or *ferro* which distinguishes the gondola. The gunwale is only just raised above the water, over which the little craft skims with a rapid bounding motion, affording an agreeable variation from the stately swan-like movement of the gondola. In one of these boats —called by him the *Fisolo* or Seamew—my friend Eustace had started with Antonio, intending to [Pg 173] row the whole way to Chioggia, or, if the breeze favoured, to hoist a sail and help himself along. After breakfast, when the crew for my gondola had been assembled, Francesco and I followed with the Signora. It was one of those perfect mornings which occur as a respite from broken weather, when the air is windless and the light falls soft through haze on the horizon. As we broke into the lagoon behind the Redentore, the islands in front of us, S. Spirito, Poveglia, Malamocco, seemed as though they were just lifted from the sea-line. The Euganeans, far away to westward, were bathed in mist, and almost blent with the blue sky. Our four rowers put their backs into their work; and soon we reached the port of Malamocco, where a breeze from the Adriatic caught us sideways for a while. This is the largest of the breaches in the Lidi, or raised sand-reefs, which protect Venice from the sea: it affords an entrance to vessels of draught like the steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company. We crossed the dancing wavelets of the port; but when we passed under the lee of Pelestrina, the breeze failed, and the lagoon was once again a sheet of undulating glass. At S. Pietro on this island a halt was made to give the oarsmen wine, and here we saw the women at their cottage doorways making lace. The old lace industry of Venice has recently been revived. From Burano and Pelestrina cargoes of hand-made imitations of the ancient fabrics are sent at intervals to Jesurun's magazine at S. Marco. He is the chief *impresario* of the trade, employing hundreds of hands, and speculating for a handsome profit in the foreign market on the price he gives his workwomen.

Now we are well lost in the lagoons—Venice no longer visible behind; the Alps and Euganeans [Pg 174] shrouded in a noonday haze; the lowlands at the mouth of Brenta marked by clumps of trees ephemerally faint in silver silhouette against the filmy, shimmering horizon. Form and colour have disappeared in light-irradiated vapour of an opal hue. And yet instinctively we know that we are not at sea; the different quality of the water, the piles emerging here and there above the surface, the suggestion of coast-lines scarcely felt in this infinity of lustre, all remind us that our voyage is confined to the charmed limits of an inland lake. At length the jutting headland of Pelestrina was reached. We broke across the Porto di Chioggia, and saw Chioggia itself ahead—a huddled mass of houses low upon the water. One by one, as we rowed steadily, the fishing-boats passed by, emerging from their harbour for a twelve hours' cruise upon the open sea. In a long line they came, with variegated sails of orange, red, and saffron, curiously chequered at the corners, and cantled with devices in contrasted tints. A little land-breeze carried them forward. The lagoon reflected their deep colours till they reached the port. Then, slightly swerving eastward on their course, but still in single file, they took the sea and scattered, like beautiful bright-plumaged birds, who from a streamlet float into a lake, and find their way at large according as each wills.

The Signorino and Antonio, though want of wind obliged them to row the whole way from Venice, had reached Chioggia an hour before, and stood waiting to receive us on the quay. It is a quaint town this Chioggia, which has always lived a separate life from that of Venice. Language [Pg 175] and race and customs have held the two populations apart from those distant years when Genoa

and the Republic of S. Mark fought their duel to the death out in the Chioggian harbours, down to these days, when your Venetian gondolier will tell you that the Chioggoto loves his pipe more than his *donna* or his wife. The main canal is lined with substantial palaces, attesting to old wealth and comfort. But from Chioggia, even more than from Venice, the tide of modern luxury and traffic has retreated. The place is left to fishing folk and builders of the fishing craft, whose wharves still form the liveliest quarter. Wandering about its wide deserted courts and *calli*, we feel the spirit of the decadent Venetian nobility. Passages from Goldoni's and Casanova's Memoirs occur to our memory. It seems easy to realise what they wrote about the dishevelled gaiety and lawless license of Chioggia in the days of powder, sword-knot, and *soprani*. Baffo walks beside us in hypocritical composure of bag-wig and senatorial dignity, whispering unmentionable sonnets in his dialect of *Xe* and *Ga*. Somehow or another that last dotage of S. Mark's decrepitude is more recoverable by our fancy than the heroism of Pisani in the fourteenth century.

From his prison in blockaded Venice the great admiral was sent forth on a forlorn hope, and blocked victorious Doria here with boats on which the nobles of the Golden Book had spent their fortunes. Pietro Doria boasted that with his own hands he would bridle the bronze horses of S. Mark. But now he found himself between the navy of Carlo Zeno in the Adriatic and the flotilla led by Vittore Pisani across the lagoon. It was in vain that the Republic of S. George strained [Pg 176] every nerve to send him succour from the Ligurian sea; in vain that the lords of Padua kept opening communications with him from the mainland. From the 1st of January 1380 till the 21st of June the Venetians pressed the blockade ever closer, grappling their foemen in a grip that if relaxed one moment would have hurled him at their throats. The long and breathless struggle ended in the capitulation at Chioggia of what remained of Doria's forty-eight galleys and fourteen thousand men.

These great deeds are far away and hazy. The brief sentences of mediæval annalists bring them less near to us than the *chroniques scandaleuses* of good-for-nothing scoundrels, whose vulgar adventures might be revived at the present hour with scarce a change of setting. Such is the force of *intimité* in literature. And yet Baffo and Casanova are as much of the past as Doria and Pisani. It is only perhaps that the survival of decadence in all we see around us, forms a fitting frame-work for our recollections of their vividly described corruption.

Not far from the landing-place a balustraded bridge of ample breadth and large bravura manner spans the main canal. Like everything at Chioggia, it is dirty and has fallen from its first estate. Yet neither time nor injury can obliterate style or wholly degrade marble. Hard by the bridge there are two rival inns. At one of these we ordered a sea-dinner—crabs, cuttlefishes, soles, and turbots—which we ate at a table in the open air. Nothing divided us from the street except a row of Japanese privet-bushes in hooped tubs. Our banquet soon assumed a somewhat unpleasant similitude to that of Dives; for the Chioggoti, in all stages of decrepitude and squalor, [Pg 177] crowded round to beg for scraps—indescribable old women, enveloped in their own petticoats thrown over their heads; girls hooded with sombre black mantles; old men wrinkled beyond recognition by their nearest relatives; jabbering, half-naked boys; slow, slouching fishermen with clay pipes in their mouths and philosophical acceptance on their sober foreheads.

That afternoon the gondola and sandolo were lashed together side by side. Two sails were raised, and in this lazy fashion we stole homewards, faster or slower according as the breeze freshened or slackened, landing now and then on islands, sauntering along the sea-walls which bulwark Venice from the Adriatic, and singing—those at least of us who had the power to sing. Four of our Venetians had trained voices and memories of inexhaustible music. Over the level water, with the ripple plashing at our keel, their songs went abroad, and mingled with the failing day. The barcaroles and serenades peculiar to Venice were, of course, in harmony with the occasion. But some transcripts from classical operas were even more attractive, through the dignity with which these men invested them. By the peculiarity of their treatment the *recitativo* of the stage assumed a solemn movement, marked in rhythm, which removed it from the commonplace into antiquity, and made me understand how cultivated music may pass back by natural, unconscious transition into the realm of popular melody.

The sun sank, not splendidly, but quietly in banks of clouds above the Alps. Stars came out, uncertainly at first, and then in strength, reflected on the sea. The men of the Dogana watch-boat [Pg 178] challenged us and let us pass. Madonna's lamp was twinkling from her shrine upon the harbour-pile. The city grew before us. Stealing into Venice in that calm—stealing silently and shadowlike, with scarce a ruffle of the water, the masses of the town emerging out of darkness into twilight, till San Giorgio's gun boomed with a flash athwart our stern, and the gas-lamps of the Piazzetta swam into sight; all this was like a long enchanted chapter of romance. And now the music of our men had sunk to one faint whistling from Eustace of tunes in harmony with whispers at the prow.

Then came the steps of the Palazzo Venier and the deep-scented darkness of the garden. As we passed through to supper, I plucked a spray of yellow Banksia rose, and put it in my button-hole. The dew was on its burnished leaves, and evening had drawn forth its perfume.

IV.—Morning Rambles.

A story is told of Poussin, the French painter, that when he was asked why he would not stay in Venice, he replied, "If I stay here, I shall become a colourist!" A somewhat similar tale is reported of a fashionable English decorator. While on a visit to friends in Venice, he avoided every building

which contains a Tintoretto, averring that the sight of Tintoretto's pictures would injure his carefully trained taste. It is probable that neither anecdote is strictly true. Yet there is a certain epigrammatic point in both; and I have often speculated whether even Venice could have so warped the genius of Poussin as to shed one ray of splendour on his canvases, or whether even [Pg 179] Tintoretto could have so sublimed the prophet of Queen Anne as to make him add dramatic passion to a London drawing-room. Anyhow, it is exceedingly difficult to escape from colour in the air of Venice, or from Tintoretto in her buildings. Long, delightful mornings may be spent in the enjoyment of the one and the pursuit of the other by folk who have no classical or pseudo-mediæval theories to oppress them.

Tintoretto's house, though changed, can still be visited. It formed part of the Fondamenta dei Mori, so called from having been the quarter assigned to Moorish traders in Venice. A spirited carving of a turbaned Moor leading a camel charged with merchandise, remains above the water-line of a neighbouring building; and all about the crumbling walls sprout flowering weeds—samphire and snapdragon and the spiked campanula, which shoots a spire of sea-blue stars from chinks of Istrian stone.

The house stands opposite the Church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, where Tintoretto was buried, and where four of his chief masterpieces are to be seen. This church, swept and garnished, is a triumph of modern Italian restoration. They have contrived to make it as commonplace as human ingenuity could manage. Yet no malice of ignorant industry can obscure the treasures it contains —the pictures of Cima, Gian Bellini, Palma, and the four Tintorettos, which form its crowning glory. Here the master may be studied in four of his chief moods: as the painter of tragic passion and movement, in the huge Last Judgment; as the painter of impossibilities, in the Vision of Moses upon Sinai; as the painter of purity and tranquil pathos, in the Miracle of S. Agnes; as the [Pg 180] painter of Biblical history brought home to daily life, in the Presentation of the Virgin. Without leaving the Madonna dell'Orto, a student can explore his genius in all its depth and breadth; comprehend the enthusiasm he excites in those who seek, as the essentials of art, imaginative boldness and sincerity; understand what is meant by adversaries who maintain that, after all, Tintoretto was but an inspired Gustave Doré. Between that quiet canvas of the Presentation, so modest in its cool greys and subdued gold, and the tumult of flying, ruining, ascending figures in the Judgment, what an interval there is! How strangely the white lamb-like maiden, kneeling beside her lamb in the picture of S. Agnes, contrasts with the dusky gorgeousness of the Hebrew women despoiling themselves of jewels for the golden calf! Comparing these several manifestations of creative power, we feel ourselves in the grasp of a painter who was essentially a poet, one for whom his art was the medium for expressing before all things thought and passion. Each picture is executed in the manner suited to its tone of feeling, the key of its conception.

Elsewhere than in the Madonna dell'Orto there are more distinguished single examples of Tintoretto's realising faculty. The Last Supper in San Giorgio, for instance, and the Adoration of the Shepherds in the Scuola di San Rocco illustrate his unique power of presenting sacred history in a novel, romantic frame-work of familiar things. The commonplace circumstances of ordinary life have been employed to portray in the one case a lyric of mysterious splendour; in the other, an idyll of infinite sweetness. Divinity shines through the rafters of that upper chamber, where [Pg 181] round a low large table the Apostles are assembled in a group translated from the social customs of the painter's days. Divinity is shed upon the straw-spread manger, where Christ lies sleeping in the loft, with shepherds crowding through the room beneath.

A studied contrast between the simplicity and repose of the central figure and the tumult of passions in the multitude around, may be observed in the Miracle of S. Agnes. It is this which gives dramatic vigour to the composition. But the same effect is carried to its highest fulfilment, with even a loftier beauty, in the episode of Christ before the judgment-seat of Pilate, at San Rocco. Of all Tintoretto's religious pictures, that is the most profoundly felt, the most majestic. No other artist succeeded as he has here succeeded in presenting to us God incarnate. For this Christ is not merely the just man, innocent, silent before his accusers. The stationary, white-draped figure, raised high above the agitated crowd, with tranquil forehead slightly bent, facing his perplexed and fussy judge, is more than man. We cannot say perhaps precisely why he is divine. But Tintoretto has made us feel that he is. In other words, his treatment of the high theme chosen by him has been adequate.

We must seek the Scuola di San Rocco for examples of Tintoretto's liveliest imagination. Without ceasing to be Italian in his attention to harmony and grace, he far exceeded the masters of his nation in the power of suggesting what is weird, mysterious, upon the border-land of the grotesque. And of this quality there are three remarkable instances in the Scuola. No one but Tintoretto could have evoked the fiend in his Temptation of Christ. It is an indescribable [Pg 182] hermaphroditic genius, the genius of carnal fascination, with outspread downy rose-plumed wings, and flaming bracelets on the full but sinewy arms, who kneels and lifts aloft great stones, smiling entreatingly to the sad, grey Christ seated beneath a rugged pent-house of the desert. No one again but Tintoretto could have dashed the hot lights of that fiery sunset in such quivering flakes upon the golden flesh of Eve, half-hidden among laurels, as she stretches forth the fruit of the Fall to shrinking Adam. No one but Tintoretto, till we come to Blake, could have imagined yonder Jonah, summoned by the beck of God from the whale's belly. The monstrous fish rolls over in the ocean, blowing portentous vapour from his trump-shaped nostril. The prophet's beard descends upon his naked breast in hoary ringlets to the girdle. He has forgotten the past peril of the deep, although the whale's jaws yawn around him. Between him and the outstretched finger of Jehovah calling him again to life, there runs a spark of unseen spiritual electricity.

To comprehend Tintoretto's touch upon the pastoral idyll we must turn our steps to San Giorgio again, and pace those meadows by the running river in company with his Manna-Gatherers. Or we may seek the Accademia, and notice how he here has varied the Temptation of Adam by Eve, choosing a less tragic motive of seduction than the one so powerfully rendered at San Rocco. Or in the Ducal Palace we may take our station, hour by hour, before the Marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne. It is well to leave the very highest achievements of art untouched by criticism undescribed. And in this picture we have the most perfect of all modern attempts to realise an [Pg 183] antique myth—more perfect than Raphael's Galatea, or Titian's Meeting of Bacchus with Ariadne, or Botticelli's Birth of Venus from the Sea. It may suffice to marvel at the slight effect which melodies so powerful and so direct as these produce upon the ordinary public. Sitting, as is my wont, one Sunday morning, opposite the Bacchus, four Germans with a cicerone sauntered by. The subject was explained to them. They waited an appreciable space of time. Then the youngest opened his lips and spake: "Bacchus war der Wein-Gott." And they all moved heavily away. *Bos locutus est.* "Bacchus was the wine-god!" This, apparently, is what a picture tells to one man. To another it presents divine harmonies, perceptible indeed in nature, but here by the painter-poet for the first time brought together and cadenced in a work of art. For another it is perhaps the hieroglyph of pent-up passions and desired impossibilities. For yet another it may only mean the unapproachable inimitable triumph of consummate craft.

Tintoretto, to be rightly understood, must be sought all over Venice—in the church as well as the Scuola di San Rocco; in the Temptation of S. Anthony at S. Trovaso no less than in the Temptations of Eve and Christ; in the decorative pomp of the Sala del Senato, and in the Paradisal vision of the Sala del Gran Consiglio. Yet, after all, there is one of his most characteristic moods, to appreciate which fully we return to the Madonna dell'Orto. I have called him "the painter of impossibilities." At rare moments he rendered them possible by sheer imaginative force. If we wish to realise this phase of his creative power, and to measure our own [Pg 184] subordination to his genius in its most hazardous enterprise, we must spend much time in the choir of this church. Lovers of art who mistrust this play of the audacious fancy—aiming at sublimity in supersensual regions, sometimes attaining to it by stupendous effort or authentic revelation, not seldom sinking to the verge of bathos, and demanding the assistance of interpretative sympathy in the spectator—such men will not take the point of view required of them by Tintoretto in his boldest flights, in the Worship of the Golden Calf and in the Destruction of the World by Water. It is for them to ponder well the flying archangel with the scales of judgment in his hand, and the seraph-charioted Jehovah enveloping Moses upon Sinai in lightnings.

The gondola has had a long rest. Were Francesco but a little more impatient, he might be wondering what had become of the padrone. I bid him turn, and we are soon gliding into the Sacca della Misericordia. This is a protected float, where the wood which comes from Cadore and the hills of the Ampezzo is stored in spring. Yonder square white house, standing out to sea, fronting Murano and the Alps, they call the Casa degli Spiriti. No one cares to inhabit it; for here, in old days, it was the wont of the Venetians to lay their dead for a night's rest before their final journey to the graveyard of S. Michele. So many generations of dead folk had made that house their inn, that it is now no fitting home for living men. San Michele is the island close before Murano, where the Lombardi built one of their most romantically graceful churches of pale Istrian stone, and where the Campo Santo has for centuries received the dead into its oozy clay. The cemetery is at present undergoing restoration. Its state of squalor and abandonment to [Pg 185] cynical disorder makes one feel how fitting for Italians would be the custom of cremation. An island in the lagoons devoted to funeral pyres is a solemn and ennobling conception. This graveyard, with its ruinous walls, its mangy riot of unwholesome weeds, its corpses festering in slime beneath neglected slabs in hollow chambers, and the mephitic wash of poisoned waters that surround it, inspires the horror of disgust.

The morning has not lost its freshness. Antelao and Tofana, guarding the vale above Cortina, show faint streaks of snow upon their amethyst. Little clouds hang in the still autumn sky. There are men dredging for shrimps and crabs through shoals uncovered by the ebb. Nothing can be lovelier, more resting to eyes tired with pictures than this tranquil, sunny expanse of the lagoon. As we round the point of the Bersaglio, new landscapes of island and Alp and low-lying mainland move into sight at every slow stroke of the oar. A luggage-train comes lumbering along the railway bridge, puffing white smoke into the placid blue. Then we strike down Cannaregio, and I muse upon processions of kings and generals and noble strangers, entering Venice by this water-path from Mestre, before the Austrians built their causeway for the trains. Some of the rare scraps of fresco upon house fronts, still to be seen in Venice, are left in Cannaregio. They are chiaroscuro allegories in a bold bravura manner of the sixteenth century. From these and from a few rosy fragments on the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the Fabbriche Nuove, and precious fading figures in a certain courtyard near San Stefano, we form some notion how Venice looked when all [Pg 186] her palaces were painted. Pictures by Gentile Bellini, Mansueti, and Carpaccio help the fancy in this work of restoration. And here and there, in back canals, we come across coloured sections of old buildings, capped by true Venetian chimneys, which for a moment seem to realise our dream.

A morning with Tintoretto might well be followed by a morning with Carpaccio or Bellini. But space is wanting in these pages. Nor would it suit the manner of this medley to hunt the Lombardi through palaces and churches, pointing out their singularities of violet and yellow panellings in marble, the dignity of their wide-opened arches, or the delicacy of their shallow chiselled traceries in cream-white Istrian stone. It is enough to indicate the goal of many a pleasant pilgrimage: warrior angels of Vivarini and Basaiti hidden in a dark chapel of the Frari; Fra Francesco's fantastic orchard of fruits and flowers in distant S. Francesco della Vigna; the

golden Gian Bellini in S. Zaccaria; Palma's majestic S. Barbara in S. Maria Formosa; San Giobbe's wealth of sculptured frieze and floral scroll; the Ponte di Paradiso, with its Gothic arch; the painted plates in the Museo Civico; and palace after palace, loved for some quaint piece of tracery, some moulding full of mediæval symbolism, some fierce impossible Renaissance freak of fancy.

Rather than prolong this list, I will tell a story which drew me one day past the Public Gardens to the metropolitan Church of Venice, San Pietro di Castello. The novella is related by Bandello. It has, as will be noticed, points of similarity to that of "Romeo and Juliet."

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V.—A Venetian Novella.

At the time when Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini were painting those handsome youths in tight jackets, parti-coloured hose, and little round caps placed awry upon their shocks of well-combed hair, there lived in Venice two noblemen, Messer Pietro and Messer Paolo, whose palaces fronted each other on the Grand Canal. Messer Paolo was a widower, with one married daughter, and an only son of twenty years or thereabouts, named Gerardo. Messer Pietro's wife was still living; and this couple had but one child, a daughter, called Elena, of exceeding beauty, aged fourteen. Gerardo, as is the wont of gallants, was paying his addresses to a certain lady; and nearly every day he had to cross the Grand Canal in his gondola, and to pass beneath the house of Elena on his way to visit his Dulcinea; for this lady lived some distance up a little canal on which the western side of Messer Pietro's palace looked.

Now it so happened that at the very time when the story opens, Messer Pietro's wife fell ill and died, and Elena was left alone at home with her father and her old nurse. Across the little canal of which I spoke there dwelt another nobleman, with four daughters, between the years of seventeen and twenty-one. Messer Pietro, desiring to provide amusement for poor little Elena, besought this gentleman that his daughters might come on feast-days to play with her. For you must know that, except on festivals of the Church, the custom of Venice required that gentlewomen should remain closely shut within the private apartments of their dwellings. His [Pg 188] request was readily granted; and on the next feast-day the five girls began to play at ball together for forfeits in the great saloon, which opened with its row of Gothic arches and balustrated balcony upon the Grand Canal. The four sisters, meanwhile, had other thoughts than for the game. One or other of them, and sometimes three together, would let the ball drop, and run to the balcony to gaze upon their gallants, passing up and down in gondolas below; and then they would drop flowers or ribbands for tokens. Which negligence of theirs annoyed Elena much; for she thought only of the game. Wherefore she scolded them in childish wise, and one of them made answer, "Elena, if you only knew how pleasant it is to play as we are playing on this balcony, you would not care so much for ball and forfeits!"

On one of those feast-days the four sisters were prevented from keeping their little friend company. Elena, with nothing to do, and feeling melancholy, leaned upon the window-sill which overlooked the narrow canal. And it chanced that just then Gerardo, on his way to Dulcinea, went by; and Elena looked down at him, as she had seen those sisters look at passers-by. Gerardo caught her eye, and glances passed between them, and Gerardo's gondolier, bending from the poop, said to his master, "O master! methinks that gentle maiden is better worth your wooing than Dulcinea." Gerardo pretended to pay no heed to these words; but after rowing a little way, he bade the man turn, and they went slowly back beneath the window. This time Elena, thinking to play the game which her four friends had played, took from her hair a clove carnation and let it fall close to Gerardo on the cushion of the gondola. He raised the flower and put it to his lips, [Pg 189] acknowledging the courtesy with a grave bow. But the perfume of the clove and the beauty of Elena in that moment took possession of his heart together, and straightway he forgot Dulcinea.

As yet he knew not who Elena was. Nor is this wonderful; for the daughters of Venetian nobles were but rarely seen or spoken of. But the thought of her haunted him awake and sleeping; and every feast-day, when there was the chance of seeing her, he rowed his gondola beneath her windows. And there she appeared to him in company with her four friends; the five girls clustering together like sister roses beneath the pointed windows of the Gothic balcony. Elena, on her side, had no thought of love; for of love she had heard no one speak. But she took pleasure in the game those friends had taught her, of leaning from the balcony to watch Gerardo. He meanwhile grew love-sick and impatient, wondering how he might declare his passion. Until one day it happened that, walking through a lane or *calle* which skirted Messer Pietro's palace, he caught sight of Elena's nurse, who was knocking at the door, returning from some shopping she had made. This nurse had been his own nurse in childhood; therefore he remembered her, and cried aloud, "Nurse, Nurse!" But the old woman did not hear him, and passed into the house and shut the door behind her. Whereupon Gerardo, greatly moved, still called to her, and when he reached the door, began to knock upon it violently. And whether it was the agitation of finding himself at last so near the wish of his heart, or whether the pains of waiting for his love had weakened him, I know not; but, while he knocked, his senses left him, and he fell fainting in the [Pg 190] doorway. Then the nurse recognised the youth to whom she had given suck, and brought him into the courtyard by the help of handmaidens, and Elena came down and gazed upon him. The house was now full of bustle, and Messer Pietro heard the noise, and seeing the son of his neighbour in so piteous a plight, he caused Gerardo to be laid upon a bed. But for all they could do with him, he recovered not from his swoon. And after a while force was that they should place him in a gondola and ferry him across to his father's house. The nurse went with him, and informed

Messer Paolo of what had happened. Doctors were sent for, and the whole family gathered round Gerardo's bed. After a while he revived a little; and thinking himself still upon the doorstep of Pietro's palace, called again, "Nurse, Nurse!" She was near at hand, and would have spoken to him. But while he summoned his senses to his aid, he became gradually aware of his own kinsfolk and dissembled the secret of his grief. They beholding him in better cheer, departed on their several ways, and the nurse still sat alone beside him. Then he explained to her what he had at heart, and how he was in love with a maiden whom he had seen on feast-days in the house of Messer Pietro. But still he knew not Elena's name; and she, thinking it impossible that such a child had inspired this passion, began to marvel which of the four sisters it was Gerardo loved. Then they appointed the next Sunday, when all the five girls should be together, for Gerardo by some sign, as he passed beneath the window, to make known to the old nurse his lady.

Elena, meanwhile, who had watched Gerardo lying still and pale in swoon beneath her on the [Pg 191] pavement of the palace, felt the stirring of a new unknown emotion in her soul. When Sunday came, she devised excuses for keeping her four friends away, bethinking her that she might see him once again alone, and not betray the agitation which she dreaded. This ill suited the schemes of the nurse, who nevertheless was forced to be content. But after dinner, seeing how restless was the girl, and how she came and went, and ran a thousand times to the balcony, the nurse began to wonder whether Elena herself were not in love with some one. So she feigned to sleep, but placed herself within sight of the window. And soon Gerardo came by in his gondola; and Elena, who was prepared, threw to him her nosegay. The watchful nurse had risen, and peeping behind the girl's shoulder, saw at a glance how matters stood. Thereupon she began to scold her charge, and say, "Is this a fair and comely thing, to stand all day at balconies and throw flowers at passers-by? Woe to you if your father should come to know of this! He would make you wish yourself among the dead!" Elena, sore troubled at her nurse's rebuke, turned and threw her arms about her neck, and called her "Nanna!" as the wont is of Venetian children. Then she told the old woman how she had learned that game from the four sisters, and how she thought it was not different, but far more pleasant, than the game of forfeits; whereupon her nurse spoke gravely, explaining what love is, and how that love should lead to marriage, and bidding her search her own heart if haply she could choose Gerardo for her husband. There was no reason, as she knew, why Messer Paolo's son should not mate with Messer Pietro's daughter. But being a romantic [Pg 192] creature, as many women are, she resolved to bring the match about in secret.

Elena took little time to reflect, but told her nurse that she was willing, if Gerardo willed it too, to have him for her husband. Then went the nurse and made the young man know how matters stood, and arranged with him a day, when Messer Pietro should be in the Council of the Pregadi, and the servants of the palace otherwise employed, for him to come and meet his Elena. A glad man was Gerardo, nor did he wait to think how better it would be to ask the hand of Elena in marriage from her father. But when the day arrived, he sought the nurse, and she took him to a chamber in the palace, where there stood an image of the Blessed Virgin. Elena was there, pale and timid; and when the lovers clasped hands, neither found many words to say. But the nurse bade them take heart, and leading them before Our Lady, joined their hands, and made Gerardo place his ring on his bride's finger. After this fashion were Gerardo and Elena wedded. And for some while, by the assistance of the nurse, they dwelt together in much love and solace, meeting often as occasion offered.

Messer Paolo, who knew nothing of these things, took thought meanwhile for his son's career. It was the season when the Signory of Venice sends a fleet of galleys to Beirut with merchandise; and the noblemen may bid for the hiring of a ship, and charge it with wares, and send whomsoever they list as factor in their interest. One of these galleys, then, Messer Paolo engaged, and told his son that he had appointed him to journey with it and increase their wealth. [Pg 193] "On thy return, my son," he said, "we will bethink us of a wife for thee." Gerardo, when he heard these words, was sore troubled, and first he told his father roundly that he would not go, and flew off in the twilight to pour out his perplexities to Elena. But she, who was prudent and of gentle soul, besought him to obey his father in this thing, to the end, moreover, that, having done his will and increased his wealth, he might afterwards unfold the story of their secret marriage. To these good counsels, though loth, Gerardo consented. His father was overjoyed at his son's repentance. The galley was straightway laden with merchandise, and Gerardo set forth on his voyage.

The trip to Beirut and back lasted usually six months or at the most seven. Now when Gerardo had been some six months away, Messer Pietro, noticing how fair his daughter was, and how she had grown into womanhood, looked about him for a husband for her. When he had found a youth suitable in birth and wealth and years, he called for Elena, and told her that the day had been appointed for her marriage. She, alas! knew not what to answer. She feared to tell her father that she was already married, for she knew not whether this would please Gerardo. For the same reason she dreaded to throw herself upon the kindness of Messer Paolo. Nor was her nurse of any help in counsel; for the old woman repented her of what she had done, and had good cause to believe that, even if the marriage with Gerardo were accepted by the two fathers, they would punish her for her own part in the affair. Therefore she bade Elena wait on fortune, and hinted to [Pg 194] her that, if the worst came to the worst, no one need know she had been wedded with the ring to Gerardo. Such weddings, you must know, were binding; but till they had been blessed by the Church, they had not taken the force of a religious sacrament. And this is still the case in Italy among the common folk, who will say of a man, "Si, è ammogliato; ma il matrimonio non è stato benedetto." "Yes, he has taken a wife, but the marriage has not yet been blessed."

So the days flew by in doubt and sore distress for Elena. Then on the night before her wedding,

she felt that she could bear this life no longer. But having no poison, and being afraid to pierce her bosom with a knife, she lay down on her bed alone, and tried to die by holding in her breath. A mortal swoon came over her; her senses fled; the life in her remained suspended. And when her nurse came next morning to call her, she found poor Elena cold as a corpse. Messer Pietro and all the household rushed, at the nurse's cries, into the room, and they all saw Elena stretched dead upon her bed undressed. Physicians were called, who made theories to explain the cause of death. But all believed that she was really dead, beyond all help of art or medicine. Nothing remained but to carry her to church for burial instead of marriage. Therefore, that very evening, a funeral procession was formed, which moved by torchlight up the Grand Canal, along the Riva, past the blank walls of the Arsenal, to the Campo before San Pietro in Castello. Elena lay beneath the black felze in one gondola, with a priest beside her praying, and other boats followed bearing mourners. Then they laid her marble chest outside the church, and all departed, still with torches [Pg 195] burning, to their homes.

Now it so fell out that upon that very evening Gerardo's galley had returned from Syria, and was anchoring within the port of Lido, which looks across to the island of Castello. It was the gentle custom of Venice at that time that, when a ship arrived from sea, the friends of those on board at once came out to welcome them, and take and give the news. Therefore many noble youths and other citizens were on the deck of Gerardo's galley, making merry with him over the safe conduct of his voyage. Of one of these he asked, "Whose is yonder funeral procession returning from San Pietro?" The young man made answer, "Alas for poor Elena, Messer Pietro's daughter! She should have been married this day. But death took her, and to-night they buried her in the marble monument outside the church." A woeful man was Gerardo, hearing suddenly this news, and knowing what his dear wife must have suffered ere she died. Yet he restrained himself, daring not to disclose his anguish, and waited till his friends had left the galley. Then he called to him the captain of the oarsmen, who was his friend, and unfolded to him all the story of his love and sorrow, and said that he must go that night and see his wife once more, if even he should have to break her tomb. The captain tried to dissuade him, but in vain. Seeing him so obstinate, he resolved not to desert Gerardo. The two men took one of the galley's boats, and rowed together toward San Pietro. It was past midnight when they reached the Campo and broke the marble sepulchre asunder. Pushing back its lid, Gerardo descended into the grave and abandoned himself upon the body of his Elena. One who had seen them at that moment could not [Pg 196] well have said which of the two was dead and which was living—Elena or her husband. Meantime the captain of the oarsmen, fearing lest the watch (set by the Masters of the Night to keep the peace of Venice) might arrive, was calling on Gerardo to come back. Gerardo heeded him no whit. But at the last, compelled by his entreaties, and as it were astonied, he arose, bearing his wife's corpse in his arms, and carried her clasped against his bosom to the boat, and laid her therein, and sat down by her side and kissed her frequently, and suffered not his friend's remonstrances. Force was for the captain, having brought himself into this scrape, that he should now seek refuge by the nearest way from justice. Therefore he hoved gently from the bank, and plied his oar, and brought the gondola apace into the open waters. Gerardo still clasped Elena, dying husband by dead wife. But the sea-breeze freshened towards daybreak, and the Captain, looking down upon that pair, and bringing to their faces the light of his boat's lantern, judged their case not desperate at all. On Elena's cheek there was a flush of life less deadly even than the pallor of Gerardo's forehead. Thereupon the good man called aloud, and Gerardo started from his grief; and both together they chafed the hands and feet of Elena; and, the sea-breeze aiding with its saltness, they awoke in her the spark of life.

Dimly burned the spark. But Gerardo, being aware of it, became a man again. Then, having taken counsel with the captain, both resolved to bear her to that brave man's mother's house. A bed was soon made ready, and food was brought; and after due time, she lifted up her face and [Pg 197] knew Gerardo. The peril of the grave was past, but thought had now to be taken for the future. Therefore Gerardo, leaving his wife to the captain's mother, rowed back to the galley and prepared to meet his father. With good store of merchandise and with great gains from his traffic, he arrived in that old palace on the Grand Canal. Then having opened to Messer Paolo the matters of his journey, and shown him how he had fared, and set before him tables of disbursements and receipts, he seized the moment of his father's gladness. "Father," he said, and as he spoke he knelt upon his knees, "Father, I bring you not good store of merchandise and bags of gold alone; I bring you also a wedded wife, whom I have saved this night from death." And when the old man's surprise was quieted, he told him the whole story. Now Messer Paolo, desiring no better than that his son should wed the heiress of his neighbour, and knowing well that Messer Pietro would make great joy receiving back his daughter from the grave, bade Gerardo in haste take rich apparel and clothe Elena therewith, and fetch her home. These things were swiftly done; and after evenfall Messer Pietro was bidden to grave business in his neighbour's palace. With heavy heart he came, from a house of mourning to a house of gladness. But there, at the banquet-table's head he saw his dead child Elena alive, and at her side a husband. And when the whole truth had been declared, he not only kissed and embraced the pair who knelt before him, but of his goodness forgave the nurse, who in her turn came trembling to his feet. Then fell there joy and bliss in over-measure that night upon both palaces of the Canal [Pg 198] Grande. And with the morrow the Church blessed the spousals which long since had been on both sides vowed and consummated.

VI.—On the Lagoons.

The mornings are spent in study, sometimes among pictures, sometimes in the Marcian Library, or again in those vast convent chambers of the Frari, where the archives of Venice load innumerable shelves. The afternoons invite us to a further flight upon the water. Both sandolo and gondola await our choice, and we may sail or row, according as the wind and inclination tempt us.

Yonder lies San Lazzaro, with the neat red buildings of the Armenian convent. The last oleander blossoms shine rosy pink above its walls against the pure blue sky as we glide into the little harbour. Boats piled with coal-black grapes block the landing-place, for the Padri are gathering their vintage from the Lido, and their presses run with new wine. Eustace and I have not come to revive memories of Byron—that curious patron saint of the Armenian colony—or to inspect the printing-press, which issues books of little value for our studies. It is enough to pace the terrace, and linger half an hour beneath the low broad arches of the alleys pleached with vines, through which the domes and towers of Venice rise more beautiful by distance.

Malamocco lies considerably farther, and needs a full hour of stout rowing to reach it. Alighting there, we cross the narrow strip of land, and find ourselves upon the huge sea-wall—block piled [Pg 199] on block—of Istrian stone in tiers and ranks, with cunning breathing-places for the waves to wreak their fury on and foam their force away in fretful waste. The very existence of Venice may be said to depend sometimes on these *murazzi*, which were finished at an immense cost by the Republic in the days of its decadence. The enormous monoliths which compose them had to be brought across the Adriatic in sailing vessels. Of all the Lidi, that of Malamocco is the weakest; and here, if anywhere, the sea might effect an entrance into the lagoon. Our gondoliers told us of some places where the *murazzi* were broken in a gale, or *sciroccale*, not very long ago. Lying awake in Venice, when the wind blows hard, one hears the sea thundering upon its sandy barrier, and blesses God for the *murazzi*. On such a night it happened once to me to dream a dream of Venice overwhelmed by water. I saw the billows roll across the smooth lagoon like a gigantic Eager. The Ducal Palace crumbled, and San Marco's domes went down. The Campanile rocked and shivered like a reed. And all along the Grand Canal the palaces swayed helpless, tottering to their fall, while boats piled high with men and women strove to stem the tide, and save themselves from those impending ruins. It was a mad dream, born of the sea's roar and Tintoretto's painting. But this afternoon no such visions are suggested. The sea sleeps, and in the moist autumn air we break tall branches of the seeded yellowing samphire from hollows of the rocks, and bear them homeward in a wayward bouquet mixed with cobs of Indian-corn.

Fusina is another point for these excursions. It lies at the mouth of the Canal di Brenta, where [Pg 200] the mainland ends in marsh and meadows, intersected by broad renes. In spring the ditches bloom with fleurs-de-lys; in autumn they take sober colouring from lilac daisies and the delicate sea-lavender. Scores of tiny plants are turning scarlet on the brown moist earth; and when the sun goes down behind the Euganean hills, his crimson canopy of cloud, reflected on these shallows, muddy shoals, and wilderness of matted weeds, converts the common earth into a fairyland of fabulous dyes. Purple, violet, and rose are spread around us. In front stretches the lagoon, tinted with a pale light from the east, and beyond this pallid mirror shines Venice—a long low broken line, touched with the softest roseate flush. Ere we reach the Giudecca on our homeward way, sunset has faded. The western skies have clad themselves in green, barred with dark fire-rimmed clouds. The Euganean hills stand like stupendous pyramids, Egyptian, solemn, against a lemon space on the horizon. The far reaches of the lagoons, the Alps, and islands assume those tones of glowing lilac which are the supreme beauty of Venetian evening. Then, at last, we see the first lamps glitter on the Zattere. The quiet of the night has come.

Words cannot be formed to express the endless varieties of Venetian sunset. The most magnificent follow after wet stormy days, when the west breaks suddenly into a labyrinth of fire, when chasms of clear turquoise heavens emerge, and horns of flame are flashed to the zenith, and unexpected splendours scale the fretted clouds, step over step, stealing along the purple caverns till the whole dome throbs. Or, again, after a fair day, a change of weather approaches, [Pg 201] and high, infinitely high, the skies are woven over with a web of half-transparent cirrus-clouds. These in the after-glow blush crimson, and through their rifts the depth of heaven is of a hard and gem-like blue, and all the water turns to rose beneath them. I remember one such evening on the way back from Torcello. We were well out at sea between Mazzorbo and Murano. The ruddy arches overhead were reflected without interruption in the waveless ruddy lake below. Our black boat was the only dark spot in this sphere of splendour. We seemed to hang suspended; and such as this, I fancied, must be the feeling of an insect caught in the heart of a fiery-petalled rose. Yet not these melodramatic sunsets alone are beautiful. Even more exquisite, perhaps, are the lagoons, painted in monochrome of greys, with just one touch of pink upon a western cloud, scattered in ripples here and there on the waves below, reminding us that day has passed and evening come. And beautiful again are the calm settings of fair weather, when sea and sky alike are cheerful, and the topmost blades of the lagoon grass, peeping from the shallows, glance like emeralds upon the surface. There is no deep stirring of the spirit in a symphony of light and colour; but purity, peace, and freshness make their way into our hearts.

VII.—At the Lido.

Of all these afternoon excursions, that to the Lido is most frequent. It has two points for approach. The more distant is the little station of San Nicoletto, at the mouth of the Porto. With an ebb-tide, the water of the lagoon runs past the mulberry gardens of this hamlet like a river. [Pg 202]

There is here a grove of acacia-trees, shadowy and dreamy, above deep grass, which even an Italian summer does not wither. The Riva is fairly broad, forming a promenade, where one may conjure up the personages of a century ago. For San Nicoletto used to be a fashionable resort before the other points of Lido had been occupied by pleasure-seekers. An artist even now will select its old-world quiet, leafy shade, and prospect through the islands of Vignole and Sant'Erasmo to snow-touched peaks of Antelao and Tofana, rather than the glare and bustle and extended view of Venice which its rival Sant'Elisabetta offers.

But when we want a plunge into the Adriatic, or a stroll along smooth sands, or a breath of genuine sea-breeze, or a handful of horned poppies from the dunes, or a lazy half-hour's contemplation of a limitless horizon flecked with russet sails, then we seek Sant'Elisabetta. Our boat is left at the landing-place. We saunter across the island and back again. Antonio and Francesco wait and order wine, which we drink with them in the shade of the little *osteria's* wall.

A certain afternoon in May I well remember, for this visit to the Lido was marked by one of those apparitions which are as rare as they are welcome to the artist's soul. I have always held that in our modern life the only real equivalent for the antique mythopœic sense—that sense which enabled the Hellenic race to figure for themselves the powers of earth and air, streams and forests, and the presiding genii of places, under the forms of living human beings, is supplied by the appearance at some felicitous moment of a man or woman who impersonates for our [Pg 203] imagination the essence of the beauty that environs us. It seems, at such a fortunate moment, as though we had been waiting for this revelation, although perchance the want of it had not been previously felt. Our sensations and perceptions test themselves at the touchstone of this living individuality. The keynote of the whole music dimly sounding in our ears is struck. A melody emerges, clear in form and excellent in rhythm. The landscapes we have painted on our brain, no longer lack their central figure. The life proper to the complex conditions we have studied is discovered, and every detail, judged by this standard of vitality, falls into its right relations.

I had been musing long that day and earnestly upon the mystery of the lagoons, their opaline transparencies of air and water, their fretful risings and sudden subsidence into calm, the treacherousness of their shoals, the sparkle and the splendour of their sunlight. I had asked myself how would a Greek sculptor have personified the elemental deity of these salt-water lakes, so different in quality from the Ægean or Ionian sea? What would he find distinctive of their spirit? The Tritons of these shallows must be of other form and lineage than the fierce-eyed youth who blows his conch upon the curled crest of a wave, crying aloud to his comrades, as he bears the nymph away to caverns where the billows plunge in tideless instability.

We had picked up shells and looked for sea-horses on the Adriatic shore. Then we returned to give our boatmen wine beneath the vine-clad *pergola*. Four other men were there, drinking, and eating from a dish of fried fish set upon the coarse white linen cloth. Two of them soon rose and [Pg 204] went away. Of the two who stayed, one was a large, middle-aged man; the other was still young. He was tall and sinewy, but slender, for these Venetians are rarely massive in their strength. Each limb is equally developed by the exercise of rowing upright, bending all the muscles to their stroke. Their bodies are elastically supple, with free sway from the hips and a mercurial poise upon the ankle. Stefano showed these qualities almost in exaggeration. The type in him was refined to its artistic perfection. Moreover, he was rarely in repose, but moved with a singular brusque grace. A black broad-brimmed hat was thrown back upon his matted *zazzera* of dark hair tipped with dusky brown. This shock of hair, cut in flakes, and falling wilfully, reminded me of the lagoon grass when it darkens in autumn upon uncovered shoals, and sunset gilds its sombre edges. Fiery grey eyes beneath it gazed intensely, with compulsive effluence of electricity. It was the wild glance of a Triton. Short blonde moustache, dazzling teeth, skin bronzed, but showing white and healthful through open front and sleeves of lilac shirt. The dashing sparkle of this animate splendour, who looked to me as though the sea-waves and the sun had made him in some hour of secret and unquiet rapture, was somehow emphasised by a curious dint dividing his square chin—a cleft that harmonised with smile on lip and steady flame in eyes. I hardly know what effect it would have upon a reader to compare eyes to opals. Yet Stefano's eyes, as they met mine, had the vitreous intensity of opals, as though the colour of Venetian waters were vitalised in them. This noticeable being had a rough, hoarse voice, which, to develop the parallel with a [Pg 205] sea-god, might have screamed in storm or whispered raucous messages from crests of tossing billows.

I felt, as I looked, that here, for me at least, the mythopoem of the lagoons was humanised; the spirit of the salt-water lakes had appeared to me; the final touch of life emergent from nature had been given. I was satisfied; for I had seen a poem.

Then we rose, and wandered through the Jews' cemetery. It is a quiet place, where the flat grave-stones, inscribed in Hebrew and Italian, lie deep in Lido sand, waved over with wild grass and poppies. I would fain believe that no neglect, but rather the fashion of this folk, had left the monuments of generations to be thus resumed by nature. Yet, knowing nothing of the history of this burial-ground, I dare not affirm so much. There is one outlying piece of the cemetery which seems to contradict my charitable interpretation. It is not far from San Nicoletto. No enclosure marks it from the unconsecrated dunes. Acacia-trees sprout amid the monuments, and break the tablets with their thorny shoots upthrusting from the soil. Where patriarchs and rabbis sleep for centuries, the fishers of the sea now wander, and defile these habitations of the dead:

> Corruption most abhorred
> Mingling itself with their renownèd ashes.

Some of the grave-stones have been used to fence the towing-path; and one I saw, well carved with letters legible of Hebrew on fair Itrian marble, which roofed an open drain leading from the stable of a Christian dog.

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VIII.—A Venetian Restaurant.

At the end of a long glorious day, unhappy is that mortal whom the Hermes of a cosmopolitan hotel, white-chokered and white-waistcoated, marshals to the Hades of the *table-d'hôte*. The world has often been compared to an inn; but on my way down to this common meal I have, not unfrequently, felt fain to reverse the simile. From their separate stations, at the appointed hour, the guests like ghosts flit to a gloomy gas-lit chamber. They are of various speech and race, preoccupied with divers interests and cares. Necessity and the waiter drive them all to a sepulchral syssition, whereof the cook too frequently deserves that old Greek comic epithet—ἅδου μάγειρος—cook of the Inferno. And just as we are told that in Charon's boat we shall not be allowed to pick our society, so here we must accept what fellowship the fates provide. An English spinster retailing paradoxes culled to-day from Ruskin's handbooks; an American citizen describing his jaunt in a gondola from the railway station; a German shopkeeper descanting in one breath on Baur's Bock and the beauties of the Marcusplatz; an intelligent æsthete bent on working into clearness his own views of Carpaccio's genius: all these in turn, or all together, must be suffered gladly through well-nigh two long hours. Uncomforted in soul we rise from the expensive banquet; and how often rise from it unfed!

Far other be the doom of my own friends—of pious bards and genial companions, lovers of natural and lovely things! Nor for these do I desire a seat at Florian's marble tables, or a perch in [Pg 207] Quadri's window, though the former supply dainty food, and the latter command a bird's-eye view of the Piazza. Rather would I lead them to a certain humble tavern on the Zattere. It is a quaint, low-built, unpretending little place, near a bridge, with a garden hard by which sends a cataract of honeysuckles sunward over a too-jealous wall. In front lies a Mediterranean steamer, which all day long has been discharging cargo. Gazing westward up Giudecca, masts and funnels bar the sunset and the Paduan hills; and from a little front room of the *trattoria* the view is so marine that one keeps fancying oneself in some ship's cabin. Sea-captains sit and smoke beside their glass of grog in the pavilion and the *caffé*. But we do not seek their company at dinner-time. Our way lies under yonder arch, and up the narrow alley into a paved court. Here are oleanders in pots, and plants of Japanese spindle-wood in tubs; and from the walls beneath the window hang cages of all sorts of birds—a talking parrot, a whistling blackbird, goldfinches, canaries, linnets. Athos, the fat dog, who goes to market daily in a *barchetta* with his master, snuffs around. "Where are Porthos and Aramis, my friend?" Athos does not take the joke; he only wags his stump of tail and pokes his nose into my hand. What a Tartufe's nose it is! Its bridge displays the full parade of leather-bound brass-nailed muzzle. But beneath, this muzzle is a patent sham. The frame does not even pretend to close on Athos' jaw, and the wise dog wears it like a decoration. A little farther we meet that ancient grey cat, who has no discoverable name, but is famous for the sprightliness and grace with which she bears her eighteen years. Not far from the cat one is sure [Pg 208] to find Carlo—the bird-like, bright-faced, close-cropped Venetian urchin, whose duty it is to trot backwards and forwards between the cellar and the dining-tables. At the end of the court we walk into the kitchen, where the black-capped little *padrone* and the gigantic white-capped *chef* are in close consultation. Here we have the privilege of inspecting the larder—fish of various sorts, meat, vegetables, several kinds of birds, pigeons, tordi, beccafichi, geese, wild ducks, chickens, woodcock, &c. ., according to the season. We select our dinner, and retire to eat it either in the court among the birds beneath the vines, or in the low dark room which occupies one side of it. Artists of many nationalities and divers ages frequent this house; and the talk arising from the several little tables, turns upon points of interest and beauty in the life and landscape of Venice. There can be no difference of opinion about the excellence of the *cuisine*, or about the reasonable charges of this *trattoria*. A soup of lentils, followed by boiled turbot or fried soles, beef-steak or mutton cutlets, tordi or beccafichi, with a salad, the whole enlivened with good red wine or Florio's Sicilian Marsala from the cask, costs about four francs. Gas is unknown in the establishment. There is no noise, no bustle, no brutality of waiters, no *ahurissement* of tourists. And when dinner is done, we can sit awhile over our cigarette and coffee, talking until the night invites us to a stroll along the Zattere or a *giro* in the gondola.

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IX.—Night in Venice.

Night in Venice! Night is nowhere else so wonderful, unless it be winter among the high Alps. But the nights of Venice and the nights of the mountains are too different in kind to be compared.

There is the ever-recurring miracle of the full moon rising, before day is dead, behind San Giorgio, spreading a path of gold on the lagoon which black boats traverse with the glow-worm lamp upon their prow; ascending the cloudless sky and silvering the domes of the Salute; pouring vitreous sheen upon the red lights of the Piazzetta; flooding the Grand Canal, and lifting the Rialto higher in ethereal whiteness; piercing but penetrating not the murky labyrinth of *rio* linked with *rio*, through which we wind in light and shadow, to reach once more the level glories and the luminous expanse of heaven beyond the Misericordia.

This is the melodrama of Venetian moonlight; and if a single impression of the night has to be

retained from one visit to Venice, those are fortunate who chance upon a full moon of fair weather. Yet I know not whether some quieter and soberer effects are not more thrilling. To-night, for example, the waning moon will rise late through veils of *scirocco*. Over the bridges of San Cristoforo and San Gregorio, through the deserted Calle di Mezzo, my friend and I walk in darkness, pass the marble basements of the Salute, and push our way along its Riva to the point of the Dogana. We are out at sea alone, between the Canalozzo and the Giudecca. A moist wind ruffles the water and cools our forehead. It is so dark that we can only see San Giorgio by the [Pg 210] light reflected on it from the Piazzetta. The same light climbs the Campanile of S. Mark, and shows the golden angel in mystery of gloom. The only noise that reaches us is a confused hum from the Piazza. Sitting and musing there, the blackness of the water whispers in our ears a tale of death. And now we hear a plash of oars and gliding through the darkness comes a single boat. One man leaps upon the landing-place without a word and disappears. There is another wrapped in a military cloak asleep. I see his face beneath me, pale and quiet. The *barcaruolo* turns the point in silence. From the darkness they came; into the darkness they have gone. It is only an ordinary incident of coastguard service. But the spirit of the night has made a poem of it.

Even tempestuous and rainy weather, though melancholy enough, is never sordid here. There is no noise from carriage traffic in Venice, and the sea-wind preserves the purity and transparency of the atmosphere. It had been raining all day, but at evening came a partial clearing. I went down to the Molo, where the large reach of the lagoon was all moon-silvered, and San Giorgio Maggiore dark against the blueish sky, and Santa Maria della Salute domed with moon-irradiated pearl, and the wet slabs of the Riva shimmering in moonlight, the whole misty sky, with its clouds and stellar spaces, drenched in moonlight, nothing but moonlight sensible except the tawny flare of gas-lamps and the orange lights of gondolas afloat upon the waters. On such a night the very spirit of Venice is abroad. We feel why she is called Bride of the Sea.

Take yet another night. There had been a representation of Verdi's "Forza del Destino" at the [Pg 211] Teatro Malibran. After midnight we walked homeward through the Merceria, crossed the Piazza, and dived into the narrow *calle* which leads to the *traghetto* of the Salute. It was a warm moist starless night, and there seemed no air to breathe in those narrow alleys. The gondolier was half asleep. Eustace called him as we jumped into his boat, and rang our *soldi* on the gunwale. Then he arose and turned the *ferro* round, and stood across towards the Salute. Silently, insensibly, from the oppression of confinement in the airless streets to the liberty and immensity of the water and the night we passed. It was but two minutes ere we touched the shore and said good-night, and went our way and left the ferryman. But in that brief passage he had opened our souls to everlasting things—the freshness, and the darkness, and the kindness of the brooding, all-enfolding night above the sea.

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THE GONDOLIER'S WEDDING.

The night before the wedding we had a supper-party in my rooms. We were twelve in all. My friend Eustace brought his gondolier Antonio with fair-haired, dark-eyed wife, and little Attilio, their eldest child. My own gondolier, Francesco, came with his wife and two children. Then there was the handsome, languid Luigi, who, in his best clothes, or out of them, is fit for any drawing-room. Two gondoliers, in dark blue shirts, completed the list of guests, if we exclude the maid Catina, who came and went about the table, laughing and joining in the songs, and sitting down at intervals to take her share of wine. The big room looking across the garden to the Grand Canal had been prepared for supper; and the company were to be received in the smaller, which has a fine open space in front of it to southwards. But as the guests arrived, they seemed to find the kitchen and the cooking that was going on quite irresistible. Catina, it seems, had lost her head with so many cuttlefishes, *orai*, cakes, and fowls, and cutlets to reduce to order. There was, therefore, a great bustle below stairs; and I could hear plainly that all my guests were lending their making, or their marring, hands to the preparation of the supper. That the company should cook their own food on the way to the dining-room, seemed a quite novel arrangement, but one [Pg 213] that promised well for their contentment with the banquet. Nobody could be dissatisfied with what was everybody's affair.

When seven o'clock struck, Eustace and I, who had been entertaining the children in their mothers' absence, heard the sound of steps upon the stairs. The guests arrived, bringing their own *risotto* with them. Welcome was short, if hearty. We sat down in carefully appointed order, and fell into such conversation as the quarter of San Vio and our several interests supplied. From time to time one of the matrons left the table and descended to the kitchen, when a finishing stroke was needed for roast pullet or stewed veal. The excuses they made their host for supposed failure in the dishes, lent a certain grace and comic charm to the commonplace of festivity. The entertainment was theirs as much as mine; and they all seemed to enjoy what took the form by degrees of curiously complicated hospitality. I do not think a well-ordered supper at any *trattoria*, such as at first suggested itself to my imagination, would have given any of us an equal pleasure or an equal sense of freedom. The three children had become the guests of the whole party. Little Attilio, propped upon an air-cushion, which puzzled him exceedingly, ate through his supper and

drank his wine with solid satisfaction, opening the large brown eyes beneath those tufts of clustering fair hair which promise much beauty for him in his manhood. Francesco's boy, who is older and begins to know the world, sat with a semi-suppressed grin upon his face, as though the humour of the situation was not wholly hidden from him. Little Teresa too was happy, except when her mother, a severe Pomona, with enormous earrings and splendid *fazzoletto* of crimson [Pg 214] and orange dyes, pounced down upon her for some supposed infraction of good manners —*creanza*, as they vividly express it here. Only Luigi looked a trifle bored. But Luigi has been a soldier, and has now attained the supercilious superiority of young-manhood, which smokes its cigar of an evening in the piazza and knows the merits of the different cafés.

The great business of the evening began when the eating was over, and the decanters filled with new wine of Mirano circulated freely. The four best singers of the party drew together; and the rest prepared themselves to make suggestions, hum tunes, and join with fitful effect in choruses. Antonio, who is a powerful young fellow, with bronzed cheeks and a perfect tempest of coal-black hair in flakes upon his forehead, has a most extraordinary soprano—sound as a bell, strong as a trumpet, well-trained, and true to the least shade in intonation. Piero, whose rugged Neptunian features, sea-wrinkled, tell of a rough water-life, boasts a bass of resonant, almost pathetic quality. Francesco has a *mezza voce*, which might, by a stretch of politeness, be called baritone. Piero's comrade, whose name concerns us not, has another of these nondescript voices. They sat together with their glasses and cigars before them, sketching part-songs in outline, striking the keynote—now higher and now lower—till they saw their subject well in view. Then they burst into full singing, Antonio leading with a metal note that thrilled one's ears, but still was musical. Complicated contrapuntal pieces, such as we should call madrigals, with ever-recurring refrains of "Venezia, gemma Triatica, sposa del mar," descending probably from ancient days, followed each other in quick succession. Barcaroles, serenades, love-songs, and [Pg 215] invitations to the water were interwoven for relief. One of these romantic pieces had a beautiful burden, "Dormi, o bella, o fingi di dormir," of which the melody was fully worthy. But the most successful of all the tunes were two with a sad motive. The one repeated incessantly "Ohimé! mia madre morì;" the other was a girl's love lament: "Perchè tradirmi, perchè lasciarmi! prima d'amarmi non eri così!" Even the children joined in these; and Catina, who took the solo part in the second, was inspired to a great dramatic effort. All these were purely popular songs. The people of Venice, however, are passionate for operas. Therefore we had duets and solos from "Ernani," the "Ballo in Maschera," and the "Forza del Destino," and one comic chorus from "Boccaccio," which seemed to make them wild with pleasure. To my mind, the best of these more formal pieces was a duet between Attila and Italia from some opera unknown to me, which Antonio and Piero performed with incomparable spirit. It was noticeable how, descending to the people, sung by them for love at sea, or on excursions to the villages round Mestre, these operatic reminiscences had lost something of their theatrical formality, and assumed instead the serious gravity, the quaint movement, and marked emphasis which belong to popular music in Northern and Central Italy. An antique character was communicated even to the recitative of Verdi by slight, almost indefinable, changes of rhythm and accent. There was no end to the singing. "Siamo appassionati per il canto," frequently repeated, was proved true by the profusion and variety of songs produced from inexhaustible memories, lightly tried over, brilliantly [Pg 216] performed, rapidly succeeding each other. Nor were gestures wanting—lifted arms, hands stretched to hands, flashing eyes, hair tossed from the forehead—unconscious and appropriate action—which showed how the spirit of the music and words alike possessed the men. One by one the children fell asleep. Little Attilio and Teresa were tucked up beneath my Scotch shawl at two ends of a great sofa; and not even his father's clarion voice, in the character of Italia defying Attila to harm "le mie superbe città," could wake the little boy up. The night wore on. It was past one. Eustace and I had promised to be in the church of the Gesuati at six next morning. We, therefore, gave the guests a gentle hint, which they as gently took. With exquisite, because perfectly unaffected, breeding they sank for a few moments into common conversation, then wrapped the children up, and took their leave. It was an uncomfortable, warm, wet night of sullen *scirocco*.

The next day, which was Sunday, Francesco called me at five. There was no visible sunrise that cheerless damp October morning. Grey dawn stole somehow imperceptibly between the veil of clouds and leaden waters, as my friend and I, well sheltered by our *felze*, passed into the Giudecca, and took our station before the church of the Gesuati. A few women from the neighbouring streets and courts crossed the bridges in draggled petticoats on their way to first mass. A few men, shouldering their jackets, lounged along the Zattere, opened the great green doors, and entered. Then suddenly Antonio cried out that the bridal party was on its way, not as we had expected, in boats, but on foot. We left our gondola, and fell into the ranks, after shaking [Pg 217] hands with Francesco, who is the elder brother of the bride. There was nothing very noticeable in her appearance, except her large dark eyes. Otherwise both face and figure were of a common type; and her bridal dress of sprigged grey silk, large veil and orange blossoms, reduced her to the level of a *bourgeoise*. It was much the same with the bridegroom. His features, indeed, proved him a true Venetian gondolier; for the skin was strained over the cheekbones, and the muscles of the throat beneath the jaws stood out like cords, and the bright blue eyes were deep-set beneath a spare brown forehead. But he had provided a complete suit of black for the occasion, and wore a shirt of worked cambric, which disguised what is really splendid in the physique of these oarsmen, at once slender and sinewy. Both bride and bridegroom looked uncomfortable in their clothes. The light that fell upon them in the church was dull and leaden. The ceremony, which was very hurriedly performed by an unctuous priest, did not appear to impress either of them. Nobody in the bridal party, crowding together on both sides of the altar, looked as though the service was of the slightest interest and moment. Indeed, this was hardly to

be wondered at; for the priest, so far as I could understand his gabble, took the larger portion for read, after muttering the first words of the rubric. A little carven image of an acolyte—a weird boy who seemed to move by springs, whose hair had all the semblance of painted wood, and whose complexion was white and red like a clown's—did not make matters more intelligible by spasmodically clattering responses.

After the ceremony we heard mass and contributed to three distinct offertories. Considering [Pg 218] how much account even two *soldi* are to these poor people, I was really angry when I heard the copper shower. Every member of the party had his or her pennies ready, and dropped them into the boxes. Whether it was the effect of the bad morning, or the ugliness of a very ill-designed *barocco* building, or the fault of the fat oily priest, I know not. But the *sposalizio* struck me as tame and cheerless, the mass as irreverent and vulgarly conducted. At the same time there is something too impressive in the mass for any perfunctory performance to divest its symbolism of sublimity. A Protestant Communion Service lends itself more easily to degradation by unworthiness in the minister.

We walked down the church in double file, led by the bride and bridegroom, who had knelt during the ceremony with the best man—*compare*, as he is called—at a narrow *prie-dieu* before the altar. The *compare* is a person of distinction at these weddings. He has to present the bride with a great pyramid of artificial flowers, which is placed before her at the marriage-feast, a packet of candles, and a box of bonbons. The comfits, when the box is opened, are found to include two magnificent sugar babies lying in their cradles. I was told that a *compare*, who does the thing handsomely, must be prepared to spend about a hundred francs upon these presents, in addition to the wine and cigars with which he treats his friends. On this occasion the women were agreed that he had done his duty well. He was a fat, wealthy little man, who lived by letting market-boats for hire on the Rialto.

From the church to the bride's house was a walk of some three minutes. On the way we were introduced to the father of the bride—a very magnificent personage, with points of strong [Pg 219] resemblance to Vittorio Emmanuele. He wore an enormous broad-brimmed hat and emerald-green earrings, and looked considerably younger than his eldest son, Francesco. Throughout the *nozze* he took the lead in a grand imperious fashion of his own. Wherever he went, he seemed to fill the place, and was fully aware of his own importance. In Florence I think he would have got the nickname of *Tacchin*, or turkey-cock. Here at Venice the sons and daughters call their parent briefly *Vecchio*. I heard him so addressed with a certain amount of awe, expecting an explosion of bubbly-jock displeasure. But he took it, as though it was natural, without disturbance. The other *Vecchio*, father of the bridegroom, struck me as more sympathetic. He was a gentle old man, proud of his many prosperous, laborious sons. They, like the rest of the gentlemen, were gondoliers. Both the *Vecchi*, indeed, continue to ply their trade, day and night, at the *traghetto*.

Traghetti are stations for gondolas at different points of the canals. As their name implies, it is the first duty of the gondoliers upon them to ferry people across. This they do for the fixed fee of five centimes. The *traghetti* are in fact Venetian cab-stands. And, of course, like London cabs, the gondolas may be taken off them for trips. The municipality, however, makes it a condition, under penalty of fine to the *traghetto*, that each station should always be provided with two boats for the service of the ferry. When vacancies occur on the *traghetti*, a gondolier who owns or hires a boat makes application to the municipality, receives a number, and is inscribed as plying at a certain station. He has now entered a sort of guild, which is presided over by a *Capo-traghetto*, [Pg 220] elected by the rest for the protection of their interests, the settlement of disputes, and the management of their common funds. In the old acts of Venice this functionary is styled *Gastaldo di traghetto*. The members have to contribute something yearly to the guild. This payment varies upon different stations, according to the greater or less amount of the tax levied by the municipality on the *traghetto*. The highest subscription I have heard of is twenty-five francs; the lowest, seven. There is one *traghetto*, known by the name of Madonna del Giglio or Zobenigo, which possesses near its *pergola* of vines a nice old brown Venetian picture. Some stranger offered a considerable sum for this. But the guild refused to part with it.

As may be imagined, the *traghetti* vary greatly in the amount and quality of their custom. By far the best are those in the neighbourhood of the hotels upon the Grand Canal. At any one of these a gondolier during the season is sure of picking up some foreigner or other who will pay him handsomely for comparatively light service. A *traghetto* on the Giudecca, on the contrary, depends upon Venetian traffic. The work is more monotonous, and the pay is reduced to its tariffed minimum. So far as I can gather, an industrious gondolier, with a good boat, belonging to a good *traghetto*, may make as much as ten or fifteen francs in a single day. But this cannot be relied on. They therefore prefer a fixed appointment with a private family, for which they receive by tariff five francs a day, or by arrangement for long periods perhaps four francs a day, with certain perquisites and small advantages. It is great luck to get such an engagement for the [Pg 221] winter. The heaviest anxieties which beset a gondolier are then disposed of. Having entered private service, they are not allowed to ply their trade on the *traghetto*, except by stipulation with their masters. Then they may take their place one night out of every six in the rank and file. The gondoliers have two proverbs, which show how desirable it is, while taking a fixed engagement, to keep their hold on the *traghetto*. One is to this effect: *il traghetto è un buon padrone*. The other satirises the meanness of the poverty-stricken Venetian nobility: *pompa di servitù, misera insegna*. When they combine the *traghetto* with private service, the municipality insists on their retaining the number painted on their gondola; and against this their employers frequently object. It is, therefore, a great point for a gondolier to make such an arrangement with his master as will leave him free to show his number. The reason for this regulation is obvious. Gondoliers

are known more by their numbers and their *traghetti* than their names. They tell me that though there are upwards of a thousand registered in Venice, each man of the trade knows the whole confraternity by face and number. Taking all things into consideration, I think four francs a day the whole year round are very good earnings for a gondolier. On this he will marry and rear a family, and put a little money by. A young unmarried man, working at two and a half or three francs a day, is proportionately well-to-do. If he is economical, he ought upon these wages to save enough in two or three years to buy himself a gondola. A boy from fifteen to nineteen is called a *mezz'uomo*, and gets about one franc a day. A new gondola with all its fittings is worth about a [Pg 222] thousand francs. It does not last in good condition more than six or seven years. At the end of that time the hull will fetch eighty francs. A new hull can be had for three hundred francs. The old fittings—brass sea-horses or *cavalli*, steel prow or *ferro*, covered cabin or *felze*, cushions and leather-covered back-board or *stramazetto*, may be transferred to it. When a man wants to start a gondola, he will begin by buying one already half past service—a *gondola da traghetto* or *di mezza età*. This should cost him something over two hundred francs. Little by little, he accumulates the needful fittings; and when his first purchase is worn out, he hopes to set up with a well-appointed equipage. He thus gradually works his way from the rough trade which involves hard work and poor earnings to that more profitable industry which cannot be carried on without a smart boat. The gondola is a source of continual expense for repairs. Its oars have to be replaced. It has to be washed with sponges, blacked, and varnished. Its bottom needs frequent cleaning. Weeds adhere to it in the warm brackish water, growing rapidly through the summer months, and demanding to be scrubbed off once in every four weeks. The gondolier has no place where he can do this for himself. He therefore takes his boat to a wharf, or *squero*, as the place is called. At these *squeri* gondolas are built as well as cleaned. The fee for a thorough setting to rights of the boat is five francs. It must be done upon a fine day. Thus in addition to the cost, the owner loses a good day's work.

These details will serve to give some notion of the sort of people with whom Eustace and I [Pg 223] spent our day. The bride's house is in an excellent position on an open canal leading from the Canalozzo to the Giudecca. She had arrived before us, and received her friends in the middle of the room. Each of us in turn kissed her cheek and murmured our congratulations. We found the large living-room of the house arranged with chairs all round the walls, and the company were marshalled in some order of precedence, my friend and I taking place near the bride. On either hand airy bed-rooms opened out, and two large doors, wide open, gave a view from where we sat of a good-sized kitchen. This arrangement of the house was not only comfortable, but pretty; for the bright copper pans and pipkins ranged on shelves along the kitchen walls had a very cheerful effect. The walls were whitewashed, but literally covered with all sorts of pictures. A great plaster cast from some antique, an Atys, Adonis, or Paris, looked down from a bracket placed between the windows. There was enough furniture, solid and well kept, in all the rooms. Among the pictures were full-length portraits in oils of two celebrated gondoliers—one in antique costume, the other painted a few years since. The original of the latter soon came and stood before it. He had won regatta prizes; and the flags of four discordant colours were painted round him by the artist, who had evidently cared more to commemorate the triumphs of his sitter and to strike a likeness than to secure the tone of his own picture. This champion turned out a fine fellow—Corradini—with one of the brightest little gondoliers of thirteen for his son.

After the company were seated, lemonade and cakes were handed round amid a hubbub of [Pg 224] chattering women. Then followed cups of black coffee and more cakes. Then a glass of Cyprus and more cakes. Then a glass of curaçoa and more cakes. Finally, a glass of noyau and still more cakes. It was only a little after seven in the morning. Yet politeness compelled us to consume these delicacies. I tried to shirk my duty; but this discretion was taken by my hosts for well-bred modesty; and instead of being let off, I had the richest piece of pastry and the largest macaroon available pressed so kindly on me, that, had they been poisoned, I would not have refused to eat them. The conversation grew more and more animated, the women gathering together in their dresses of bright blue and scarlet, the men lighting cigars and puffing out a few quiet words. It struck me as a drawback that these picturesque people had put on Sunday-clothes to look as much like shop-keepers as possible. But they did not all of them succeed. Two handsome women, who handed the cups round—one a brunette, the other a blonde—wore skirts of brilliant blue, with a sort of white jacket, and white kerchief folded heavily about their shoulders. The brunette had a great string of coral, the blonde of amber, round her throat. Gold earrings and the long gold chains Venetian women wear, of all patterns and degrees of value, abounded. Nobody appeared without them; but I could not see any of an antique make. The men seemed to be contented with rings—huge, heavy rings of solid gold, worked with a rough flower pattern. One young fellow had three upon his fingers. This circumstance led me to speculate whether a certain portion at least of this display of jewellery around me had not been borrowed for the occasion. [Pg 225]

Eustace and I were treated quite like friends. They called us *I Signori*. But this was only, I think, because our English names are quite unmanageable. The women fluttered about us and kept asking whether we really liked it all? whether we should come to the *pranzo*? whether it was true we danced? It seemed to give them unaffected pleasure to be kind to us; and when we rose to go away, the whole company crowded round, shaking hands and saying: "*Si divertirà bene stasera*!" Nobody resented our presence; what was better, no one put himself out for us. "*Vogliono veder il nostro costume*," I heard one woman say.

We got home soon after eight, and, as our ancestors would have said, settled our stomachs with a dish of tea. It makes me shudder now to think of the mixed liquids and miscellaneous cakes we had consumed at that unwonted hour.

At half-past three, Eustace and I again prepared ourselves for action. His gondola was in attendance, covered with the *felze*, to take us to the house of the *sposa*. We found the canal crowded with poor people of the quarter—men, women, and children lining the walls along its side, and clustering like bees upon the bridges. The water itself was almost choked with gondolas. Evidently the folk of San Vio thought our wedding procession would be a most exciting pageant. We entered the house, and were again greeted by the bride and bridegroom, who consigned each of us to the control of a fair tyrant. This is the most fitting way of describing our introduction to our partners of the evening; for we were no sooner presented, than the ladies [Pg 226] swooped upon us like their prey, placing their shawls upon our left arms, while they seized and clung to what was left available of us for locomotion. There was considerable giggling and tittering throughout the company when Signora Fenzo, the young and comely wife of a gondolier, thus took possession of Eustace, and Signora dell'Acqua, the widow of another gondolier, appropriated me. The affair had been arranged beforehand, and their friends had probably chaffed them with the difficulty of managing two mad Englishmen. However, they proved equal to the occasion, and the difficulties were entirely on our side. Signora Fenzo was a handsome brunette, quiet in her manners, who meant business. I envied Eustace his subjection to such a reasonable being. Signora dell'Acqua, though a widow, was by no means disconsolate; and I soon perceived that it would require all the address and diplomacy I possessed, to make anything out of her society. She laughed incessantly; darted in the most diverse directions, dragging me along with her; exhibited me in triumph to her cronies; made eyes at me over a fan; repeated my clumsiest remarks, as though they gave her indescribable amusement; and all the while jabbered Venetian at express rate, without the slightest regard for my incapacity to follow her vagaries. The *Vecchio* marshalled us in order. First went the *sposa* and *comare* with the mothers of bride and bridegroom. Then followed the *sposo* and the bridesmaid. After them I was made to lead my fair tormentor. As we descended the staircase there arose a hubbub of excitement from the crowd on the canals. The gondolas moved turbidly upon the face of the waters. The bridegroom [Pg 227] kept muttering to himself, "How we shall be criticised! They will tell each other who was decently dressed, and who stepped awkwardly into the boats, and what the price of my boots was!" Such exclamations, murmured at intervals, and followed by chest-drawn sighs, expressed a deep preoccupation. With regard to his boots, he need have had no anxiety. They were of the shiniest patent leather, much too tight, and without a speck of dust upon them. But his nervousness infected me with a cruel dread. All those eyes were going to watch how we comported ourselves in jumping from the landing-steps into the boat! If this operation, upon a ceremonious occasion, has terrors even for a gondolier, how formidable it ought to be to me! And here is the Signora dell'Acqua's white cachemire shawl dangling on one arm, and the Signora herself languishingly clinging to the other; and the gondolas are fretting in a fury of excitement, like corks, upon the churned green water! The moment was terrible. The *sposa* and her three companions had been safely stowed away beneath their *felze*. The *sposo* had successfully handed the bridesmaid into the second gondola. I had to perform the same office for my partner. Off she went, like a bird, from the bank. I seized a happy moment, followed, bowed, and found myself to my contentment gracefully ensconced in a corner opposite the widow. Seven more gondolas were packed. The procession moved. We glided down the little channel, broke away into the Grand Canal, crossed it, and dived into a labyrinth from which we finally emerged before our destination, the Trattoria di San Gallo. The perils of the landing were soon over; and, with the rest of the guests, my [Pg 228] mercurial companion and I slowly ascended a long flight of stairs leading to a vast upper chamber. Here we were to dine.

It had been the gallery of some palazzo in old days, was above one hundred feet in length, fairly broad, with a roof of wooden rafters and large windows opening on a courtyard garden. I could see the tops of three cypress-trees cutting the grey sky upon a level with us. A long table occupied the centre of this room. It had been laid for upwards of forty persons, and we filled it. There was plenty of light from great glass lustres blazing with gas. When the ladies had arranged their dresses, and the gentlemen had exchanged a few polite remarks, we all sat down to dinner —I next my inexorable widow, Eustace beside his calm and comely partner. The first impression was one of disappointment. It looked so like a public dinner of middle-class people. There was no local character in costume or customs. Men and women sat politely bored, expectant, trifling with their napkins, yawning, muttering nothings about the weather or their neighbours. The frozen commonplaceness of the scene was made for me still more oppressive by Signora dell'Acqua. She was evidently satirical, and could not be happy unless continually laughing at or with somebody. "What a stick the woman will think me!" I kept saying to myself. "How shall I ever invent jokes in this strange land? I cannot even flirt with her in Venetian! And here I have condemned myself—and her too, poor thing—to sit through at least three hours of mortal dulness!" Yet the widow was by no means unattractive. Dressed in black, she had contrived by an artful arrangement of lace and jewellery to give an air of lightness to her costume. She had a [Pg 229] pretty little pale face, a *minois chiffonné*, with slightly turned-up nose, large laughing brown eyes, a dazzling set of teeth, and a tempestuously frizzled mop of powdered hair. When I managed to get a side-look at her quietly, without being giggled at or driven half mad by unintelligible incitements to a jocularity I could not feel, it struck me that, if we once found a common term of communication we should become good friends. But for the moment that *modus vivendi* seemed unattainable. She had not recovered from the first excitement of her capture of me. She was still showing me off and trying to stir me up. The arrival of the soup gave me a momentary relief; and soon the serious business of the afternoon began. I may add that before dinner was over, the Signora dell'Acqua and I were fast friends. I had discovered the way of making jokes, and she had become intelligible. I found her a very nice, though flighty, little woman; and I believe she thought me gifted with the faculty of uttering eccentric epigrams in a

grotesque tongue. Some of my remarks were flung about the table, and had the same success as uncouth Lombard carvings have with connoisseurs in *naïvetés* of art. By that time we had come to be *compare* and *comare* to each other—the sequel of some clumsy piece of jocularity.

It was a heavy entertainment, copious in quantity, excellent in quality, plainly but well cooked. I remarked there was no fish. The widow replied that everybody present ate fish to satiety at home. They did not join a marriage feast at the San Gallo, and pay their nine francs, for that! It should be observed that each guest paid for his own entertainment. This appears to be the [Pg 230] custom. Therefore attendance is complimentary, and the married couple are not at ruinous charges for the banquet. A curious feature in the whole proceeding had its origin in this custom. I noticed that before each cover lay an empty plate, and that my partner began with the first course to heap upon it what she had not eaten. She also took large helpings, and kept advising me to do the same. I said: "No; I only take what I want to eat; if I fill that plate in front of me as you are doing, it will be great waste." This remark elicited shrieks of laughter from all who heard it; and when the hubbub had subsided, I perceived an apparently official personage bearing down upon Eustace, who was in the same perplexity. It was then circumstantially explained to us that the empty plates were put there in order that we might lay aside what we could not conveniently eat, and take it home with us. At the end of the dinner the widow (whom I must now call my *comare*) had accumulated two whole chickens, half a turkey, and a large assortment of mixed eatables. I performed my duty and won her regard by placing delicacies at her disposition.

Crudely stated, this proceeding moves disgust. But that is only because one has not thought the matter out. In the performance there was nothing coarse or nasty. These good folk had made a contract at so much a head—so many fowls, so many pounds of beef, &c., to be supplied; and what they had fairly bought, they clearly had a right to. No one, so far as I could notice, tried to take more than his proper share; except, indeed, Eustace and myself. In our first eagerness to conform to custom, we both overshot the mark, and grabbed at disproportionate helpings. The [Pg 231] waiters politely observed that we were taking what was meant for two; and as the courses followed in interminable sequence, we soon acquired the tact of what was due to us.

Meanwhile the room grew warm. The gentlemen threw off their coats—a pleasant liberty of which I availed myself, and was immediately more at ease. The ladies divested themselves of their shoes (strange to relate!) and sat in comfort with their stockinged feet upon the *scagliola* pavement. I observed that some cavaliers by special permission were allowed to remove their partners' slippers. This was not my lucky fate. My *comare* had not advanced to that point of intimacy. Healths began to be drunk. The conversation took a lively turn; and women went fluttering round the table, visiting their friends, to sip out of their glass, and ask each other how they were getting on. It was not long before the stiff veneer of *bourgeoisie* which bored me had worn off. The people emerged in their true selves: natural, gentle, sparkling with enjoyment, playful. Playful is, I think, the best word to describe them. They played with infinite grace and innocence, like kittens, from the old men of sixty to the little boys of thirteen. Very little wine was drunk. Each guest had a litre placed before him. Many did not finish theirs; and for very few was it replenished. When at last the desert arrived, and the bride's comfits had been handed round, they began to sing. It was very pretty to see a party of three or four friends gathering round some popular beauty, and paying her compliments in verse—they grouped behind her chair, she sitting back in it and laughing up to them, and joining in the chorus. The words, "Brunetta mia [Pg 232] simpatica, ti amo sempre più," sung after this fashion to Eustace's handsome partner, who puffed delicate whiffs from a Russian cigarette, and smiled her thanks, had a peculiar appropriateness. All the ladies, it may be observed in passing, had by this time lit their cigarettes. The men were smoking Toscani, Sellas, or Cavours, and the little boys were dancing round the table breathing smoke from their pert nostrils.

The dinner, in fact, was over. Other relatives of the guests arrived, and then we saw how some of the reserved dishes were to be bestowed. A side-table was spread at the end of the gallery, and these late-comers were regaled with plenty by their friends. Meanwhile, the big table at which we had dined was taken to pieces and removed. The *scagliola* floor was swept by the waiters. Musicians came streaming in and took their places. The ladies resumed their shoes. Every one prepared to dance.

My friend and I were now at liberty to chat with the men. He knew some of them by sight, and claimed acquaintance with others. There was plenty of talk about different boats, gondolas, and sandolos and topos, remarks upon the past season, and inquiries as to chances of engagements in the future. One young fellow told us how he had been drawn for the army, and should be obliged to give up his trade just when he had begun to make it answer. He had got a new gondola, and this would have to be hung up during the years of his service. The warehousing of a boat in these circumstances costs nearly one hundred francs a year, which is a serious tax upon the pockets of [Pg 233] a private in the line. Many questions were put in turn to us, but all of the same tenor. "Had we really enjoyed the *pranzo*? Now, really, were we amusing ourselves? And did we think the custom of the wedding *un bel costume*?" We could give an unequivocally hearty response to all these interrogations. The men seemed pleased. Their interest in our enjoyment was unaffected. It is noticeable how often the word *divertimento* is heard upon the lips of the Italians. They have a notion that it is the function in life of the *Signori* to amuse themselves.

The ball opened, and now we were much besought by the ladies. I had to deny myself with a whole series of comical excuses. Eustace performed his duty after a stiff English fashion—once with his pretty partner of the *pranzo*, and once again with a fat gondolier. The band played waltzes and polkas, chiefly upon patriotic airs—the Marcia Reale, Garibaldi's Hymn, &c. Men danced with men, women with women, little boys and girls together. The gallery whirled with a

laughing crowd. There was plenty of excitement and enjoyment—not an unseemly or extravagant word or gesture. My *comare* careered about with a light mænadic impetuosity, which made me regret my inability to accept her pressing invitations. She pursued me into every corner of the room, but when at last I dropped excuses and told her that my real reason for not dancing was that it would hurt my health, she waived her claims at once with an *Ah, poverino*!

Some time after midnight we felt that we had had enough of *divertimento*. Francesco helped us to slip out unobserved. With many silent good wishes we left the innocent, playful people who [Pg 234] had been so kind to us. The stars were shining from a watery sky as we passed into the piazza beneath the Campanile and the pinnacles of S. Mark. The Riva was almost empty, and the little waves fretted the boats moored to the piazzetta, as a warm moist breeze went fluttering by. We smoked a last cigar, crossed our *traghetto*, and were soon sound asleep at the end of a long, pleasant day. The ball, we heard next morning, finished about four.

Since that evening I have had plenty of opportunities for seeing my friends the gondoliers, both in their own homes and in my apartment. Several have entertained me at their mid-day meal of fried fish and amber-coloured polenta. These repasts were always cooked with scrupulous cleanliness, and served upon a table covered with coarse linen. The polenta is turned out upon a wooden platter, and cut with a string called *lassa*. You take a large slice of it on the palm of the left hand, and break it with the fingers of the right. Wholesome red wine of the Paduan district and good white bread were never wanting. The rooms in which we met to eat looked out on narrow lanes or over pergolas of yellowing vines. Their whitewashed walls were hung with photographs of friends and foreigners, many of them souvenirs from English or American employers. The men, in broad black hats and lilac skirts, sat round the table, girt with the red waist-wrapper, or *fascia*, which marks the ancient faction of the Castellani. The other faction, called Nicolotti, are distinguished by a black *assisa*. The quarters of the town are divided unequally and irregularly into these two parties. What was once a formidable rivalry between two [Pg 235] sections of the Venetian populace, still survives in challenges to trials of strength and skill upon the water. The women, in their many-coloured kerchiefs, stirred polenta at the smoke-blackened chimney, whose huge pent-house roof projects two feet or more across the hearth. When they had served the table they took their seat on low stools, knitted stockings, or drank out of glasses handed across the shoulder to them by their lords. Some of these women were clearly notable housewives, and I have no reason to suppose that they do not take their full share of the housework. Boys and girls came in and out, and got a portion of the dinner to consume where they thought best. Children went tottering about upon the red-brick floor, the playthings of those hulking fellows, who handled them very gently and spoke kindly in a sort of confidential whisper to their ears. These little ears were mostly pierced for earrings, and the light blue eyes of the urchins peeped maliciously beneath shocks of yellow hair. A dog was often of the party. He ate fish like his masters, and was made to beg for it by sitting up and rowing with his paws. *Voga, Azzò, voga!* The Anzolo who talked thus to his little brown Spitz-dog has the hoarse voice of a Triton and the movement of an animated sea-wave. Azzò performed his trick, swallowed his fish-bones, and the fiery Anzolo looked round approvingly.

On all these occasions I have found these gondoliers the same sympathetic, industrious, cheery affectionate folk. They live in many respects a hard and precarious life. The winter in particular is a time of anxiety, and sometimes of privation, even to the well-to-do among them. Work then is [Pg 236] scarce, and what there is, is rendered disagreeable to them by the cold. Yet they take their chance with facile temper, and are not soured by hardships. The amenities of the Venetian sea and air, the healthiness of the lagoons, the cheerful bustle of the poorer quarters, the brilliancy of this Southern sunlight, and the beauty which is everywhere apparent, must be reckoned as important factors in the formation of their character. And of that character, as I have said, the final note is playfulness. In spite of difficulties, their life has never been stern enough to sadden them. Bare necessities are marvellously cheap, and the pinch of real bad weather—such frost as locked the lagoons in ice two years ago, or such south-western gales as flooded the basement floors of all the houses on the Zattere—is rare and does not last long. On the other hand, their life has never been so lazy as to reduce them to the savagery of the traditional Neapolitan lazzaroni. They have had to work daily for small earnings, but under favourable conditions, and their labour has been lightened by much good-fellowship among themselves, by the amusements of their *feste* and their singing clubs.

Of course it is not easy for a stranger in a very different social position to feel that he has been admitted to their confidence. Italians have an ineradicable habit of making themselves externally agreeable, of bending in all indifferent matters to the whims and wishes of superiors, and of saying what they think *Signori* like. This habit, while it smoothes the surface of existence, raises up a barrier of compliment and partial insincerity, against which the more downright natures of [Pg 237] us Northern folk break in vain efforts. Our advances are met with an imperceptible but impermeable resistance by the very people who are bent on making the world pleasant to us. It is the very reverse of that dour opposition which a Lowland Scot or a North English peasant offers to familiarity; but it is hardly less insurmountable. The treatment, again, which Venetians of the lower class have received through centuries from their own nobility, makes attempts at fraternisation on the part of gentlemen unintelligible to them. The best way, here and elsewhere, of overcoming these obstacles is to have some bond of work or interest in common—of service on the one side rendered, and good-will on the other honestly displayed. The men of whom I have been speaking will, I am convinced, not shirk their share of duty or make unreasonable claims upon the generosity of their employers.

[Pg 238]

FORNOVO.

In the town of Parma there is one surpassingly strange relic of the past. The palace of the Farnesi, like many a haunt of upstart tyranny and beggared pride on these Italian plains, rises misshapen and disconsolate above the stream that bears the city's name. The squalor of this gray-brown edifice of formless brick, left naked like the palace of the same Farnesi at Piacenza, has something even horrid in it now that only vague memory survives of its former uses. The princely *sprezzatura* of its ancient occupants, careless of these unfinished courts and unroofed galleries amid the splendor of their purfled silks and the glitter of their torchlight pageantry, has yielded to sullen cynicism—the cynicism of arrested ruin and unreverend age. All that was satisfying to the senses and distracting to the eyesight in their transitory pomp has passed away, leaving a sinister and naked shell. Remembrance can but summon up the crimes, the madness, the trivialities of those dead palace-builders. An atmosphere of evil clings to the dilapidated walls, as though the tainted spirit of the infamous Pier Luigi still possessed the spot, on which his toadstool brood of princelings sprouted in the mud of their misdeeds. Enclosed in this huge labyrinth of brickwork is the relic of which I spoke. It is the once world-famous Teatro Farnese, raised in the year 1618 by Ranunzio Farnese for the marriage of Odoardo Farnese with Margaret [Pg 239] of Austria. Giambattista Aleotti, a native of pageant-loving Ferrara, traced the stately curves and noble orders of the galleries, designed the columns that support the raftered roof, marked out the orchestra, arranged the stage, and breathed into the whole the spirit of Palladio's most heroic neo-Latin style. Vast, built of wood, dishevelled, with broken statues and blurred coats-of-arms, with its empty scene, its uncurling frescos, its hangings all in rags, its cobwebs of two centuries, its dust and mildew and discolored gold—this theatre, a sham in its best days, and now that ugliest of things, a sham unmasked and naked to the light of day, is yet sublime, because of its proportioned harmony, because of its grand Roman manner. The sight and feeling of it fasten upon the mind and abide in the memory like a nightmare—like one of Piranesi's weirdest and most passion-haunted etchings for the *Carceri*. Idling there at noon in the twilight of the dust-bedarkened windows, we fill the tiers of those high galleries with ladies, the space below with grooms and pages; the stage is ablaze with torches, and an Italian Masque, such as our Marlowe dreamed of, fills the scene. But it is impossible to dower these fancies with even such life as in healthier, happier ruins phantasy may lend to imagination's figments. This theatre is like a maniac's skull, empty of all but unrealities and mockeries of things that are. The ghosts we raise here could never have been living men and women: *questi sciaurati non fur mai vivi*. So clinging is the sense of instability that appertains to every fragment of that dry-rot tyranny which seized by evil fortune in the sunset of her golden day on Italy.

In this theatre I mused one morning after visiting Fornovo; and the thoughts suggested by the [Pg 240] battlefield found their proper atmosphere in the dilapidated place. What, indeed, is the Teatro Farnese but a symbol of those hollow principalities which the despot and the stranger built in Italy after the fatal date of 1494, when national enthusiasm and political energy were expiring in a blaze of art, and when the Italians as a people had ceased to be; but when the phantom of their former life, surviving in high works of beauty, was still superb by reason of imperishable style! How much in Italy of the Renaissance was, like this plank-built, plastered theatre, a glorious sham! The sham was seen through then; and now it stands unmasked: and yet, strange to say, so perfect is its form that we respect the sham and yield our spirits to the incantation of its music.

The battle of Fornovo, as modern battles go, was a paltry affair; and even at the time it seemed sufficiently without result. Yet the trumpets which rang on July 6th, 1495, for the onset, sounded the *réveille* of the modern world; and in the inconclusive termination of the struggle of that day the Italians were already judged and sentenced as a nation. The armies who met that morning represented Italy and France—Italy, the Sibyl of Renaissance; France, the Sibyl of Revolution. At the fall of evening Europe was already looking northward; and the last years of the fifteenth century were opening an act which closed in blood at Paris on the ending of the eighteenth.

If it were not for thoughts like these, no one, I suppose, would take the trouble to drive for two hours out of Parma to the little village of Fornovo—a score of bare gray hovels on the margin of a [Pg 241] pebbly river-bed beneath the Apennines. The fields on either side, as far as eye can see, are beautiful indeed in May sunlight, painted here with flax, like shallow sheets of water reflecting a pale sky, and there with clover red as blood. Scarce unfolded leaves sparkle like flamelets of bright green upon the knotted vines, and the young corn is bending all one way beneath a western breeze. But not less beautiful than this is the whole broad plain of Lombardy; nor are the nightingales louder here than in the acacia-trees around Pavia. As we drive, the fields become less fertile, and the hills encroach upon the level, sending down their spurs upon that waveless plain like blunt rocks jutting out into a tranquil sea. When we reach the bed of the Taro, these hills begin to narrow on either hand, and the road rises. Soon they open out again with gradual curving lines, forming a kind of amphitheatre filled up from flank to flank with the *ghiara*, or pebbly bottom, of the Taro. The Taro is not less wasteful than any other of the brotherhood of streams that pour from Alp or Apennine to swell the Po. It wanders, an impatient rivulet, through a wilderness of boulders, uncertain of its aim, shifting its course with the season of the year,

unless the jaws of some deep-cloven gully hold it tight and show how insignificant it is. As we advance, the hills approach again; between their skirts there is nothing but the river-bed; and now on rising ground above the stream, at the point of juncture between the Ceno and the Taro, we find Fornovo. Beyond the village the valley broadens out once more, disclosing Apennines capped with winter snow. To the right descends the Ceno. To the left foams the Taro, following [Pg 242] whose rocky channel we should come at last to Pontremoli and the Tyrrhenian Sea beside Sarzana. On a May-day of sunshine like the present, the Taro is a gentle stream. A waggon drawn by two white oxen has just entered its channel, guided by a contadino with goat-skin leggings, wielding a long goad. The patient creatures stem the water, which rises to the peasant's thighs and ripples round the creaking wheels. Swaying to and fro, as the shingles shift upon the river-bed, they make their way across; and now they have emerged upon the stones; and now we lose them in a flood of sunlight.

It was by this pass that Charles VIII. in 1495 returned from Tuscany, when the army of the League was drawn up waiting to intercept and crush him in the mouse-trap of Fornovo. No road remained for Charles and his troops but the rocky bed of the Taro, running as I have described it between the spurs of steep hills. It is true that the valley of the Baganza leads, from a little higher up among the mountains, into Lombardy. But this pass runs straight to Parma; and to follow it would have brought the French upon the walls of a strong city. Charles could not do otherwise than descend upon the village of Fornovo, and cut his way thence in the teeth of the Italian army over stream and boulder between the gorges of throttling mountain. The failure of the Italians to achieve what here upon the ground appears so simple delivered Italy hand-bound to strangers. Had they but succeeded in arresting Charles and destroying his forces at Fornovo, it is just possible that then—even then, at the eleventh hour—Italy might have gained the sense of national coherence, or at least have proved herself capable of holding by her leagues the [Pg 243] foreigner at bay. As it was, the battle of Fornovo, in spite of Venetian bonfires and Mantuan Madonnas of Victory, made her conscious of incompetence and convicted her of cowardice. After Fornovo, her sons scarcely dared to hold their heads up in the field against invaders; and the battles fought upon her soil were duels among aliens for the prize of Italy.

In order to comprehend the battle of Fornovo in its bearings on Italian history, we must go back to the year 1492, and understand the conditions of the various states of Italy at that date. On April 8th in that year, Lorenzo de' Medici, who had succeeded in maintaining a political equilibrium in the peninsula, expired, and was succeeded by his son Piero, a vain and foolhardy young man, from whom no guidance could be expected. On July 25th, Innocent VIII. died, and was succeeded by the very worst pope who has ever occupied St. Peter's chair, Roderigo Borgia, Alexander VI. It was felt at once that the old order of things had somehow ended, and that a new era, the destinies of which as yet remained incalculable, was opening for Italy. The chief Italian powers, hitherto kept in equipoise by the diplomacy of Lorenzo de' Medici, were these—the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Florence, the Papacy, and the Kingdom of Naples. Minor states, such as the republics of Genoa and Siena, the duchies of Urbino and Ferrara, the marquisate of Mantua, the petty tyrannies of Romagna, and the wealthy city of Bologna, were sufficiently important to affect the balance of power, and to produce new combinations. For the present purpose it is, however, enough to consider the five great powers.

After the peace of Constance, which freed the Lombard Communes from imperial interference [Pg 244] in the year 1183, Milan, by her geographical position, rose rapidly to be the first city of North Italy. Without narrating the changes by which she lost her freedom as a Commune, it is enough to state that, earliest of all Italian cities, Milan passed into the hands of a single family. The Visconti managed to convert this flourishing commonwealth, with all its dependencies, into their private property, ruling it exclusively for their own profit, using its municipal institutions as the machinery of administration, and employing the taxes which they raised upon its wealth for purely selfish ends. When the line of the Visconti ended, in the year 1447, their tyranny was continued by Francesco Sforza, the son of a poor soldier of adventure, who had raised himself by his military genius, and had married Bianca, the illegitimate daughter of the last Visconti. On the death of Francesco Sforza, in 1466, he left two sons, Galeazzo Maria and Lodovico, surnamed Il Moro, both of whom were destined to play a prominent part in history. Galeazzo Maria, dissolute, vicious, and cruel to the core, was murdered by his injured subjects in the year 1476. His son, Giovanni Galeazzo, aged eight, would in course of time have succeeded to the duchy, had it not been for the ambition of his uncle Lodovico. Lodovico contrived to name himself as regent for his nephew, whom he kept, long after he had come of age, in a kind of honorable prison. Virtual master in Milan, but without a legal title to the throne, unrecognized in his authority by the Italian powers, and holding it from day to day by craft and fraud, Lodovico at last found his situation untenable; and it was this difficulty of a usurper to maintain himself in his despotism [Pg 245] which, as we shall see, brought the French into Italy.

Venice, the neighbor and constant foe of Milan, had become a close oligarchy by a process of gradual constitutional development, which threw her government into the hands of a few nobles. She was practically ruled by the hereditary members of the Grand Council. Ever since the year 1453, when Constantinople fell beneath the Turk, the Venetians had been more and more straitened in their Oriental commerce, and were thrown back upon the policy of territorial aggrandisement in Italy, from which they had hitherto refrained as alien to the temperament of the republic. At the end of the fifteenth century Venice, therefore, became an object of envy and terror to the Italian States. They envied her because she alone was tranquil, wealthy, powerful, and free. They feared her because they had good reason to suspect her of encroachment; and it was foreseen that if she got the upper hand in Italy, all Italy would be the property of the families inscribed upon the Golden Book. It was thus alone that the Italians comprehended government.

The principle of representation being utterly unknown, and the privileged burghers in each city being regarded as absolute and lawful owners of the city and of everything belonging to it, the conquest of a town by a republic implied the political extinction of that town and the disfranchisement of its inhabitants in favor of the conquerors.

Florence at this epoch still called itself a republic; and of all Italian commonwealths it was by far the most democratic. Its history, unlike that of Venice, had been the history of continual and brusque changes, resulting in the destruction of the old nobility, in the equalization of the [Pg 246] burghers, and in the formation of a new aristocracy of wealth. From this class of *bourgeois* nobles sprang the Medici, who, by careful manipulation of the State machinery, by the creation of a powerful party devoted to their interests, by flattery of the people, by corruption, by taxation, and by constant scheming, raised themselves to the first place in the commonwealth, and became its virtual masters. In the year 1492, Lorenzo de Medici, the most remarkable chief of this despotic family, died, bequeathing his supremacy in the republic to a son of marked incompetence.

Since the pontificate of Nicholas V. the See of Rome had entered upon a new period of existence. The popes no longer dreaded to reside in Rome, but were bent upon making the metropolis of Christendom both splendid as a seat of art and learning, and also potent as the capital of a secular kingdom. Though their fiefs in Romagna and the March were still held but loosely, though their provinces swarmed with petty despots who defied the papal authority, and though the princely Roman houses of Colonna and Orsini were still strong enough to terrorize the Holy Father in the Vatican, it was now clear that the Papal See must in the end get the better of its adversaries, and consolidate itself into a first-rate power. The internal spirit of the papacy, at this time, corresponded to its external policy. It was thoroughly secularized by a series of worldly and vicious pontiffs, who had clean forgotten what their title, Vicar of Christ, implied. They consistently used their religious prestige to enforce their secular authority, while by their temporal power they caused their religious claims to be respected. [Pg 247] Corrupt and shameless, they indulged themselves in every vice, openly acknowledged their children, and turned Italy upside down in order to establish favorites and bastards in the principalities they seized as spoils of war.

The kingdom of Naples differed from any other state of Italy. Subject continually to foreign rulers since the decay of the Greek Empire, governed in succession by the Normans, the Hohenstauffens, and the House of Anjou, it had never enjoyed the real independence or the free institutions of the northern provinces; nor had it been Italianized in the same sense as the rest of the peninsula. Despotism, which assumed so many forms in Italy, was here neither the tyranny of a noble house, nor the masked autocracy of a burgher, nor yet the forceful sway of a condottiere. It had a dynastic character, resembling the monarchy of one of the great European nations, but modified by the peculiar conditions of Italian state-craft. Owing to this dynastic and monarchical complexion of the Neapolitan kingdom, semi-feudal customs flourished in the south far more than in the north of Italy. The barons were more powerful; and the destinies of the Regno often turned upon their feuds and quarrels with the crown. At the same time the Neapolitan despots shared the uneasy circumstances of all Italian potentates, owing to the uncertainty of their tenure, both as conquerors and aliens, and also as the nominal vassals of the Holy See. The rights of suzerainty which the Normans had yielded to the papacy over their Southern conquests, and which the popes had arbitrarily exercised in favor of the Angevine princes, proved a constant source of peril to the rest of Italy by rendering the succession to the crown of Naples doubtful. [Pg 248] On the extinction of the Angevine line, however, the throne was occupied by a prince who had no valid title but that of the sword to its possession. Alfonso of Aragon conquered Naples in 1442, and neglecting his hereditary dominion, settled in his Italian capital. Possessed with the enthusiasm for literature which was then the ruling passion of the Italians, and very liberal to men of learning, Alfonso won for himself the surname of Magnanimous. On his death, in 1458, he bequeathed his Spanish kingdom, together with Sicily and Sardinia, to his brother, and left the fruits of his Italian conquest to his bastard, Ferdinand. This Ferdinand, whose birth was buried in profound obscurity, was the reigning sovereign in the year 1492. Of a cruel and sombre temperament, traitorous and tyrannical, Ferdinand was hated by his subjects as much as Alfonso had been loved. He possessed, however, to a remarkable degree, the qualities which at that epoch constituted a consummate statesman; and though the history of his reign is the history of plots and conspiracies, of judicial murders and forcible assassinations, of famines produced by iniquitous taxation, and of every kind of diabolical tyranny, Ferdinand contrived to hold his own, in the teeth of a rebellious baronage or a maddened population. His political sagacity amounted almost to a prophetic instinct in the last years of his life, when he became aware that the old order was breaking up in Italy, and had cause to dread that Charles VIII. of France would prove his title to the kingdom of Naples by force of arms.[D]

Such were the component parts of the Italian body politic, with the addition of numerous petty [Pg 249] principalities and powers, adhering more or less consistently to one or other of the greater states. The whole complex machine was bound together by no sense of common interest, animated by no common purpose, amenable to no central authority. Even such community of feeling as one spoken language gives was lacking. And yet Italy distinguished herself clearly from the rest of Europe, not merely as a geographical fact, but also as a people intellectually and spiritually one. The rapid rise of humanism had aided in producing this national self-consciousness. Every state and every city was absorbed in the recovery of culture and in the development of art and literature. Far in advance of the other European nations, the Italians regarded the rest of the world as barbarous, priding themselves the while, in spite of mutual jealousies and hatreds, on their Italic civilization. They were enormously wealthy. The resources of the papal treasury, the private fortunes of the Florentine bankers, the riches of the Venetian

merchants might have purchased all that France or Germany possessed of value. The single duchy of Milan yielded to its masters seven hundred thousand golden florins of revenue, according to the computation of De Comines. In default of a confederative system, the several states were held in equilibrium by diplomacy. By far the most important people, next to the despots and the captains of adventure, were ambassadors and orators. War itself had become a matter of arrangement, bargain, and diplomacy. The game of stratagem was played by generals who had been friends yesterday and might be friends again to-morrow, with troops who felt no [Pg 250] loyalty whatever for the standards under which they listed. To avoid slaughter and to achieve the ends of warfare by parade and demonstration was the interest of every one concerned. Looking back upon Italy of the fifteenth century, taking account of her religious deadness and moral corruption, estimating the absence of political vigor in the republics and the noxious tyranny of the despots, analyzing her lack of national spirit, and comparing her splendid life of cultivated ease with the want of martial energy, we can see but too plainly that contact with a simpler and stronger people could not but produce a terrible catastrophe. The Italians themselves, however, were far from comprehending this. Centuries of undisturbed internal intrigue had accustomed them to play the game of forfeits with each other, and nothing warned them that the time was come at which diplomacy, finesse, and craft would stand them in ill stead against rapacious conquerors.

The storm which began to gather over Italy in the year 1492 had its first beginning in the North. Lodovico Sforza's position in the Duchy of Milan was becoming every day more difficult, when a slight and to all appearances insignificant incident converted his apprehension of danger into panic. It was customary for the states of Italy to congratulate a new pope on his election by their ambassadors; and this ceremony had now to be performed for Roderigo Borgia. Lodovico proposed that his envoys should go to Rome together with those of Venice, Naples, and Florence; but Piero de' Medici, whose vanity made him wish to send an embassy in his own name, contrived that Lodovico's proposal should be rejected both by Florence and the King of Naples. So strained [Pg 251] was the situation of Italian affairs that Lodovico saw in the repulse a menace to his own usurped authority. Feeling himself isolated among the princes of his country, rebuffed by the Medici, and coldly treated by the King of Naples, he turned in his anxiety to France, and advised the young king, Charles VIII., to make good his claim upon the Regno. It was a bold move to bring the foreigner thus into Italy; and even Lodovico, who prided himself upon his sagacity, could not see how things would end. He thought his situation so hazardous, however, that any change must be for the better. Moreover, a French invasion of Naples would tie the hands of his natural foe, King Ferdinand, whose grand-daughter, Isabella of Aragon, had married Giovanni Galeazzo Sforza, and was now the rightful Duchess of Milan. When the Florentine ambassador at Milan asked him how he had the courage to expose Italy to such peril, his reply betrayed the egotism of his policy: "You talk to me of Italy; but when have I looked Italy in the face? No one ever gave a thought to my affairs. I have, therefore, had to give them such security as I could."

Charles VIII. was young, light-brained, romantic, and ruled by *parvenus* who had an interest in disturbing the old order of the monarchy. He lent a willing ear to Lodovico's invitation, backed as this was by the eloquence and passion of numerous Italian refugees and exiles. Against the advice of his more prudent counsellors, he taxed all the resources of his kingdom, and concluded treaties on disadvantageous terms with England, Germany, and Spain, in order that he might be [Pg 252] able to concentrate all his attention upon the Italian expedition. At the end of the year 1493, it was known that the invasion was resolved upon. Gentile Becchi, the Florentine envoy at the Court of France, wrote to Piero de' Medici: "If the king succeeds, it is all over with Italy—*tutta a bordello*." The extraordinary selfishness of the several Italian states at this critical moment deserves to be noticed. The Venetians, as Paolo Antonio Soderini described them to Piero de' Medici, "are of opinion that to keep quiet, and to see other potentates of Italy spending and suffering, cannot but be to their advantage. They trust no one, and feel sure they have enough money to be able at any moment to raise sufficient troops, and so to guide events according to their inclinations." As the invasion was directed against Naples, Ferdinand of Aragon displayed the acutest sense of the situation. "Frenchmen," he exclaimed, in what appears like a prophetic passion when contrasted with the cold indifference of others no less really menaced, "have never come into Italy without inflicting ruin; and this invasion, if rightly considered, cannot but bring universal ruin, although it seems to menace us alone." In his agony Ferdinand applied to Alexander VI. But the Pope looked coldly upon him, because the King of Naples, with rare perspicacity, had predicted that his elevation to the papacy would prove disastrous to Christendom. Alexander preferred to ally himself with Venice and Milan. Upon this Ferdinand wrote as follows: "It seems fated that the popes should leave no peace in Italy. We are compelled to fight; but the Duke of Bari (*i.e.*, Lodovico Sforza) should think what may ensue from the tumult he is stirring up. He who raises this wind will not be able to lay the tempest when he likes. Let [Pg 253] him look to the past, and he will see how every time that our internal quarrels have brought powers from beyond the Alps into Italy, these have oppressed and lorded over her."

Terribly verified as these words were destined to be—and they were no less prophetic in their political sagacity than Savonarola's prediction of the Sword and bloody Scourge—it was now too late to avert the coming ruin. On March 1, 1494, Charles was with his army at Lyons. Early in September he had crossed the pass of Mont Genêvre and taken up his quarters in the town of Asti. There is no need to describe in detail the holiday march of the French troops through Lombardy, Tuscany, and Rome, until, without having struck a blow of consequence, the gates of Naples opened to receive the conqueror upon February 22, 1495. Philippe de Comines, who parted from the king at Asti and passed the winter as his envoy at Venice, has more than once recorded his belief that nothing but the direct interposition of Providence could have brought so

mad an expedition to so successful a conclusion. "Dieu monstroit conduire l'entreprise." No sooner, however, was Charles installed in Naples than the states of Italy began to combine against him. Lodovico Sforza had availed himself of the general confusion consequent upon the first appearance of the French, to poison his nephew. He was, therefore, now the titular, as well as virtual, Lord of Milan. So far, he had achieved what he desired, and had no further need of Charles. The overtures he now made to the Venetians and the Pope terminated in a league between these powers for the expulsion of the French from Italy. Germany and Spain entered [Pg 254] into the same alliance; and De Comines, finding himself treated with marked coldness by the Signory of Venice, despatched a courier to warn Charles in Naples of the coming danger. After a stay of only fifty days in his new capital, the French king hurried northward. Moving quickly through the Papal States and Tuscany, he engaged his troops in the passes of the Apennines near Pontremoli, and on July 5th, 1495, took up his quarters in the village of Fornovo. De Comines reckons that his whole fighting force at this time did not exceed nine thousand men, with fourteen pieces of artillery. Against him at the opening of the valley was the army of the League, numbering some thirty-five thousand men, of whom three fourths were supplied by Venice, the rest by Lodovico Sforza and the German emperor. Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, was the general of the Venetian forces; and on him, therefore, fell the real responsibility of the battle.

De Comines remarks on the imprudence of the allies, who allowed Charles to advance as far as Fornovo, when it was their obvious policy to have established themselves in the village and so have caught the French troops in a trap. It was a Sunday when the French marched down upon Fornovo. Before them spread the plain of Lombardy, and beyond it the white crests of the Alps. "We were," says De Comines, "in a valley between two little mountain flanks, and in that valley ran a river which could easily be forded on foot, except when it is swelled with sudden rains. The whole valley was a bed of gravel and big stones, very difficult for horses, about a quarter of a league in breadth, and on the right bank lodged our enemies." Any one who has visited Fornovo [Pg 255] can understand the situation of the two armies. Charles occupied the village on the right bank of the Taro. On the same bank, extending downward towards the plain, lay the host of the allies; and in order that Charles should escape them, it was necessary that he should cross the Taro, just below its junction with the Ceno, and reach Lombardy by marching in a parallel line with his foes.

All through the night of Sunday it thundered and rained incessantly; so that on the Monday morning the Taro was considerably swollen. At seven o'clock the king sent for De Comines, who found him already armed and mounted on the finest horse he had ever seen. The name of this charger was Savoy. He was black, one-eyed, and of middling height; and to his great courage, as we shall see, Charles owed life upon that day. The French army, ready for the march, now took to the gravelly bed of the Taro, passing the river at a distance of about a quarter of a league from the allies. As the French left Fornovo, the light cavalry of their enemies entered the village and began to attack the baggage. At the same time the Marquis of Mantua, with the flower of his men-at-arms, crossed the Taro and harassed the rear of the French host; while raids from the right bank to the left were constantly being made by sharp-shooters and flying squadrons. "At this moment," says De Comines, "not a single man of us could have escaped if our ranks had once been broken." The French army was divided into three main bodies. The vanguard consisted of some three hundred and fifty men-at-arms, three thousand Switzers, three hundred archers of the Guard, a few mounted crossbow-men, and the artillery. Next came the Battle, and after this [Pg 256] the rear-guard. At the time when the Marquis of Mantua made his attack, the French rear-guard had not yet crossed the river. Charles quitted the van, put himself at the head of his chivalry, and charged the Italian horsemen, driving them back, some to the village and others to their camp. De Comines observes, that had the Italian knights been supported in this passage of arms by the light cavalry of the Venetian force, called Stradiots, the French must have been outnumbered, thrown into confusion, and defeated. As it was, these Stradiots were engaged in plundering the baggage of the French; and the Italians, accustomed to bloodless encounters, did not venture, in spite of their immense superiority of numbers, to renew the charge. In the pursuit of Gonzaga's horsemen Charles outstripped his staff, and was left almost alone to grapple with a little band of mounted foemen. It was here that his noble horse, Savoy, saved his person by plunging and charging till assistance came up from the French, and enabled the king to regain his van.

It is incredible, considering the nature of the ground and the number of the troops engaged, that the allies should not have returned to the attack and have made the passage of the French into the plain impossible. De Comines, however, assures us that the actual engagement only lasted a quarter of an hour, and the pursuit of the Italians three quarters of an hour. After they had once resolved to fly, they threw away their lances and betook themselves to Reggio and Parma. So complete was their discomfiture, that De Comines gravely blames the want of military genius and adventure in the French host. If, instead of advancing along the left bank of the Taro [Pg 257] and there taking up his quarters for the night, Charles had recrossed the stream and pursued the army of the allies, he would have had the whole of Lombardy at his discretion. As it was, the French army encamped not far from the scene of the action in great discomfort and anxiety. De Comines had to bivouac in a vineyard, without even a mantle to wrap round him, having lent his cloak to the king in the morning; and as it had been pouring all day, the ground could not have afforded very luxurious quarters. The same extraordinary luck which had attended the French in their whole expedition now favored their retreat; and the same pusillanimity which the allies had shown at Fornovo prevented them from re-forming and engaging with the army of Charles upon the plain. One hour before daybreak on Tuesday morning the French broke up their camp and succeeded in clearing the valley. That night they lodged at Fiorenzuola, the next at Piacenza, and so on; till on the eighth day they arrived at Asti without having been so much as incommoded by

the army of the allies in their rear.

Although the field of Fornovo was in reality so disgraceful to the Italians, they reckoned it a victory upon the technical pretence that the camp and baggage of the French had been seized. Illuminations and rejoicings made the piazza of St. Mark in Venice gay, and Francesco da Gonzaga had the glorious Madonna della Vittoria painted for him by Mantegna, in commemoration of what ought only to have been remembered with shame.

A fitting conclusion to this sketch, connecting its close with the commencement, may be found in some remarks upon the manner of warfare to which the Italians of the Renaissance had [Pg 258] become accustomed, and which proved so futile on the field of Fornovo. During the Middle Ages, and in the days of the Communes, the whole male population of Italy had fought light armed on foot. Merchant and artisan left the counting-house and the workshop, took shield and pike, and sallied forth to attack the barons in their castles, or to meet the emperor's troops upon the field. It was with this national militia that the citizens of Florence freed their *Contado* of the nobles, and the burghers of Lombardy gained the battle of Legnano. In course of time, by a process of change which it is not very easy to trace, heavily armed cavalry began to take the place of infantry in mediæval warfare. Men-at-arms, as they were called, encased from head to foot in iron, and mounted upon chargers no less solidly caparisoned, drove the foot-soldiers before them at the points of their long lances. Nowhere in Italy do they seem to have met with the fierce resistance which the bears of the Swiss Oberland and the bulls of Uri offered to the knights of Burgundy. No Tuscan Arnold von Winkelried clasped a dozen lances to his bosom that the foeman's ranks might thus be broken at the cost of his own life; nor did it occur to the Italian burghers to meet the charge of the horsemen with squares protected by bristling spears. They seem, on the contrary, to have abandoned military service with the readiness of men whose energies were already absorbed in the affairs of peace. To become a practised and efficient man-at-arms required long training and a life's devotion. So much time the burghers of the free towns could not spare to military service, while the petty nobles were only too glad to devote [Pg 259] themselves to so honorable a calling. Thus it came to pass that a class of professional fighting-men was gradually formed in Italy, whose services the burghers and the princes bought, and by whom the wars of the peninsula were regularly farmed by contract. Wealth and luxury in the great cities continued to increase; and as the burghers grew more comfortable, they were less inclined to take the field in their own persons, and more disposed to vote large sums of money for the purchase of necessary aid. At the same time this system suited the despots, since it spared them the peril of arming their own subjects, while they taxed them to pay the services of foreign captains. War thus became a commerce. Romagna, the Marches of Ancona, and other parts of the papal dominions supplied a number of petty nobles whose whole business in life it was to form companies of trained horsemen, and with these bands to hire themselves out to the republics and the despots. Gain was the sole purpose of these captains. They sold their service to the highest bidder, fighting irrespectively of principle or patriotism, and passing with the coldest equanimity from the camp of one master to that of his worst foe. It was impossible that true military spirit should survive this prostitution of the art of war. A species of mock warfare prevailed in Italy. Battles were fought with a view to booty more than victory; prisoners were taken for the sake of ransom, bloodshed was carefully avoided, for the men who fought on either side in any pitched field had been comrades with their present foemen in the last encounter, and who could tell how soon the general of the one host might not need his rival's troops to recruit his own ranks? Like [Pg 260] every genuine institution of the Italian Renaissance, warfare was thus a work of fine art, a masterpiece of intellectual subtlety; and, like the Renaissance itself, this peculiar form of warfare was essentially transitional. The cannon and the musket were already in use; and it only required one blast of gunpowder to turn the shamfight of courtly, traitorous, finessing captains of adventure into something terribly more real. To men like the Marquis of Mantua war had been a highly profitable game of skill; to men like the Maréchal de Gié it was a murderous horse-play; and this difference the Italians were not slow to perceive. When they cast away their lances at Fornovo, and fled—in spite of their superior numbers—never to return, one fair-seeming sham of the fifteenth century became a vision of the past.

FOOTNOTES:

[D] Charles claimed under the will of René of Anjou, who in turn claimed under the will of Joan II.

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BERGAMO AND BARTOLOMMEO COLLEONI.

From the new town of commerce to the old town of history upon the hill the road is carried along a rampart lined with horse-chestnut trees—clumps of massy foliage and snowy pyramids of bloom expanded in the rapture of a Southern spring. Each pair of trees between their stems and arch of intermingling leaves includes a space of plain checkered with cloud-shadows, melting blue and green in amethystine haze. To right and left the last spurs of the Alps descend, jutting

like promontories, heaving like islands from the misty breadth below; and here and there are towers half lost in airy azure, and cities dwarfed to blots, and silvery lines where rivers flow, and distant, vapor-drowned, dim crests of Apennines. The city walls above us wave with snapdragons and iris among fig-trees sprouting from the riven stones. There are terraces over-rioted with pergolas of vine, and houses shooting forward into balconies and balustrades, from which a Romeo might launch himself at daybreak, warned by the lark's song. A sudden angle in the road is turned, and we pass from air-space and freedom into the old town, beneath walls of dark-brown masonry, where wild valerians light their torches of red bloom in immemorial shade. Squalor and splendor live here side by side. Grand Renaissance portals grinning with satyr masks [Pg 262] are flanked by tawdry frescos shamming stonework, or by doorways where the withered bush hangs out a promise of bad wine.

The Cappella Colleoni is our destination—that masterpiece of the sculptor-architect's craft, with its variegated marbles—rosy and white and creamy yellow and jet-black—in patterns, bass-reliefs, pilasters, statuettes, incrusted on the fanciful domed shrine. Upon the façade are mingled, in the true Renaissance spirit of genial acceptance, motives Christian and Pagan with supreme impartiality. Medallions of emperors and gods alternate with virtues, angels, and cupids in a maze of loveliest arabesque; and round the base of the building are told two stories—the one of Adam from his creation to his fall, the other of Hercules and his labors. Italian craftsmen of the *quattrocento* were not averse to setting thus together, in one frame-work, the myths of our first parents and Alemena's son; partly, perhaps, because both subjects gave scope to the free treatment of the nude; but partly, also, we may venture to surmise, because the heroism of Hellas counterbalanced the sin of Eden. Here, then, we see how Adam and Eve were made and tempted and expelled from Paradise and set to labor, how Cain killed Abel, and Lamech slew a man to his hurt, and Isaac was offered on the mountain. The tale of human sin and the promise of redemption are epitomized in twelve of the sixteen bass-reliefs. The remaining four show Hercules wrestling with Antæus, taming the Nemean lion, extirpating the Hydra, and bending to his will the bull of Crete. Labor, appointed for a punishment to Adam, becomes a title to immortality for the hero. The dignity of man is reconquered by prowess for the Greek, as it is [Pg 263] repurchased for the Christian by vicarious suffering. Many may think this interpretation of Amadeo's bass-reliefs far-fetched; yet, such as it is, it agrees with the spirit of humanism, bent ever on harmonizing the two great traditions of the past. Of the workmanship little need be said, except that it is wholly Lombard, distinguished from the similar work of Della Quercia at Bologna and Siena by a more imperfect feeling for composition and a lack of monumental gravity, yet graceful, rich in motives, and instinct with a certain wayward *improvisatore* charm.

This chapel was built by the great Condottiere Bartolommeo Colleoni, to be the monument of his puissance even in the grave. It had been the Sacristy of S. Maria Maggiore, which, when the Consiglio della Misericordia refused it to him for his half-proud, half-pious purpose, he took and held by force. The structure, of costliest materials, reared by Gian Antonio Amadeo, cost him fifty thousand golden florins. An equestrian statue of gilt wood, voted to him by the town of Bergamo, surmounts his monument inside the chapel. This was the work of two German masters called Sisto figlio di Enrico Syri da Norimberga and Leonardo Tedesco. The tomb itself is of marble, executed for the most part in a Lombard style resembling Amadeo's, but scarcely worthy of his genius. The whole effect is disappointing. Five figures representing Mars, Hercules, and three sons-in-law of Colleoni, who surround the sarcophagus of the buried general, are, indeed, almost grotesque. The angularity and crumpled draperies of the Milanese manner, when so exaggerated, produce an impression of caricature. Yet many subordinate details—a row of *putti* in a Cinque [Pg 264] Cento frieze, for instance—and much of the low relief work, especially the Crucifixion, with its characteristic episodes of the fainting Marys and the soldiers casting dice, are lovely in their unaffected Lombardism.

There is another portrait of Colleoni in a round above the great door, executed with spirit, though in a *bravura* style that curiously anticipates the decline of Italian sculpture. Gaunt, hollow-eyed, with prominent cheekbones and strong jaws, this animated half-length statue of the hero bears the stamp of a good likeness, but when or by whom it was made I do not know.

Far more noteworthy than Colleoni's own monument is that of his daughter Medea. She died young in 1470, and her father caused her tomb, carved of Carrara marble, to be placed in the Dominican Church of Basella, which he had previously founded. It was not until 1842 that this most precious masterpiece of Antonio Amadeo's skill was transferred to Bergamo. *Hic jacet Medea virgo.* Her hands are clasped across her breast. A robe of rich brocade, gathered to the waist and girdled, lies in simple folds upon the bier. Her throat, exceedingly long and slender, is circled with a string of pearls. Her face is not beautiful, for the features, especially the nose, are large and prominent; but it is pure and expressive of vivid individuality. The hair curls in crisp, short clusters; and the ear, fine and shaped almost like a Faun's, reveals the scrupulous fidelity of the sculptor. Italian art has, in truth, nothing more exquisite than this still-sleeping figure of the girl who, when she lived, must certainly have been so rare of type and lovable in personality. If [Pg 265] Busti's Lancinus Curtius be the portrait of a humanist, careworn with study, burdened by the laurel leaves that were so dry and dusty; if Gaston de Foix in the Brera, smiling at death and beautiful in the cropped bloom of youth, idealize the hero of romance; if Michael Angelo's Penseroso translate in marble the dark broodings of a despot's soul; if Della Porta's Julia Farnese be the Roman courtesan magnificently throned in nonchalance at a pope's footstool; if Verocchio's Colleoni on his horse at Venice impersonate the pomp and circumstance of scientific war—surely this Medea exhales the flower-like graces, the sweet sanctities of human life, that even in that turbid age were found among high-bred Italian ladies. Such power have mighty sculptors, even in our modern world, to make the mute stone speak in poems and clasp the soul's

life of a century in some five or six transcendent forms.

The Colleoni, or Coglioni, family were of considerable antiquity and well authenticated nobility in the town of Bergamo. Two lions' heads conjoined formed one of their canting ensigns; another was borrowed from the vulgar meaning of their name. Many members of the house held important office during the three centuries preceding the birth of the famous general Bartolommeo. He was born in the year 1400 at Solza in the Bergamasque Contado. His father, Paolo, or Pùho as he was commonly called, was poor and exiled from the city, together with the rest of the Guelf nobles, by the Visconti. Being a man of daring spirit, and little inclined to languish in a foreign state as the dependent on some patron, Pùho formed the bold design of [Pg 266] seizing the Castle of Trezzo. This he achieved in 1405 by fraud, and afterwards held it as his own by force. Partly with the view of establishing himself more firmly in his acquired lordship, and partly out of family affection, Pùho associated four of his first-cousins in the government of Trezzo. They repaid his kindness with an act of treason and cruelty only too characteristic of those times in Italy. One day while he was playing at draughts in a room of the castle, they assaulted him and killed him, seized his wife and the boy Bartolommeo, and flung them into prison. The murdered Pùho had another son, Antonio, who escaped and took refuge with Giorgio Benzone, the tyrant of Crema. After a short time the Colleoni brothers found means to assassinate him also; therefore Bartolommeo alone, a child of whom no heed was taken, remained to be his father's avenger. He and his mother lived together in great indigence at Solza, until the lad felt strong enough to enter the service of one of the numerous petty Lombard princes, and to make himself if possible a captain of adventure. His name alone was a sufficient introduction, and the Duchy of Milan, dismembered upon the death of Gian Maria Visconti, was in such a state that all the minor despots were increasing their forces and preparing to defend by arms the fragments they had seized from the Visconti heritage. Bartolommeo therefore had no difficulty in recommending himself to Filippo d'Arcello, sometime general in the pay of the Milanese, but now the new lord of Piacenza. With this master he remained as page for two or three years, learning the use of arms, riding, and training himself in the physical exercises which were indispensable to a young Italian soldier. Meanwhile Filippo Maria Visconti reacquired his [Pg 267] hereditary dominions; and at the age of twenty, Bartolommeo found it prudent to seek a patron stronger than D'Arcello. The two great Condottieri, Sforza Attendolo and Braccio, divided the military glories of Italy at this period; and any youth who sought to rise in his profession had to enroll himself under the banners of the one or the other. Bartolommeo chose Braccio for his master, and was enrolled among his men as a simple trooper, or *ragazzo*, with no better prospects than he could make for himself by the help of his talents and his borrowed horse and armor. Braccio at this time was in Apulia, prosecuting the war of the Neapolitan Succession disputed between Alfonso of Aragon and Louis of Anjou under the weak sovereignty of Queen Joan. On which side of a quarrel a condottiere fought mattered but little, so great was the confusion of Italian politics, and so complete was the egotism of these fraudful, violent, and treacherous party leaders. Yet it may be mentioned that Braccio had espoused Alfonso's cause. Bartolommeo Colleoni early distinguished himself among the ranks of the Bracceschi. But he soon perceived that he could better his position by deserting to another camp. Accordingly he offered his services to Jacopo Caldora, one of Joan's generals, and received from him a commission of twenty men-at-arms. It may here be parenthetically said that the rank and pay of an Italian captain varied with the number of the men he brought into the field. His title "Condottiere" was derived from the circumstance that he was said to have received a *Condotta di venti cavalli*, and so forth. Each *cavallo* was equal to one mounted man-at-arms and two [Pg 268] attendants, who were also called *ragazzi*. It was his business to provide the stipulated number of men, to keep them in good discipline, and to satisfy their just demands. Therefore an Italian army at this epoch consisted of numerous small armies varying in size, each held together by personal engagements to a captain, and all dependent on the will of a general-in-chief, who had made a bargain with some prince or republic for supplying a fixed contingent of fighting-men. The *condottiere* was in other words a contractor or *impresario*, undertaking to do a certain piece of work for a certain price, and to furnish the requisite forces for the business in good working order. It will be readily seen upon this system how important were the personal qualities of the captain, and what great advantages those condottieri had who, like the petty princes of Romagna and the March, the Montefeltri, Ordelaffi, Malatesti, Manfredi, Orsini, and Vitelli, could rely upon a race of hardy vassals for their recruits.

It is not necessary to follow Colleoni's fortunes in the Regno, at Aquila, Ancona, and Bologna. He continued in the service of Caldora, who was now General of the Church, and had his *condotta* gradually increased. Meanwhile his cousins, the murderers of his father, began to dread his rising power, and determined, if possible, to ruin him. He was not a man to be easily assassinated; so they sent a hired ruffian to Caldora's camp to say that Bartolommeo had taken his name by fraud, and that he was himself the real son of Pùho Colleoni. Bartolommeo defied the liar to a duel; and this would have taken place before the army, had not two witnesses appeared who knew the fathers of both Colleoni and the *bravo*, and who gave such evidence that the [Pg 269] captains of the army were enabled to ascertain the truth. The impostor was stripped and drummed out of the camp.

At the conclusion of a peace between the Pope and the Bolognese, Bartolommeo found himself without occupation. He now offered himself to the Venetians, and began to fight again under the great Carmagnola against Filippo Visconti. His engagement allowed him forty men, which, after the judicial murder of Carmagnola at Venice in 1432, were increased to eighty. Erasmo da Narni, better known as Gattamelata, was now his general-in-chief—a man who had risen from the lowest fortunes to one of the most splendid military positions in Italy. Colleoni spent the next years of

his life, until 1443, in Lombardy, manœuvring against Il Piccinino, and gradually rising in the Venetian service, until his condotta reached the number of eight hundred men. Upon Gattamelata's death at Padua in 1440, Colleoni became the most important of the generals who had fought with Caldora in the March. The lordships of Romano in the Bergamasque, and of Covo and Antegnate in the Cremonese, had been assigned to him; and he was in a position to make independent engagements with princes. What distinguished him as a general was a combination of caution with audacity. He united the brilliant system of his master Braccio with the more prudent tactics of the Sforzeschi; and thus, though he often surprised his foes by daring stratagems and vigorous assaults, he rarely met with any serious check. He was a captain who could be relied upon for boldly seizing an advantage, no less than for using a success with discretion. Moreover he had acquired an almost unique reputation for honesty in dealing with his [Pg 270] masters, and for justice combined with humane indulgence to his men. His company was popular, and he could always bring capital troops into the field.

In the year 1443, Colleoni quitted the Venetian service on account of a quarrel with Gherardo Dandolo, the Proveditore of the Republic. He now took a commission from Filippo Maria Visconti, who received him at Milan with great honor, bestowed on him the Castello Adorno at Pavia, and sent him into the March of Ancona upon a military expedition. Of all Italian tyrants, this Visconti was the most difficult to serve. Constitutionally timid, surrounded with a crowd of spies and base informers, shrinking from the sight of men in the recesses of his palace, and controlling the complicated affairs of his duchy by means of correspondents and intelligencers, this last scion of the Milanese despots lived like a spider in an inscrutable network of suspicion and intrigue. His policy was one of endless plot and counterplot. He trusted no man; his servants were paid to act as spies on one another; his body-guard consisted of mutually hostile mercenaries; his captains in the field were watched and thwarted by commissioners appointed to check them at the point of successful ambition or magnificent victory. The historian has a hard task when he tries to fathom the Visconti's schemes, or to understand his motives. Half the duke's time seems to have been spent in unravelling the webs that he had woven, in undoing his own work, and weakening the hands of his chosen ministers. Conscious that his power was artificial, that the least breath might blow him back into the nothingness from which he had arisen on the wrecks of his father's [Pg 271] tyranny, he dreaded the personal eminence of his generals above all things. His chief object was to establish a system of checks, by means of which no one whom he employed should at any moment be great enough to threaten him. The most formidable of these military adventurers, Francesco Sforza, had been secured by marriage with Bianca Maria Visconti, his master's only daughter, in 1441; but the duke did not even trust his son-in-law. The last six years of his life were spent in scheming to deprive Sforza of his lordships; and the war in the March, on which he employed Colleoni, had the object of ruining the principality acquired by this daring captain from Pope Eugenius IV. in 1443.

Colleoni was by no means deficient in those foxlike qualities which were necessary to save the lion from the toils spread for him by Italian intriguers. He had already shown that he knew how to push his own interests, by changing sides and taking service with the highest bidder, as occasion prompted. Nor, though his character for probity and loyalty stood exceptionally high among the men of his profession, was he the slave to any questionable claims of honor or of duty. In that age of confused politics and extinguished patriotism, there was not indeed much scope for scrupulous honesty. But Filippo Maria Visconti proved more than a match for him in craft. While Colleoni was engaged in pacifying the revolted population of Bologna, the duke yielded to the suggestion of his parasites at Milan, who whispered that the general was becoming dangerously powerful. He recalled him, and threw him without trial into the dungeons of the Forni at Monza. [Pg 272] Here Colleoni remained a prisoner more than a year, until the duke's death, in 1447, when he made his escape, and profited by the disturbance of the duchy to reacquire his lordships in the Bergamasque territory. The true motive for his imprisonment remains still buried in obscure conjecture. Probably it was not even known to the Visconti, who acted on this, as on so many other occasions, by a mere spasm of suspicious jealousy, for which he could have given no account.

From the year 1447 to the year 1455, it is difficult to follow Colleoni's movements, or to trace his policy. First, we find him employed by the Milanese Republic, during its brief space of independence; then he is engaged by the Venetians, with a commission for fifteen hundred horse; next, he is in the service of Francesco Sforza; once more in that of the Venetians, and yet again in that of the Duke of Milan. His biographer relates with pride that, during this period, he was three times successful against French troops in Piedmont and Lombardy. It appears that he made short engagements, and changed his paymasters according to convenience. But all this time he rose in personal importance, acquired fresh lordships in the Bergamasque, and accumulated wealth. He reached the highest point of his prosperity in 1455, when the Republic of St. Mark elected him general-in-chief of their armies, with the fullest powers, and with a stipend of one hundred thousand florins. For nearly twenty-one years, until the day of his death, in 1475, Colleoni held this honorable and lucrative office. In his will he charged the Signory of Venice that they should never again commit into the hands of a single captain such unlimited control over their military [Pg 273] resources. It was indeed no slight tribute to Colleoni's reputation for integrity that the jealous republic, which had signified its sense of Carmagnola's untrustworthiness by capital punishment, should have left him so long in the undisturbed disposal of their army. The standard and the baton of St. Mark were conveyed to Colleoni by two ambassadors, and presented to him at Brescia on June 24, 1455. Three years later he made a triumphal entry into Venice, and received the same ensigns of military authority from the hands of the new doge, Pasquale Malipiero. On this occasion his staff consisted of some two hundred officers, splendidly armed, and followed by

a train of serving-men. Noblemen from Bergamo, Brescia, and other cities of the Venetian territory, swelled the cortége. When they embarked on the lagoons, they found the water covered with boats and gondolas, bearing the population of Venice in gala attire to greet the illustrious guest with instruments of music. Three great galleys of the republic, called bucentaurs, issued from the crowd of smaller craft. On the first was the doge in his state robes, attended by the government in office, or the Signoria of St. Mark. On the second were members of the senate and minor magistrates. The third carried the ambassadors of foreign powers. Colleoni was received into the first state galley, and placed by the side of the doge. The oarsmen soon cleared the space between the land and Venice, passed the small canals, and swept majestically up the Canalozzo among the plaudits of the crowds assembled on both sides to cheer their general. Thus they reached the piazzetta, where Colleoni alighted between the two great pillars, and, conducted by [Pg 274] the doge in person, walked to the Church of St. Mark. Here, after mass had been said, and a sermon had been preached, kneeling before the high-altar he received the truncheon from the doge's hands. The words of his commission ran as follows:

"By authority and decree of this most excellent city of Venice, of us the prince, and of the senate, you are to be commander and captain-general of all our forces and armaments on *terra firma*. Take from our hands this truncheon, with good augury and fortune, as sign and warrant of your power. Be it your care and effort, with dignity and splendor to maintain and to defend the majesty, the loyalty, and the principles of this empire. Neither provoking, nor yet provoked, unless at our command, shall you break into open warfare with our enemies. Free jurisdiction and lordship over each one of our soldiers, except in cases of treason, we hereby commit to you."

After the ceremony of his reception, Colleoni was conducted with no less pomp to his lodgings, and the next ten days were spent in festivities of all sorts.

The commandership-in-chief of the Venetian forces was perhaps the highest military post in Italy. It placed Colleoni on the pinnacle of his profession, and made his camp the favorite school of young soldiers. Among his pupils or lieutenants we read of Ercole d'Este, the future Duke of Ferrara; Alessandro Sforza, Lord of Pesaro; Boniface, Marquis of Montferrat; Cicco and Pino Ordelaffi, Princes of Forli; Astorre Manfredi, the Lord of Faenza; three Counts of Mirandola; two Princes of Carpi; Deifobo, the Count of Anguillara; Giovanni Antonio Caldora, Lord of Jesi in the March; and many others of less name. Honors came thick upon him. When one of the many ineffectual leagues against the infidel was formed in 1468, during the pontificate of Paul II., he was named captain-general for the crusade. Pius II. designed him for the leader of the expedition [Pg 275] he had planned against the impious and savage despot Sigismondo Malatesta. King René of Anjou, by special patent, authorized him to bear his name and arms, and made him a member of his family. The Duke of Burgundy, by a similar heraldic fiction, conferred upon him his name and armorial bearings. This will explain why Colleoni is often styled "di Andegavia e Borgogna." In the case of René, the honor was but a barren show. But the patent of Charles the Bold had more significance. In 1473 he entertained the project of employing the great Italian general against his Swiss foes; nor does it seem reasonable to reject a statement made by Colleoni's biographer, to the effect that a secret compact had been drawn up between him and the Duke of Burgundy, for the conquest and partition of the Duchy of Milan. The Venetians, in whose service Colleoni still remained, when they became aware of this project, met it with peaceful but irresistible opposition.

Colleoni had been engaged continually since his earliest boyhood in the trade of war. It was not therefore possible that he should have gained a great degree of literary culture. Yet the fashion of the times made it necessary that a man in his position should seek the society of scholars. Accordingly his court and camp were crowded with students, in whose wordy disputations he is said to have delighted. It will be remembered that his contemporaries, Alfonso the Magnanimous, Francesco Sforza, Federigo of Urbino, and Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, piqued themselves at least as much upon their patronage of letters as upon their prowess in the field.

Colleoni's court, like that of Urbino, was a model of manners. As became a soldier, he was [Pg 276] temperate in food and moderate in slumber. It was recorded of him that he had never sat more than one hour at meat in his own house, and that he never overslept the sunrise. After dinner he would converse with his friends, using commonly his native dialect of Bergamo, and entertaining the company now with stories of adventure, and now with pithy sayings. In another essential point he resembled his illustrious contemporary, the Duke of Urbino; for he was sincerely pious in an age which, however it preserved the decencies of ceremonial religion, was profoundly corrupt at heart. His principal lordships in the Bergamasque territory owed to his munificence their fairest churches and charitable institutions. At Martinengo, for example, he rebuilt and re-endowed two monasteries, the one dedicated to St. Chiara, the other to St. Francis. In Bergamo itself he founded an establishment named "La Pietà," for the good purpose of dowering and marrying poor girls. This house he endowed with a yearly income of three thousand ducats. The sulphur baths of Trescorio, at some distance from the city, were improved and opened to poor patients by a hospital which he provided. At Rumano he raised a church to St. Peter, and erected buildings of public utility, which on his death he bequeathed to the society of the Misericordia in that town. All the places of his jurisdiction owed to him such benefits as good water, new walls, and irrigation-works. In addition to these munificent foundations must be mentioned the Basella, or Monastery of Dominican friars, which he established not far from Bergamo, upon the river Serio, in memory of his beloved daughter Medea. Last, not least, was the Chapel of St. John the [Pg 277] Baptist, attached to the Church of S. Maria Maggiore, which he endowed with fitting maintenance for two priests and deacons.

The one defect acknowledged by his biographer was his partiality for women. Early in life he

married Tisbe, of the noble house of the Brescian Martinenghi, who bore him one daughter, Caterina, wedded to Gasparre Martinengo. Two illegitimate daughters, Ursina and Isotta, were recognized and treated by him as legitimate. The first he gave in marriage to Gherardo Martinengo, and the second to Jacopo of the same family. Two other natural children, Doratina and Ricardona, were mentioned in his will: he left them four thousand ducats apiece for dowry. Medea, the child of his old age (for she was born to him when he was sixty), died before her father, and was buried, as we have seen, in the Chapel of Basella.

Throughout his life he was distinguished for great physical strength and agility. When he first joined the troop of Braccio, he could race, with his corselet on, against the swiftest runner of the army; and when he was stripped, few horses could beat him in speed. Far on into old age he was in the habit of taking long walks every morning for the sake of exercise, and delighted in feats of arms and jousting-matches. "He was tall, straight, and full of flesh, well-proportioned, and excellently made in all his limbs. His complexion inclined somewhat to brown, but was colored with sanguine and lively carnation. His eyes were black; in look and sharpness of light they were vivid, piercing, and terrible. The outlines of his nose and all his countenance expressed a certain [Pg 278] manly nobleness, combined with goodness and prudence." Such is the portrait drawn of Colleoni by his biographer and it well accords with the famous bronze statue of the general at Venice.

Colleoni lived with a magnificence that suited his rank. His favorite place of abode was Malpaga, a castle built by him at the distance of about an hour's drive from Bergamo. The place is worth a visit, though its courts and gates and galleries have now been turned into a monster farm, and the southern rooms, where Colleoni entertained his guests, are given over to the silkworms. Half a dozen families, employed upon a vast estate of the Martinengo family, occupy the still substantial house and stables. The moat is planted with mulberry-trees; the upper rooms are used as granaries for golden maize; cows, pigs, and horses litter in the spacious yard. Yet the walls of the inner court and of the ancient state-rooms are brilliant with frescos, executed by some good Venetian hand, which represent the chief events of Colleoni's life—his battles, his reception by the Signory of Venice, his tournaments and hawking-parties, and the great series of entertainments with which he welcomed Christiern of Denmark. This king had made his pilgrimage to Rome, and was returning westward, when the fame of Colleoni and his princely state at Malpaga induced him to turn aside and spend some days as the general's guest. In order to do him honor, Colleoni left his castle at the king's disposal and established himself with all his staff and servants in a camp at some distance from Malpaga. The camp was duly furnished with tents and trenches, stockades, artillery, and all the other furniture of war. On the king's [Pg 279] approach, Colleoni issued with trumpets blowing and banners flying to greet his guest, gratifying him thus with a spectacle of the pomp and circumstance of war as carried on in Italy. The visit was further enlivened by sham fights, feats of arms, and trials of strength. When it ended, Colleoni presented the king with one of his own suits of armor, and gave to each of his servants a complete livery of red and white, his colors. Among the frescos at Malpaga none are more interesting, and none, thanks to the silkworms rather than to any other cause, are fortunately in a better state of preservation, than those which represent this episode in the history of the castle.

Colleoni died in the year 1475, at the age of seventy-five. Since he left no male representative, he constituted the Republic of St. Mark his heir in chief, after properly providing for his daughters and his numerous foundations. The Venetians received under this testament a sum of one hundred thousand ducats, together with all arrears of pay due to him, and ten thousand ducats owed him by the Duke of Ferrara. It set forth the testator's intention that this money should be employed in defence of the Christian faith against the Turk. One condition was attached to the bequest. The legatees were to erect a statue to Colleoni on the Piazza of St. Mark. This, however, involved some difficulty; for the proud republic had never accorded a similar honor, nor did they choose to encumber their splendid square with a monument. They evaded the condition by assigning the Campo in front of the Scuola di S. Marco, where also stands the Church of S. Zanipolo, to the purpose. Here accordingly the finest bronze equestrian statue in [Pg 280] Italy, if we except the Marcus Aurelius of the Capitol, was reared upon its marble pedestal by Andrea Verocchio and Alessandro Leopardi.

Colleoni's liberal expenditure of wealth found its reward in the immortality conferred by art. While the names of Braccio, his master in the art of war, and of Piccinino, his great adversary, are familiar to few but professed students, no one who has visited either Bergamo or Venice can fail to have learned something about the founder of the Chapel of St. John and the original of Leopardi's bronze. The annals of sculpture assign to Verocchio, of Florence, the principal share in this statue: but Verocchio died before it was cast; and even granting that he designed the model, its execution must be attributed to his collaborator, the Venetian Leopardi. For my own part, I am loath to admit that the chief credit of this masterpiece belongs to a man whose undisputed work at Florence shows but little of its living spirit and splendor of suggested motion. That the Tuscan science of Verocchio secured conscientious modelling for man and horse may be assumed; but I am fain to believe that the concentrated fire which animates them both is due in no small measure to the handling of his northern fellow-craftsman.

While immersed in the dreary records of crimes, treasons, cruelties, and base ambitions, which constitute the bulk of fifteenth-century Italian history, it is refreshing to meet with a character so frank and manly, so simply pious and comparatively free from stain, as Colleoni. The only general of his day who can bear comparison with him for purity of public life and decency in conduct was [Pg 281] Federigo di Montefeltro. Even here, the comparison redounds to Colleoni's credit; for he, unlike the Duke of Urbino, rose to eminence by his own exertion in a profession fraught with peril to men of ambition and energy. Federigo started with a principality sufficient to satisfy his just

desires for power. Nothing but his own sense of right and prudence restrained Colleoni upon the path which brought Francesco Sforza to a duchy by dishonorable dealings, and Carmagnola to the scaffold by questionable practice against his masters.

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LOMBARD VIGNETTES.

On the Superga.

This is the chord of Lombard coloring in May: Lowest in the scale, bright green of varied tints, the meadow-grasses mingling with willows and acacias, harmonized by air and distance; next, opaque blue—the blue of something between amethyst and lapis-lazuli—that belongs alone to the basements of Italian mountains; higher, the roseate whiteness of ridged snow on Alps or Apennines; highest, the blue of the sky, ascending from pale turquoise to transparent sapphire filled with light. A mediæval mystic might have likened this chord to the spiritual world. For the lowest region is that of natural life, of plant and bird and beast, and unregenerate man. It is the place of faun and nymph and satyr, the plain where wars are fought and cities built and work is done. Thence we climb to purified humanity, the mountains of purgation, the solitude and simplicity of contemplative life not yet made perfect by freedom from the flesh. Higher comes that thin white belt, where are the resting-places of angelic feet, the points whence purged souls take their flight towards infinity. Above all is heaven, the hierarchies ascending row on row to reach the light of God.

This fancy occurred to me as I climbed the slope of the Superga, gazing over acacia hedges and poplars to the mountains bare in morning light. The occasional occurrence of bars across this [Pg 283] chord—poplars shivering in sun and breeze, stationary cypresses as black as night, and tall campanili with the hot red shafts of glowing brick—adds just enough of composition to the landscape. Without too much straining of the allegory, the mystic might have recognised in these aspiring bars the upward effort of souls rooted in the common life of earth.

The panorama, unrolling as we ascend, is enough to overpower a lover of beauty. There is nothing equal to it for space and breadth and majesty. Monte Rosa, the masses of Mont Blanc blended with the Grand Paradis, the airy pyramid of Monte Viso, these are the battlements of that vast Alpine rampart in which the vale of Susa opens like a gate. To west and south sweep the Maritime Alps and the Apennines. Beneath glides the infant Po; and where he leads our eyes the plain is only limited by pearly mist.

A bronze Bust of Caligula at Turin.

The Albertina bronze is one of the most precious portraits of antiquity, not merely because it confirms the testimony of the green basalt bust in the Capitol, but also because it supplies an even more emphatic and impressive illustration to the narrative of Suetonius.

Caligula is here represented as young and singularly beautiful. It is indeed an ideal Roman head, with the powerful square modelling, the crisp short hair, low forehead, and regular firm features proper to the noblest Roman type. The head is thrown backward from the throat; and there is a something of menace or defiance or suffering in the suggestion of brusque movement [Pg 284] given to the sinews of the neck. This attitude, together with the tension of the forehead and the fixed expression of pain and strain communicated by the lines of the mouth—strong muscles of the upper lip and abruptly chiselled under lip—in relation to the small eyes, deep set beneath their cavernous and level brows, renders the whole face a monument of spiritual anguish. I remember that the green basalt bust of the Capitol has the same anxious forehead, the same troubled and overburdened eyes; but the agony of this fretful mouth, comparable to nothing but the mouth of Pandolfo Sigismondo Malatesta, and, like that, on the verge of breaking into the spasms of delirium, is quite peculiar to the Albertina bronze. It is just this which the portrait of the Capitol lacks for the completion of Caligula. The man who could be so represented in art had nothing wholly vulgar in him. The brutality of Caracalla, the overblown sensuality of Nero, the effeminacy of Commodus or Heliogabalus are all absent here. This face idealizes the torture of a morbid soul. It is withal so truly beautiful that it might easily be made the poem of high suffering or noble passion. If the bronze were plastic I see how a great sculptor by but few strokes could convert it into an agonizing Stephen or Sebastian. As it is, the unimaginable touch of disease, the unrest of madness, made Caligula the genius of insatiable appetite; and his martyrdom was the torment of lust and ennui and everlasting agitation. The accident of empire tantalized him with vain hopes of satisfying the Charybdis of his soul's sick cravings. From point to point he passed of empty pleasure and unsatisfying cruelty, forever hungry; until the malady of his spirit, [Pg 285] unrestrained by any limitations, and with the right medium for its development, became unique—the tragic type of pathological desire. What more than all things must have plagued a man with that face was probably the unavoidable meanness of his career. When we study the chapters of Suetonius we are forced to feel that, though the situation and the madness of Caligula were

dramatically impressive, his crimes were trivial and small. In spite of the vast scale on which he worked his devilish will, his life presents a total picture of sordid vice, differing only from pothouse dissipation and school-boy cruelty in point of size. And this of a truth is the Nemesis of evil. After a time, mere tyrannous caprice must become commonplace and cloying, tedious to the tyrant and uninteresting to the student of humanity; nor can I believe that Caligula failed to perceive this to his own infinite disgust.

Suetonius asserts that he was hideously ugly. How are we to square this testimony with the witness of the bronze before us? What changed the face, so beautiful and terrible in youth, to ugliness that shrank from sight in manhood? Did the murderers find it blurred in its fine lineaments, furrowed with lines of care, hollowed with the soul's hunger? Unless a life of vice and madness had succeeded in making Caligula's face what the faces of some maniacs are—the bloated ruin of what was once a living witness to the soul within—I could fancy that death may have sanctified it with even more beauty than this bust of the self-tormented young man shows. Have we not all seen the anguish of thought-fretted faces smoothed out by the hands of the Deliverer?

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Ferrari at Vercelli.

It is possible that many visitors to the Cathedral of Como have carried away the memory of stately women with abundant yellow hair and draperies of green and crimson in a picture they connect thereafter with Gaudenzio Ferrari. And when they come to Milan they are probably both impressed and disappointed by a Martyrdom of St. Catherine in the Brera, bearing the same artist's name. If they wish to understand this painter they must seek him at Varallo, at Saronno, and at Vercelli. In the Church of S. Christoforo, in Vercelli, Gaudenzio Ferrari, at the full height of his powers, showed what he could do to justify Lomazzi's title chosen for him of the eagle. He has indeed the strong wing and the swiftness of the king of birds. And yet the works of few really great painters—and among the really great we place Ferrari—leave upon the mind a more distressing sense of imperfection. Extraordinary fertility of fancy, vehement dramatic passion, sincere study of nature, and great command of technical resources are here (as elsewhere in Ferrari's frescos) neutralized by an incurable defect of the combining and harmonizing faculty so essential to a masterpiece. There is stuff enough of thought and vigor and imagination to make a dozen artists. And yet we turn away disappointed from the crowded, dazzling, stupefying wilderness of forms and faces on these mighty walls.

All that Ferrari derived from actual life—the heads of single figures, the powerful movement of men and women in excited action, the monumental pose of two praying nuns—is admirably rendered. His angels, too, in S. Cristoforo, as elsewhere, are quite original; not only in their type [Pg 287] of beauty, which is terrestrial and peculiar to Ferrari, without a touch of Correggio's sensuality; but also in the intensity of their emotion, the realisation of their vitality. Those which hover round the Cross in the fresco of the "Crucifixion" are as passionate as any angels of the Giottesque masters in Assisi. Those, again, which crowd the Stable of Bethlehem in the "Nativity" yield no point of idyllic charm to Gozzoli's in the Riccardi Chapel.

The "Crucifixion," and the "Assumption of Madonna" are very tall and narrow compositions, audacious in their attempt to fill almost unmanageable space with a connected action. Of the two frescos, the "Crucifixion," which has points of strong similarity to the same subject at Varallo, is by far the best. Ferrari never painted anything at once truer to life and nobler in tragic style than the fainting Virgin. Her face expresses the very acme of martyrdom—not exaggerated nor spasmodic, but real and sublime—in the suffering of a stately matron. In points like this Ferrari cannot be surpassed. Raphael could scarcely have done better; besides, there is an air of sincerity, a stamp of popular truth in this episode which lies beyond Raphael's sphere. It reminds us rather of Tintoretto.

After the "Crucifixion," I place the "Adoration of the Magi," full of fine mundane motives and gorgeous costumes; then the "Sposalizio" (whose marriage I am not certain), the only grandly composed picture of the series, and marked by noble heads; then the "Adoration of the Shepherds," with two lovely angels holding the bambino. The "Assumption of the Magdalen"—for [Pg 288] which fresco there is a valuable cartoon in the Albertina Collection at Turin—must have been a fine picture; but it is ruined now. An oil altar-piece, in the choir of the same church, struck me less than the frescos. It represents Madonna and a crowd of saints under an orchard of apple-trees, with cherubs curiously flung about almost at random in the air. The motive of the orchard is prettily conceived and carried out with spirit.

What Ferrari possessed was rapidity of movement, fulness and richness of reality, exuberance of invention, excellent portraiture, dramatic vehemence, and an almost unrivalled sympathy with the swift and passionate world of angels. What he lacked was power of composition, simplicity of total effect, harmony in coloring, control over his own luxuriance, the sense of tranquillity. He seems to have sought grandeur in size and multitude, richness, éclat, contrast. Being the disciple of Leonardo and Raphael, his defects are truly singular. As a composer, the old leaven of Giovenone remained in him; but he felt the dramatic tendencies of a later age, and in occasional episodes he realized them with a force and *furia* granted to very few of the Italian painters.

Lanini at Vercelli.

The Casa Mariano is a palace which belonged to a family of that name. Like many houses of the sort in Italy, it fell to vile uses, and its hall of audience was turned into a lumber-room. The Operai of Vercelli, I was told, bought the palace a few years ago, restored the noble hall, and [Pg 289] devoted a smaller room to a collection of pictures valuable for students of the early Vercellese style of painting. Of these there is no need to speak. The great hall is the gem of the Casa Mariano. It has a coved roof, with a large, flat, oblong space in the centre of the ceiling. The whole of this vault and the lunettes beneath were painted by Lanini; so runs the tradition of the fresco-painter's name; and though much injured by centuries of outrage, and somewhat marred by recent restoration, these frescos form a precious monument of Lombard art. The object of the painter's design seems to have been the glorification of Music. In the central compartment of the roof is an assembly of the gods, obviously borrowed from Raphael's "Marriage of Cupid and Psyche" in the Farnesina at Rome. The fusion of Roman composition with Lombard execution constitutes the chief charm of this singular work, and makes it, so far as I am aware, unique. Single figures of the Goddesses, and the whole movement of the scene upon Olympus, are transcribed without attempt at concealment. And yet the fresco is not a bare-faced copy. The manner of feeling and of execution is quite different from that of Raphael's school. The poetry and sentiment are genuinely Lombard. None of Raphael's pupils could have carried out his design with a delicacy of emotion and a technical skill in coloring so consummate. What, we think, as we gaze upward, would the master have given for such a craftsman? The hardness, coarseness, and animal crudity of the Roman school are absent; so also is their vigor. But where the grace of form and color is so soft and sweet, where the high-bred calm of good company is so [Pg 290] sympathetically rendered, where the atmosphere of amorous languor and of melody is so artistically diffused, we cannot miss the powerful modelling and rather vulgar *tours de force* of Giulio Romano. The scala of tone is silvery golden. There are no hard blues, no coarse red flesh-tints, no black shadows. Mellow lights, the morning hues of primrose or of palest amber, pervade the whole society. It is a court of gentle and harmonious souls; and though this style of beauty might cloy, at first sight there is something ravishing in those yellow-haired, white-limbed, blooming deities. No movement of lascivious grace as in Correggio, no perturbation of the senses, as in some of the Venetians, disturbs the rhythm of their music; nor is the pleasure of the flesh, though felt by the painter and communicated to the spectator, an interruption to their divine calm. The white, saffron-haired goddesses are grouped together like stars seen in the topaz light of evening, like daffodils half smothered in snow-drops, and among them Diana, with the crescent on her forehead, is the fairest. Her dream-like beauty need fear no comparison with the Diana of the Camera di S. Paolo. Apollo and Bacchus are scarcely less lovely in their bloom of earliest manhood; honey-pale, as Greeks would say; like statues of living electron; realizing Simætha's picture of her lover and his friend:

> τοῖς δ᾽ ἦν ξανθοτέρα μὲν ἐλιχρύσοιο γενειάς,
> στήθεα δὲ στίλβοντα πολὺ πλέον ἢ τὺ Σελάνα.[E]

It was thus that the almost childlike spirit of the Milanese painters felt the antique; how [Pg 291] differently from their Roman brethren! It was thus that they interpreted the lines of their own poets:

> E i tuoi capei più volte ho somigliati
> Di Cerere a le paglie secche o bionde
> Dintorno crespi al tuo capo legati.[F]

Yet the painter of this hall—whether we are to call him Lanini or another—was not a composer. Where he has not robbed the motives and the distribution of the figures from Raphael, he has nothing left but grace of detail. The intellectual feebleness of his style may be seen in many figures of women playing upon instruments of music, ranged around the walls. One girl at the organ is graceful; another with a tambourine has a sort of Bassarid beauty. But the group of Apollo, Pegasus, and a Muse upon Parnassus is a failure in its meaningless frigidity, while few of these subordinate compositions show power of conception or vigor of design.

Lanini, like Sodoma, was a native of Vercelli; and though he was Ferrari's pupil, there is more in him of Luini or of Sodoma than of his master. He does not rise at any point to the height of these three great masters, but he shares some of Luini's and Sodoma's fine qualities, without having any of Ferrari's force. A visit to the mangled remnants of his frescos in S. Caterina will repay the student of art. This was once, apparently, a double church with the hall and chapel of a *confraternità* appended to it. One portion of the building was painted with the history of the [Pg 292] saint; and very lovely must this work have been, to judge by the fragments which have recently been rescued from whitewash, damp, and ruthless mutilation. What wonderful Lombard faces, half obliterated on the broken wall and mouldering plaster, smile upon us like drowned memories swimming up from the depths of oblivion! Wherever three or four are grouped together, we find an exquisite little picture—an old woman and two young women in a doorway, for example, telling no story, but touching us with simple harmony of form. Nothing further is needed to render their grace intelligible. Indeed, knowing the faults of the school, we may seek some consolation by telling ourselves that these incomplete fragments yield Lanini's best. In the coved compartments of the roof, above the windows, ran a row of dancing boys; and these are still most beautifully modelled, though the pallor of recent whitewash is upon them. All the boys have blonde hair. They are naked, with scrolls or ribbons wreathed round them, adding to the airiness of their continual dance. Some of the loveliest are in a room used to stow away the lumber of the church—old boards and curtains, broken lanterns, candle-ends in tin sconces, the musty apparatus of festival adornments, and in the midst of all a battered, weather-beaten bier.

The Piazza of Piacenza.

The great feature of Piacenza is its famous piazza—a romantically, picturesquely perfect square, surpassing the most daring attempts of the scene-painter, and realizing a poet's dreams. [Pg 293] The space is considerable, and many streets converge upon it at irregular angles. Its finest architectural feature is the antique Palace of the Commune: Gothic arcades of stone below, surmounted by a brick building with wonderfully delicate and varied terra-cotta work in the round-arched windows. Before this façade, on the marble pavement, prance the bronze equestrian statues of two Farnesi—insignificant men, exaggerated horses, flying drapery—as *barocco* as it is possible to be in style, but so splendidly toned with verdigris, so superb in their *bravura* attitude, and so happily placed in the line of two streets lending far vistas from the square into the town beyond, that it is difficult to criticise them seriously. They form, indeed, an important element in the pictorial effect, and enhance the terra-cotta work of the façade, by the contrast of their color.

The time to see this square is in evening twilight—that wonderful hour after sunset—when the people are strolling on the pavement, polished to a mirror by the pacing of successive centuries, and when the cavalry soldiers group themselves at the angles under the lamp-posts or beneath the dimly lighted Gothic arches of the palace. This is the magical mellow hour to be sought by lovers of the picturesque in all the towns of Italy, the hour which, by its tender blendings of sallow western lights with glimmering lamps, casts the veil of half-shadow over any crudeness and restores the injuries of time; the hour when all the tints of these old buildings are intensified, etherealized, and harmonized by one pervasive glow. When I last saw Piacenza, it had been raining all day; and ere sun-down a clearing had come from the Alps, followed by fresh [Pg 294] threatenings of thunderstorms. The air was very liquid. There was a tract of yellow sunset sky to westward, a faint new moon half swathed in mist above, and over all the north a huge towered thunder-cloud kept flashing distant lightnings. The pallid primrose of the West, forced down and reflected back from the vast bank of tempest, gave unearthly beauty to the hues of church and palace—tender half-tones of violet and russet paling into grays and yellows on what in daylight seemed but dull red brick. Even the uncompromising façade of St. Francesco helped; and the dukes were like statues of the "Gran Commendatore," waiting for Don Giovanni's invitation.

Masolino at Castiglione D'olona.

Through the loveliest Arcadian scenery of woods and fields and rushing waters the road leads downward from Varese to Castiglione. The Collegiate Church stands on a leafy hill above the town, with fair prospect over groves and waterfalls and distant mountains. Here in the choir is a series of frescos by Masolino da Panicale, the master of Masaccio, who painted them about the year 1428. "Masolinus de Florentia pinxit" decides their authorship. The histories of the Virgin, St. Stephen, and St. Lawrence are represented; but the injuries of time and neglect have been so great that it is difficult to judge them fairly. All we feel for certain is that Masolino had not yet escaped from the traditional Giottesque mannerism. Only a group of Jews stoning Stephen and [Pg 295] Lawrence before the tribunal remind us by dramatic energy of the Brancacci chapel.

The baptistery frescos, dealing with the legend of St. John, show a remarkable advance; and they are luckily in better preservation. A soldier lifting his two-handed sword to strike off the Baptist's head is a vigorous figure full of Florentine realism. Also in the Baptism in Jordan we are reminded of Masaccio by an excellent group of bathers—one man taking off his hose, another putting them on again, a third standing naked with his back turned, and a fourth shivering half-dressed with a look of curious sadness on his face. The nude has been carefully studied and well realized. The finest composition of this series is a large panel representing a double action—Salome at Herod's table begging for the Baptist's head, and then presenting it to her mother Herodias. The costumes are *quattrocento* Florentine, exactly rendered. Salome is a graceful, slender creature; the two women who regard her offering to Herodias with mingled curiosity and horror are well conceived. The background consists of a mountain landscape in Masaccio's simple manner, a rich Renaissance villa, and an open loggia. The architecture perspective is scientifically accurate, and a frieze of boys with garlands on the villa is in the best manner of Florentine sculpture. On the mountain-side, diminished in scale, is a group of elders burying the body of St. John. These are massed together and robed in the style of Masaccio, and have his virile dignity of form and action. Indeed, this interesting wall-painting furnishes an epitome of Florentine art, in its intentions and achievements, during the first half of the fifteenth century. The color is strong and brilliant, and the execution solid. [Pg 296]

The margin of the Salome panel has been used for scratching the chronicle of Castiglione. I read one date, 1568, several of the next century, the record of a duel between two gentlemen, and many inscriptions to this effect "Erodiana Regina," "Omnia prætereunt," etc. A dirty, one-eyed fellow keeps the place. In my presence he swept the frescos over with a scratchy broom, flaying their upper surface in profound unconsciousness of mischief. The armor of the executioner has had its steel colors almost rubbed off by this infernal process. Damp and cobwebs are far kinder.

The Certosa.

The Certosa of Pavia leaves upon the mind an impression of bewildering sumptuousness: nowhere else are costly materials so combined with a lavish expenditure of the rarest art. Those who have only once been driven round together with the crew of sight-seers can carry little away but the memory of lapis-lazuli and bronze-work, inlaid agates and labyrinthine sculpture, cloisters tenantless in silence, fair painted faces smiling from dark corners on the senseless crowd, trim gardens with rows of pink primroses in spring and of begonia in autumn, blooming beneath colonnades of glowing terra-cotta. The striking contrast between the Gothic of the interior and the Renaissance façade, each in its own kind perfect, will also be remembered; and thoughts of the two great houses, Visconti and Sforza, to whose pride of power it is a monument, may be [Pg 297] blended with the recollection of art-treasures alien to their spirit.

Two great artists, Ambrogio Borgognone and Antonio Amadeo, are the presiding genii of the Certosa. To minute criticism, based upon the accurate investigation of records and the comparison of styles, must be left the task of separating their work from that of numerous collaborators. But it is none the less certain that the keynote of the whole music is struck by them. Amadeo, the master of the Colleoni chapel at Bergamo, was both sculptor and architect. If the façade of the Certosa be not absolutely his creation, he had a hand in the distribution of its masses and the detail of its ornaments. The only fault in this otherwise faultless product of the purest quattrocento inspiration is that the façade is a frontispiece, with hardly any structural relation to the church it masks; and this, though serious from the point of view of architecture, is no abatement of its sculpturesque and picturesque refinement. At first sight it seems a wilderness of loveliest reliefs and statues—of angel faces, fluttering raiment, flowing hair, love-laden youths, and stationary figures of grave saints, mid wayward tangles of acanthus and wild vine and cupid-laden foliage; but the subordination of these decorative details to the main design —clear, rhythmical, and lucid, like a chant of Pergolese or Stradella—will enrapture one who has the sense for unity evoked from divers elements, for thought subduing all caprices to the harmony of beauty. It is not possible elsewhere in Italy to find the instinct of the earlier Renaissance, so amorous in its expenditure of rare material, so lavish in its bestowal of the [Pg 298] costliest workmanship on ornamental episodes, brought into truer keeping with a pure and simple structural effect.

All the great sculptor-architects of Lombardy worked in succession on this miracle of beauty; and this may account for the sustained perfection of style, which nowhere suffers from the languor of exhaustion in the artist or from repetition of motives. It remains the triumph of North Italian genius, exhibiting qualities of tenderness and self-abandonment to inspiration which we lack in the severer masterpieces of the Tuscan school.

To Borgognone is assigned the painting of the roof in nave and choir—exceeding rich, varied, and withal in sympathy with stately Gothic style. Borgognone, again, is said to have designed the saints and martyrs worked in *tarsia* for the choir-stalls. His frescos are in some parts well preserved, as in the lovely little Madonna at the end of the south chapel, while the great fresco above the window in the south transept has an historical value that renders it interesting in spite of partial decay. Borgognone's oil-pictures throughout the church prove, if such proof were needed after inspection of the altar-piece in our National Gallery, that he was one of the most powerful and original painters of Italy, blending the repose of the earlier masters and their consummate workmanship with a profound sensibility to the finest shades of feeling and the rarest forms of natural beauty. He selected an exquisite type of face for his young men and women; on his old men he bestowed singular gravity and dignity. His saints are a society of strong, pure, restful, earnest souls, in whom the passion of deepest emotion is transfigured by [Pg 299] habitual calm. The brown and golden harmonies he loved are gained without sacrifice of lustre: there is a self-restraint in his coloring which corresponds to the reserve of his emotion; and though a regret sometimes rises in our mind that he should have modelled the light and shade upon his faces with a brusque, unpleasing hardness, their pallor dwells within our memory as something delicately sought if not consummately attained. In a word, Borgognone was a true Lombard of the best time. The very imperfection of his flesh-painting repeats in color what the greatest Lombard sculptors sought in stone—a sharpness of relief that passes over into angularity. This brusqueness was the counter-poise to tenderness of feeling and intensity of fancy in these Northern artists. Of all Borgognone's pictures in the Certosa, I should select the altar-piece of St. Siro with St. Lawrence and St. Stephen and two fathers of the Church, for its fusion of this master's qualities.

The Certosa is a wilderness of lovely workmanship. From Borgognone's majesty we pass into the quiet region of Luini's Christian grace, or mark the influence of Leonardo on that rare Assumption of Madonna by his pupil, Andrea Solari. Like everything touched by the Leonardesque spirit, this great picture was left unfinished; yet Northern Italy has nothing finer to show than the landscape, outspread in its immeasurable purity of calm, behind the grouped Apostles and the ascendent Mother of Heaven. The feeling of that happy region between the Alps and Lombardy, where there are many waters—*et tacitos sine labe lacus sine murmure rivos*—and where the last spurs of the mountains sink in undulations to the plain, has passed into this azure [Pg 300] vista, just as all Umbria is suggested in a twilight background of young Raphael or Perugino.

The portraits of the dukes of Milan and their families carry us into a very different realm of feeling. Medallions above the doors of sacristy and chancel, stately figures reared aloft beneath gigantic canopies, men and women slumbering with folded hands upon their marble biers—we read in all those sculptured forms a strange record of human restlessness resolved into the quiet of the tomb. The iniquities of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, *il gran Biscione*; the blood-thirst of Gian Maria; the dark designs of Filippo and his secret vices; Francesco Sforza's treason; Galeazzo

Maria's vanities and lusts; their tyrants' dread of thunder and the knife; their awful deaths by pestilence and the assassin's poniard; their selfishness, oppression, cruelty, and fraud; the murders of their kinsmen; their labyrinthine plots and acts of broken faith—all is tranquil now, and we can say to each what Bosola found for the Duchess of Malfi ere her execution:

> Much you had of land and rent;
> Your length in clay's now competent:
> A long war disturbed your mind;
> Here your perfect peace is signed!

Some of these faces are commonplace, with *bourgeois* cunning written on the heavy features; one is bluff, another stolid, a third bloated, a fourth stately. The sculptors have dealt fairly with all, and not one has the lineaments of utter baseness. To Cristoforo Solari's statues of Lodovico Sforza and his wife, Beatrice d'Este, the palm of excellence in art and of historical interest must [Pg 301] be awarded. Sculpture has rarely been more dignified and true to life than here. The woman with her short clustering curls, the man with his strong face, are resting after that long fever which brought woe to Italy, to Europe a new age, and to the boasted minion of fortune a slow death in the prison palace of Loches. Attired in ducal robes, they lie in state; and the sculptor has carved the lashes on their eyelids heavy with death's marmoreal sleep. He, at least, has passed no judgment on their crimes. Let us, too, bow and leave their memories to the historian's pen, their spirits to God's mercy.

After all wanderings in this temple of art, we return to Antonio Amadeo, to his long-haired seraphs playing on the lutes of Paradise, to his angels of the Passion with their fluttering robes and arms outspread in agony, to his saints and satyrs mingled on pilasters of the marble doorways, his delicate *Lavabo* decorations, and his hymns of piety expressed in noble forms of weeping women and dead Christs. Wherever we may pass, this master-spirit of the Lombard style enthralls attention. His curious treatment of drapery, as though it were made of crumpled paper, and his trick of enhancing relief by sharp angles and attenuated limbs, do not detract from his peculiar charm. That is his way, very different from Donatello's, of attaining to the maximum of life and lightness in the stubborn vehicle of stone. Nor do all the riches of the choir—those multitudes of singing angels, those Ascensions and Assumptions, and innumerable bass-reliefs of gleaming marble moulded into softest wax by mastery of art—distract our eyes from the single round medallion, not larger than a common plate, inscribed by him upon the front of the high- [Pg 302] altar. Perhaps, if one who loved Amadeo were bidden to point out his masterpiece, he would lead the way at once to this. The space is small; yet it includes the whole tragedy of the Passion. Christ is lying dead among the women on his mother's lap, and there are pitying angels in the air above. One woman lifts his arm, another makes her breast a pillow for his head. Their agony is hushed, but felt in every limb and feature; and the extremity of suffering is seen in each articulation of the worn and wounded form just taken from the cross. It would be too painful, were not the harmony of art so rare, the interlacing of those many figures in a simple round so exquisite. The noblest tranquillity and the most passionate emotion are here fused in a manner of adorable naturalness.

From the church it is delightful to escape into the cloisters, flooded with sunlight, where the swallows skim and the brown hawks circle and the mason-bees are at work upon their cells among the carvings. The arcades of the two cloisters are the final triumph of Lombard terra-cotta. The memory fails before such infinite invention, such facility and felicity of execution. Wreaths of cupids gliding round the arches among grape-bunches and bird-haunted foliage of vine; rows of angels, like rising and setting planets, some smiling and some grave, ascending and descending by the Gothic curves; saints stationary on their pedestals and faces leaning from the rounds above; crowds of cherubs and courses of stars and acanthus-leaves in woven lines and ribbons incessantly inscribed with Ave Maria! Then, over all, the rich red light and purple [Pg 303] shadows of the brick, than which no substance sympathizes more completely with the sky of solid blue above, the broad plain space of waving summer grass beneath our feet.

It is now late afternoon, and when evening comes the train will take us back to Milan. There is yet a little while to rest tired eyes and strained spirits among the willows and the poplars by the monastery wall. Through that gray-green leafage, young with early spring, the pinnacles of the Certosa leap like flames into the sky. The rice-fields are under water, far and wide, shining like burnished gold beneath the level light now near to sun-down. Frogs are croaking; those persistent frogs whom the muses have ordained to sing for aye, in spite of Bion and all tuneful poets dead. We sit and watch the water-snakes, the busy rats, the hundred creatures swarming in the fat, well-watered soil. Nightingales here and there, new-comers, tune their timid April song. But, strangest of all sounds in such a place, my comrade from the Grisons jodels forth an Alpine cowherd's melody—*Auf den Alpen droben ist ein herrliches Leben!*

Did the echoes of Gian Galeazzo's convent ever wake to such a tune as this before?

San Maurizio.

The student of art in Italy, after mastering the characters of different styles and epochs, finds a final satisfaction in the contemplation of buildings designed and decorated by one master, or by groups of artists interpreting the spirit of a single period. Such supreme monuments of the [Pg 304] national genius are not very common, and they are therefore the more precious. Giotto's chapel at Padua; the Villa Farnesina at Rome, built by Peruzzi and painted in fresco by Raphael and

Sodoma; the Palazzo del Te at Mantua, Giulio Romano's masterpiece; the Scuola di San Rocco, illustrating the Venetian Renaissance at its climax, might be cited among the most splendid of these achievements. In the church of the Monastero Maggiore at Milan, dedicated to San Maurizio, Lombard architecture and fresco-painting may be studied in this rare combination. The monastery itself, one of the oldest in Milan, formed a retreat for cloistered virgins following the rule of St. Benedict. It may have been founded as early as the tenth century; but its church was rebuilt in the first two decades of the sixteenth, between 1503 and 1519, and was immediately afterwards decorated with frescos by Luini and his pupils. Gian Giacomo Dolcebono, architect and sculptor, called by his fellow-craftsmen *magistro di taliare pietre*, gave the design, at once simple and harmonious, which was carried out with hardly any deviation from his plan. The church is a long parallelogram, divided into two unequal portions, the first and smaller for the public, the second for the nuns. The walls are pierced with rounded and pilastered windows, ten on each side, four of which belong to the outer and six to the inner section. The dividing wall or septum rises to the point from which the groinings of the roof spring; and round three sides of the whole building, north, east, and south, runs a gallery for the use of the convent. The altars of the inner and outer church are placed against the septum, back to back, with certain differences [Pg 305] of structure that need not be described. Simple and severe, San Maurizio owes its architectural beauty wholly and entirely to purity of line and perfection of proportion. There is a prevailing spirit of repose, a sense of space, fair, lightsome, and adapted to serene moods of the meditative fancy in this building which is singularly at variance with the religious mysticism and imaginative grandeur of a Gothic edifice. The principal beauty of the church, however, is its tone of color. Every square inch is covered with fresco or rich wood-work mellowed by time into that harmony of tints which blends the work of greater and lesser artists in one golden hue of brown. Round the arcades of the convent-loggia run delicate arabesques with faces of fair female saints—Catherine, Agnes, Lucy, Agatha—gem-like or star-like, gazing from their gallery upon the church below. The Luinesque smile is on their lips and in their eyes, quiet, refined, as though the emblems of their martyrdom brought back no thought of pain to break the Paradise of rest in which they dwell. There are twenty-six in all—a sisterhood of stainless souls, the lilies of Love's garden planted round Christ's throne. Soldier saints are mingled with them in still smaller rounds above the windows, chosen to illustrate the virtues of an order which renounced the world. To decide whose hand produced these masterpieces of Lombard suavity and grace, or whether more than one, would not be easy. Near the altar we can perhaps trace the style of Bartolommeo Suardi in an Annunciation painted on the spandrils—that heroic style, large and noble, known to us by the chivalrous St. Martin and the glorified Madonna of the Brera frescos. It is not impossible that the male saints of the loggia may be also his, though a tenderer touch, a [Pg 306] something more nearly Leonardesque in its quietude, must be discerned in Lucy and her sisters. The whole of the altar in this inner church belongs to Luini. Were it not for darkness and decay, we should pronounce this series of the Passion in nine great compositions, with saints and martyrs and torch-bearing genii, to be one of his most ambitious and successful efforts. As it is, we can but judge in part; the adolescent beauty of Sebastian, the grave compassion of St. Rocco, the classical perfection of the cupid with lighted tapers, the gracious majesty of women smiling on us sideways from their Lombard eyelids—these remain to haunt our memory, emerging from the shadows of the vault above.

The inner church, as is fitting, excludes all worldly elements. We are in the presence of Christ's agony, relieved and tempered by the sunlight of those beauteous female faces. All is solemn here, still as the convent, pure as the meditations of a novice. We pass the septum, and find ourselves in the outer church appropriated to the laity. Above the high-altar the whole wall is covered with Luini's loveliest work, in excellent light and far from ill preserved. The space divides into eight compartments. A Pietà, an Assumption, Saints and Founders of the church, group themselves under the influence of Luini's harmonizing color into one symphonious whole. But the places of distinction are reserved for two great benefactors of the convent, Alessandro de' Bentivogli and his wife, Ippolita Sforza. When the Bentivogli were expelled from Bologna by the papal forces, Alessandro settled at Milan, where he dwelt, honored by the Sforzas and allied to them by [Pg 307] marriage, till his death in 1532. He was buried in the monastery by the side of his sister Alessandra, a nun of the order. Luini has painted the illustrious exile in his habit as he lived. He is kneeling, as though in ever-during adoration of the altar mystery, attired in a long black senatorial robe trimmed with furs. In his left hand he holds a book; and above his pale, serenely noble face is a little black berretta. Saints attend him, as though attesting to his act of faith. Opposite kneels Ippolita, his wife, the brilliant queen of fashion, the witty leader of society, to whom Bandello dedicated his Novelle, and whom he praised as both incomparably beautiful and singularly learned. Her queenly form is clothed from head to foot in white brocade, slashed and trimmed with gold lace, and on her forehead is a golden circlet. She has the proud port of a princess, the beauty of a woman past her prime, but stately, the indescribable dignity of attitude which no one but Luini could have rendered so majestically sweet. In her hand is a book; and she, like Alessandro, has her saintly sponsors, Agnes and Catherine and St. Scolastica.

Few pictures bring the splendid Milanese court so vividly before us as these portraits of the Bentivogli: they are, moreover, very precious for the light they throw on what Luini could achieve in the secular style so rarely touched by him. Great, however, as are these frescos, they are far surpassed both in value and interest by his paintings in the side chapel of St. Catherine. Here more than anywhere else, more even than at Saronno or Lugano, do we feel the true distinction of Luini—his unrivalled excellence as a colourist, his power over pathos, the refinement of his feeling, and the peculiar beauty of his favorite types. The chapel was decorated at the expense of [Pg 308] a Milanese advocate, Francesco Besozzi, who died in 1529. It is he who is kneeling, gray-haired and bare-headed, under the protection of St. Catherine of Alexandria, intently gazing at Christ

unbound from the scourging-pillar. On the other side stand St. Lawrence and St. Stephen, pointing to the Christ and looking at us, as though their lips were framed to say: "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow." Even the soldiers who have done their cruel work seem softened. They untie the cords tenderly, and support the fainting form, too weak to stand alone. What sadness in the lovely faces of Sts. Catherine and Lawrence! What divine anguish in the loosened limbs and bending body of Christ; what piety in the adoring old man! All the moods proper to this supreme tragedy of the faith are touched as in some tenor song with low accompaniment of viols; for it was Luini's special province to feel profoundly and to express musically. The very depth of the Passion is there; and yet there is no discord.

Just in proportion to this unique faculty for yielding a melodious representation of the most intense moments of stationary emotion was his inability to deal with a dramatic subject. The first episode of St. Catherine's execution, when the wheel was broken and the executioners struck by lightning, is painted in this chapel without energy and with a lack of composition that betrays the master's indifference to his subject. Far different is the second episode when Catherine is about to be beheaded. The executioner has raised his sword to strike. She, robed in brocade of black [Pg 309] and gold, so cut as to display the curve of neck and back, while the bosom is covered, leans her head above her praying hands, and waits the blow in sweetest resignation. Two soldiers stand at some distance in a landscape of hill and meadow; and far up are seen the angels carrying her body to its tomb upon Mount Sinai. I cannot find words or summon courage to describe the beauty of this picture—its atmosphere of holy peace, the dignity of its composition, the golden richness of its coloring. The most tragic situation has here again been alchemized by Luini's magic into a pure idyl, without the loss of power, without the sacrifice of edification.

St. Catherine, in this incomparable fresco, is a portrait, the history of which so strikingly illustrates the relation of the arts to religion on the one hand, and to life on the other, in the age of the Renaissance, that it cannot be omitted. At the end of his fourth Novella, having related the life of the Contessa di Cellant, Bandello says: "And so the poor woman was beheaded; such was the end of her unbridled desires; and he who would fain see her painted to the life, let him go to the Church of the Monastero Maggiore, and there will he behold her portrait." The Contessa di Cellant was the only child of a rich usurer who lived at Casal Monferrato. Her mother was a Greek; and she was a girl of such exquisite beauty that, in spite of her low origin, she became the wife of the noble Ermes Visconti in her sixteenth year. He took her to live with him at Milan, where she frequented the house of the Bentivogli, but none other. Her husband told Bandello that he knew her temper better than to let her visit with the freedom of the Milanese ladies. Upon his death, while she was little more than twenty, she retired to Casale and led a gay life [Pg 310] among many lovers. One of these, the Count of Cellant in the Val d'Aosta, became her second husband, conquered by her extraordinary loveliness. They could not, however, agree together. She left him, and established herself at Pavia. Rich with her father's wealth and still of most seductive beauty, she now abandoned herself to a life of profligacy. Three among her lovers must be named: Ardizzino Valperga, Count of Masino; Roberto Sanseverino, of the princely Naples family; and Don Pietro di Cardona, a Sicilian. With each of the two first she quarrelled, and separately besought each to murder the other. They were friends, and frustrated her plans by communicating them to one another. The third loved her with the insane passion of a very young man. What she desired, he promised to do blindly; and she bade him murder his two predecessors in her favor. At this time she was living at Milan, where the Duke of Bourbon was acting as viceroy for the emperor. Don Pietro took twenty-five armed men of his household and waylaid the Count of Masino as he was returning, with his brother and eight or nine servants, late one night from supper. Both the brothers and the greater part of their suite were killed; but Don Pietro was caught. He revealed the atrocity of his mistress; and she was sent to prison. Incapable of proving her innocence, and prevented from escaping, in spite of fifteen thousand golden crowns with which she hoped to bribe her jailers, she was finally beheaded. Thus did a vulgar and infamous Messalina, distinguished only by rare beauty, furnish Luini with a St. Catherine for this masterpiece of pious art! The thing seems scarcely credible. Yet Bandello lived [Pg 311] in Milan while the Church of St. Maurizio was being painted; nor does he show the slightest sign of disgust at the discord between the Contessa's life and her artistic presentation in the person of a royal martyr.

A Humanist's Monument.

In the Sculpture Gallery of the Brera is preserved a fair white marble tomb, carved by that excellent Lombard sculptor Agostino Busti. The epitaph runs as follows:

> En Virtutem Mortis nesciam.
> Vivet Lancinus Curtius
> Sæcula per omnia
> Quascunque lustrans oras,
> Tantum possunt Camœnæ.

"Look here on Virtue that knows naught of Death! Lancinus Curtius shall live through all the centuries, and visit every shore on earth. Such power have the Muses." The time-worn poet reclines, as though sleeping or resting, ready to be waked; his head is covered with flowing hair, and crowned with laurel; it leans upon his left hand. On either side of his couch stand cupids or genii with torches turned to earth. Above is a group of the three Graces, flanked by winged

Pegasi. Higher up are throned two Victories with palms, and at the top a naked Fame. We need not ask who was Lancinus Curtius. He is forgotten, and his virtue has not saved him from oblivion; though he strove in his lifetime, *pro virili parte*, for the palm that Busti carved upon his [Pg 312] grave. Yet his monument teaches in short compass a deep lesson; and his epitaph sums up the dream which lured the men of Italy in the Renaissance to their doom. We see before us sculptured in this marble the ideal of the humanistic poet-scholar's life: Love, Grace, the Muse, and Nakedness, and Glory. There is not a single intrusive thought derived from Christianity. The end for which the man lived was pagan. His hope was earthly fame. Yet his name survives, if this indeed be a survival, not in those winged verses which were to carry him abroad across the earth, but in the marble of a cunning craftsman, scanned now and then by a wandering scholar's eye in the half-darkness of a vault.

The Monument of Gaston de Foix in the Brera.

The hero of Ravenna lies stretched upon his back in the hollow of a bier covered with laced drapery; and his head rests on richly ornamented cushions. These decorative accessories, together with the minute work of his scabbard, wrought in the fanciful mannerism of the *cinquecento*, serve to enhance the statuesque simplicity of the young soldier's effigy. The contrast between so much of richness in the merely subordinate details and this sublime severity of treatment in the person of the hero is truly and touchingly dramatic. There is a smile, as of content in death, upon his face; and the features are exceedingly beautiful—with the beauty of a boy, almost of a woman. The heavy hair cut straight above the forehead and straight over the [Pg 313] shoulders, falling in massive clusters. A delicately sculptured laurel-branch is woven into a victor's crown and laid lightly on the tresses it scarcely seems to clasp. So fragile is this wreath that it does not break the pure outline of the boy-conqueror's head. The armor is quite plain. So is the surcoat. Upon the swelling bust, that seems fit harbor for a hero's heart, there lies the collar of an order composed of cockle-shells; and this is all the ornament given to the figure. The hands are clasped across a sword laid flat upon the breast, and placed between the legs. Upon the chin is a little tuft of hair, parted, and curling either way; for the victor of Ravenna like the Hermes of Homer, was πρῶτον ὑπηνήτης, "a youth of princely blood, whose beard hath just begun to grow, for whom the season of bloom is in its prime of grace." The whole statue is the idealization of *virtù*—that quality so highly prized by the Italians and the ancients, so well fitted for commemoration in the arts. It is the apotheosis of human life resolved into undying memory because of one great deed. It is the supreme portrait in modern times of a young hero, chiselled by artists belonging to a race no longer heroic, but capable of comprehending and expressing the æsthetic charm of heroism. Standing before it, we may say of Gaston what Arrian wrote to Hadrian of Achilles: "That he was a hero, if hero ever lived, I cannot doubt; for his birth and blood were noble, and he was beautiful, and his spirit was mighty, and he passed in youth's prime away from men." Italian sculpture, under the condition of the *cinquecento*, had indeed no more congenial theme than this of bravery and beauty, youth and fame, immortal honor and untimely [Pg 314] death; nor could any sculptor of death have poetized the theme more thoroughly than Agostino Busti, whose simple instinct, unlike that of Michael Angelo, led him to subordinate his own imagination to the pathos of reality.

Saronno.

The Church of Saronno is a pretty building with a Bramantesque cupola, standing among meadows at some distance from the little town. It is the object of a special cult, which draws pilgrims from the neighboring country-side; but the concourse is not large enough to load the sanctuary with unnecessary wealth. Everything is very quiet in the holy place, and the offerings of the pious seem to have been only just enough to keep the building and its treasures of art in repair. The church consists of a nave, a central cupola, a vestibule leading to the choir, the choir itself, and a small tribune behind the choir. No other single building in North Italy can boast so much that is first-rate of the work of Luini and Gaudenzio Ferrari.

The cupola is raised on a sort of drum composed of twelve pieces, perforated with round windows and supported on four massive piers. On the level of the eye are frescos by Luini of St. Rocco, St. Sebastian, St. Christopher, and St. Anthony—by no means in his best style, and inferior to all his other paintings in this church. The Sebastian, for example, shows an effort to vary the traditional treatment of this saint. He is tied in a sprawling attitude to a tree; and little [Pg 315] of Luini's special pathos or sense of beauty—the melody of idyllic grace made spiritual—appears in him. These four saints are on the piers. Above are frescos from the early Bible history by Lanini, painted in continuation of Ferrari's medallions from the story of Adam expelled from Paradise, which fill the space beneath the cupola, leading the eye upward to Ferrari's masterpiece.

The dome itself is crowded with a host of angels singing and playing upon instruments of music. At each of the twelve angles of the drum stands a coryphæus of this celestial choir, full length, with waving drapery. Higher up, the golden-haired, broad-winged divine creatures are massed together, filling every square inch of the vault with color. Yet there is no confusion. The simplicity of the selected motive and the necessities of the place acted like a check on Ferrari, who, in spite of his dramatic impulse, could not tell a story coherently or fill a canvas with

harmonized variety. There is no trace of his violence here. Though the motion of music runs through the whole multitude like a breeze, though the joy expressed is a real *tripudio celeste*, not one of all these angels flings his arms abroad or makes a movement that disturbs the rhythm. We feel that they are keeping time and resting quietly, each in his appointed seat, as though the sphere was circling with them round the throne of God, who is their centre and their source of gladness. Unlike Correggio and his imitators, Ferrari has introduced no clouds, and has in no case made the legs of his angels prominent. It is a mass of noble faces and voluminously robed figures, emerging each above the other like flowers in a vase. Each too has specific character, [Pg 316] while all are robust and full of life, intent upon the service set them. Their instruments of music are all lutes and viols, flutes, cymbals, drums, fifes, citherns, organs, and harps that Ferrari's day could show. The scale of color, as usual with Ferrari, is a little heavy; nor are the tints satisfactorily harmonized. But the vigor and invention of the whole work would atone for minor defects of far greater consequence.

It is natural, beneath this dome, to turn aside and think one moment of Correggio at Parma. Before the *macchinisti* of the seventeenth century had vulgarized the motive, Correggio's bold attempt to paint heaven in flight from earth—earth left behind in the persons of the apostles standing round the empty tomb, heaven soaring upward with a spiral vortex into the abyss of light above—had an originality which set at naught all criticism. There is such ecstasy of jubilation, such rapturous rapidity of flight, that we who strain our eyes from below feel we are in the darkness of the grave which Mary left. A kind of controlling rhythm for the composition is gained by placing Gabriel, Madonna, and Christ at three points in the swirl of angels. Nevertheless, composition—the presiding, all-controlling intellect—is just what makes itself felt by absence; and Correggio's special qualities of light and color have now so far vanished from the cupola of the Duomo that the constructive poverty is not disguised. Here, if anywhere in painting, we may apply Goethe's words—*Gefühl ist Alles*.

If, then, we return to Ferrari's angels at Saronno, we find that the painter of Varallo chose a safer though a far more modest theme. Nor did he expose himself to that most cruel of all [Pg 317] degradations which the ethereal genius of Correggio has suffered from incompetent imitators. To daub a tawdry and superficial reproduction of these Parmese frescos, to fill the cupolas of Italy with veritable *guazzetti di rane*, was comparatively easy; and between our intelligence and what remains of that stupendous masterpiece of boldness crowd a thousand memories of such ineptitude. On the other hand, nothing but solid work and conscientious inspiration could enable any workman, however able, to follow Ferrari in the path struck out by him at Saronno. His cupola has had no imitator; and its only rival is the noble pendant painted at Varallo by his own hand, of angels in adoring anguish round the cross.

In the ante-choir of the sanctuary are Luini's priceless frescos of the "Marriage of the Virgin" and the "Dispute with the Doctors."[G] Their execution is flawless, and they are perfectly preserved. If criticism before such admirable examples of so excellent a master be permissible, it may be questioned whether the figures are not too crowded, whether the groups are sufficiently varied and connected by rhythmic lines. Yet the concords of yellow and orange with blue in the "Sposalizio," and the blendings of dull violet and red in the "Disputa," make up for much of stiffness. Here, as in the Chapel of St. Catherine at Milan, we feel that Luini was the greatest colourist among *frescanti*. In the "Sposalizio" the female heads are singularly noble and idyllically graceful. Some of the young men too have Luini's special grace and abundance of golden hair. In [Pg 318] the "Disputa" the gravity and dignity of old men are above all things striking.

Passing into the choir, we find on either hand the "Adoration of the Magi" and the "Purification of the Virgin," two of Luini's divinest frescos. Above them in lunettes are four Evangelists and four Latin Fathers, with four Sibyls. Time and neglect have done no damage here; and here, again, perforce we notice perfect mastery of color in fresco. The blues detach themselves too much, perhaps, from the rest of the coloring; and that is all a devil's advocate could say. It is possible that the absence of blue makes the St. Catherine frescos in the Monastero Maggiore at Milan surpass all other works of Luini. But nowhere else has he shown more beauty and variety in detail than here. The group of women led by Joseph, the shepherd carrying the lamb upon his shoulder, the girl with a basket of white doves, the child with an apple on the altar-steps, the lovely youth in the foreground heedless of the scene; all these are idyllic incidents treated with the purest, the serenest, the most spontaneous, the truest, most instinctive sense of beauty. The landscape includes a view of Saronno, and an episodical picture of the "Flight into Egypt," where a white-robed angel leads the way. All these lovely things are in the "Purification," which is dated *Bernardinus Lovinus pinxit*, MDXXV.

The fresco of the "Magi" is less notable in detail, and in general effect is more spoiled by obtrusive blues. There is, however, one young man of wholly Leonardesque loveliness, whose divine innocence of adolescence, unalloyed by serious thought, unstirred by passions, almost forces a comparison with Sodoma. The only painter who approaches Luini in what may be called [Pg 319] the Lombard, to distinguish it from the Venetian idyl, is Sodoma; and the work of his which comes nearest to Luini's masterpieces is the legend of St. Benedict, at Monte Oliveto, near Siena. Yet Sodoma had not all Luini's innocence or *naïveté*. If he added something slightly humorous which has an indefinite charm, he lacked that freshness, as of "cool, meek-blooded flowers" and boyish voices, which fascinates us in Luini. Sodoma was closer to the earth, and feared not to impregnate what he saw of beauty with the fiercer passions of his nature. If Luini had felt passion who shall say? It appears nowhere in his work, where life is toned to a religious joyousness. When Shelley compared the poetry of the Theocritean amourists to the perfume of the tuberose, and that of the earlier Greek poets to "a meadow-gale of June, which mingles the fragrance of all

the flowers of the field," he supplied us with critical images which may not unfairly be used to point the distinction between Sodoma at Monte Oliveto and Luini at Saronno.

The Castello of Ferrara.

Is it possible that the patron saints of cities should mould the temper of the people to their own likeness? St. George, the chivalrous, is champion of Ferrara. His is the marble group above the cathedral porch, so feudal in its mediæval pomp. He and St. Michael are painted in fresco over the south portcullis of the castle. His lustrous armor gleams with Giorgionesque brilliancy from Dossi's masterpiece in the Pinacoteca. That Ferrara, the only place in Italy where chivalry struck [Pg 320] any root, should have had St. George for patron, is at any rate significant.

The best-preserved relic of princely feudal life in Italy is this Castello of the Este family, with its sombre moat, chained draw-bridges, doleful dungeons, and unnumbered tragedies, each one of which may be compared with Parisina's history. I do not want to dwell on these things now. It is enough to remember the Castello, built of ruddiest brick, time-mellowed with how many centuries of sun and soft sea-air, as it appeared upon the close of one tempestuous day. Just before evening the rain-clouds parted and the sun flamed out across the misty Lombard plain. The Castello burned like a hero's funeral pyre, and round its high-built turrets swallows circled in the warm blue air. On the moat slept shadows, mixed with flowers of sunset, tossed from pinnacle and gable. Then the sky changed. A roof of thunder-cloud spread overhead with the rapidity of tempest. The dying sun gathered his last strength against it, fretting those steel-blue arches with crimson; and all the fierce light, thrown from vault to vault of cloud, was reflected back as from a shield, and cast in blots and patches on the buildings. The Castle towered up rosy-red and shadowy sombre, enshrined, embosomed in those purple clouds; and momently ran lightning-forks like rapiers through the growing mass. Everything around, meanwhile, was quiet in the grass-grown streets. The only sound was a high, clear boy's voice chanting an opera-tune.

[Pg 321]

Petrarch's Tomb at Arqua.

The drive from Este along the skirts of the Euganean Hills to Arqua takes one through a country which is tenderly beautiful, because of its contrast between little peaked mountains and the plain. It is not a grand landscape. It lacks all that makes the skirts of Alps and Apennines sublime. Its charm is a certain mystery and repose—an undefined sense of the neighboring Adriatic, a pervading consciousness of Venice unseen but felt from far away. From the terraces of Arqua the eye ranges across olive-trees, laurels, and pomegranates on the southern slopes to the misty level land that melts into the sea, with churches and tall campanili like gigantic galleys setting sail for fairyland over "the foam of perilous seas forlorn." Let a blue-black shadow from a thunder-cloud be cast upon this plain, and let one ray of sunlight strike a solitary bell-tower: it burns with palest flame of rose against the steely dark, and in its slender shaft and shell-like tint of pink all Venice is foreseen.

The village church of Arqua stands upon one of these terraces, with a full stream of clearest water flowing by. On the little square before the church-door, where the peasants congregate at mass-time—open to the skies with all their stars and storms, girdled by the hills, and within hearing of the vocal stream—is Petrarch's sepulchre. Fit resting-place for what remains to earth of such a poet's clay! It is as though archangels, flying, had carried the marble chest and set it down here on the hill-side, to be a sign and sanctuary for after-men. A simple rectilinear coffin, of [Pg 322] smooth Verona *mandorlato*, raised on four thick columns, and closed by a heavy cippus-cover. Without emblems, allegories, or lamenting genii, this tomb of the great poet, the great awakener of Europe from mental lethargy, encircled by the hills beneath the canopy of heaven, is impressive beyond the power of words. Bending here, we feel that Petrarch's own winged thoughts and fancies, eternal and aërial, "forms more real than living man, nurslings of immortality," have congregated to be the ever-ministering and irremovable attendants on the shrine of one who, while he lived, was purest spirit in a veil of flesh.

On a Mountain.

Milan is shining in sunset on those purple fields; and a score of cities flash back the last red light, which shows each inequality and undulation of Lombardy outspread four thousand feet beneath. Both ranges, Alps and Apennines, are clear to view; and all the silvery lakes are over-canopied and brought into one picture by flame-litten mists. Monte Rosa lifts her crown of peaks above a belt of clouds into light of living fire. The Mischabelhörner and the Dom rest stationary angel-wings upon the rampart, which at this moment is the wall of heaven. The pyramid of distant Monte Viso burns like solid amethyst far, far away. Mont Cervin beckons to his brother, the gigantic Finsteraarhorn, across tracts of liquid ether. Bells are rising from the villages, now wrapped in gloom, between me and the glimmering lake. A hush of evening silence falls upon the ridges, cliffs, and forests of this billowy hill, ascending into wave-like crests, and toppling with [Pg 323] awful chasms over the dark waters of Lugano. It is good to be alone here at this hour. Yet I must rise and go—passing through meadows where white lilies sleep in silvery drifts, and asphodel is pale with spires of faintest rose, and narcissus dreams of his own beauty, loading the air with

fragrance sweet as some love-music of Mozart. These fields want only the white figure of Persephone to make them poems; and in this twilight one might fancy that the queen had left her throne by Pluto's side to mourn for her dead youth among the flowers uplifted between earth and heaven. Nay, they are poems now, these fields; with that unchanging background of history, romance, and human life—the Lombard plain, against whose violet breadth the blossoms bend their faint heads to the evening air. Downward we hurry, on pathways where the beeches meet, by silent farms, by meadows honey-scented, deep in dew. The columbine stands tall and still on those green slopes of shadowy grass. The nightingale sings now, and now is hushed again. Streams murmur through the darkness, where the growth of trees, heavy with honeysuckle and wild rose, is thickest. Fireflies begin to flit above the growing corn. At last the plain is reached, and all the skies are tremulous with starlight. Alas, that we should vibrate so obscurely to these harmonies of earth and heaven! The inner finer sense of them seems somehow unattainable—that spiritual touch of soul evoking soul from nature, which should transfigure our dull mood of self into impersonal delight. Man needs to be a mytho-poet at some moments, or, better still, to be a mystic steeped through half-unconsciousness in the vast wonder of the world. Cold and [Pg 324] untouched to poetry or piety by scenes that ought to blend the spirit in ourselves with spirit in the world without, we can but wonder how this phantom show of mystery and beauty will pass away from us—how soon—and we be where, see what, use all our sensibilities on aught or naught?

Sic Genius.

In the picture-gallery at Modena there is a masterpiece of Dosso Dossi. The frame is old and richly carved; and the painting, bordered by its beautiful dull gold, shines with the lustre of an emerald. In his happy moods Dosso set color upon canvas as no other painter out of Venice ever did; and here he is at his happiest. The picture is the portrait of a jester, dressed in courtly clothes and with a feathered cap upon his head. He holds a lamb in his arms, and carries the legend, *Sic Genius*. Behind him is a landscape of exquisite brilliancy and depth. His face is young and handsome. Dosso has made it one most wonderful laugh. Even so perhaps laughed Yorick. Nowhere else have I seen a laugh thus painted: not violent, not loud, although the lips are opened to show teeth of dazzling whiteness; but fine and delicate, playing over the whole face like a ripple sent up from the depths of the soul within? Who was he? What does the lamb mean? How should the legend be interpreted? We cannot answer these questions. He may have been the court-fool of Ferrara; and his genius, the spiritual essence of the man, may have inclined him to laugh at all things. That at least is the value he now has for us. He is the portrait of perpetual [Pg 325] irony, the spirit of the golden sixteenth century which delicately laughed at the whole world of thoughts and things, the quintessence of the poetry of Ariosto, the wit of Berni, all condensed into one incarnation and immortalized by truthfullest art. With the Gaul, the Spaniard, and the German at her gates, and in her cities, and encamped upon her fields, Italy still laughed; and when the voice of conscience sounding through Savonarola asked her why, she only smiled—*Sic Genius*.

One evening in May we rowed from Venice to Torcello, and at sunset broke bread and drank wine together among the rank grasses just outside that ancient church. It was pleasant to sit in the so-called chair of Attila and feel the placid stillness of the place. Then there came lounging by a sturdy young fellow in brown country clothes, with a marvellous old wide-awake upon his head, and across his shoulders a bunch of massive church-keys. In strange contrast to his uncouth garb he flirted a pink Japanese fan, gracefully disposing it to cool his sun-burned olive cheeks. This made us look at him. He was not ugly. Nay, there was something of attractive in his face—the smooth-curved chin, the shrewd yet sleepy eyes, and finely-cut thin lips—a curious mixture of audacity and meekness blended upon his features. Yet this impression was but the prelude to his smile. When that first dawned, some breath of humor seeming to stir in him unbidden, the true meaning was given to his face. Each feature helped to make a smile that was the very soul's life of the man expressed. It broadened, showing brilliant teeth, and grew into a noiseless laugh; and then I saw before me Dosso's jester, the type of Shakespeare's fools, the life of that wild irony, [Pg 326] now rude, now fine, which once delighted courts. The laughter of the whole world and of all the centuries was silent in his face. What he said need not be repeated. The charm was less in his words than in his personality; for Momus-philosophy lay deep in every look and gesture of the man. The place lent itself to irony; parties of Americans and English parsons, the former agape for any rubbishy old things, the latter learned in the lore of obsolete church-furniture, had thronged Torcello; and now they were all gone, and the sun had set behind the Alps, while an irreverent stranger drank his wine in Attila's chair, and nature's jester smiled—*Sic Genius*.

When I slept that night I dreamed of an altar-piece in the Temple of Folly. The goddess sat enthroned beneath a canopy hung with bells and corals. On her lap was a beautiful winged smiling genius, who flourished two bright torches. On her left hand stood the man of Modena with his white lamb, a new St. John. On her right stood the man of Torcello with his keys, a new St. Peter. Both were laughing after their all-absorbent, divine, noiseless fashion; and under both was written, *Sic Genius*. Are not all things, even profanity, permissible in dreams?

FOOTNOTES:

[E] The down upon their cheeks and chin was yellower than helichrysus, and their breasts gleamed whiter far than thou, O Moon.

[F] Thy tresses have I oftentimes compared to Ceres' yellow autumn sheaves, wreathed in curled bands around thy head.

[G] Both these and the large frescos in the choir have been chromo-lithographed by the Arundel Society.

THE END.

Transcriber's Note

Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 15 loggie changed to logge
Page 18 Apennine changed to Apennines
Page 21 pleasaunce changed to pleasance
Page 27 obligato changed to obbligato
Page 29 dedicate changed to dedicated
Page 37 ome changed to some
Page 45 Heny changed to Henry
Page 47 Bernard changed to Bernardo
Page 69 led changed to del
Page 82 beretta changed to berretta
Page 91 intensily changed to intensely
Page 111 word "a" added
Page 128 Porsenna changed to Porsena
Page 147 loggie changed to logge
Page 149 Apeninnes changed to Apennines
Page 173 potect changed to protect
Page 173 Vernice changed to Venice
Page 178 aad changed to and
Page 180 ruining changed to running
Page 183 Bachus changed to Bacchus
Page 192 Signiory changed to Signory
Page 224 maccaroon changed to macaroon
Page 242 wagon changed to waggon
Page 273 piazetta changed to piazzetta
Page 298 sensibilty changed to sensibility
Page 304 colorist changed to colourist
Page 309 Monistero changed to Monastero
Page 317 colorist changed to colourist

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