

the money so lodged with me, but that it would be as much at their disposal as though kept in their cash-box at home, and very much safer.

It was to the interest of all concerned in my establishment to reduce the interest of money, otherwise we could not have used it to advantage. We were receiving only 8 per cent. for my stock; the lower, therefore, we brought all other interest, the more valuable was my stock.

Previous to my starting in life, the nation had been paying from 12 to 20 per cent. interest for money, which, if it had continued,

must have ruined the kingdom; and as, by the way I did my work, this would be no longer necessary or possible, those who had been, up to this time, making money in this fashion, were compelled to spend it on land or lend it at a moderate rate.

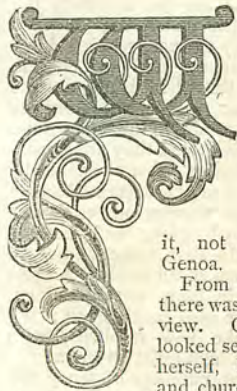
Others came in during the day to have their foreign bills of exchange discounted, which I did at the rate of 3 per cent. per annum, undertaking the inland bills and notes for debts at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per annum.

This was the kind of work which I performed in my early days, and upon which has been built up that wonderful fabric of money

transactions associated with my name in this the nineteenth century. I am afraid the very relation of my day's work two hundred years ago has wearied you; if so, forgive me. I felt it necessary to my character to show you that the work undertaken by me from the very first was good and honourable, conscientious and helpful, and that wherever my household did a good stroke of business for itself it was not at the expense of others' ruin; on the contrary, we could not help ourselves to riches without extending the benefit all round.

(To be continued.)

## CHRISTMAS IN ITALY.



WE were spending a winter on the Riviera, and, after trying various hotels in town and country, had finally established ourselves in a pretty little Italian villa, *palazzino*, as the peasants called it, not many miles from Genoa.

From the terraced garden there was a wide and splendid view. On our left, as we looked seawards, was the city herself, her marble palaces and churches rising crescent-wise behind the bay, which on the eastern side is bounded by the headland of Porto Fino. Facing us was the shining sweep of the Mediterranean; while to the right hand the Alps Maritimes trended away into the far distance, their giant peaks and hollows an ever-present, ever-changing feast of colour—whether seen at early dawn, a glory of rose and gold; or at sunset, a gorgeous vision of amber and crimson, and softest, tenderest violet; or under the southern moonlight, a study in oxydised silver.

For me mountains have always had a peculiar fascination, and no landscape ever seems complete without them. I could spend, and, indeed, did spend, when in Italy, many an hour in watching their changing hues. But to-day none of our party had time for indulging in mere sentiment. Throughout the week we had been rambling among the hills and valleys in quest of mosses, ferns, and other greenery wherewith to decorate the house; for this was Christmas week, and the day after to-morrow would be Christmas Day itself.

How difficult it was, even as we worked at the familiar mottoes and rejoiced over the holly, which, after a seemingly hopeless search, we had at last found in a remote corner of the Doria woods—how difficult it was, I say, to realise the fact that this was the 23rd of December. Why, the garden was full of roses, camellias, and heliotrope; the air was as soft as upon a summer's day in England; and we were out of doors in thin woollen dresses and large, shady hats, rejoicing in the brilliant sunshine.

We had to give up our pleasant work early that afternoon, as we had engaged to help at a children's party given by a kindly English doctor in the neighbouring village. He had hired a large room at the hotel, and invited about forty children to a sumptuous tea; and, though wintering abroad for health's sake, and with doubtless many an anxious thought for wife and little ones at home, he most unselfishly catered upon this evening for the amusement of "other folks' children."

The long table was covered with dainties

such as little folks love, while assiduous waiters handed round cups of delicious-looking coffee and chocolate.

Tea over, there was an adjournment to another room in which all kinds of merry romps were carried on for an hour or two, a general distribution of presents took place, a hearty cheer was raised for the kind doctor, and the young flock trooped gaily home.

Christmas Eve we spent in really hard work over our decorations. The dining-room was made festive with mottoes in pine sprays and trophies of orange-boughs laden with fruit, while the drawing-room was adorned with maidenhair fern, lycopodium moss, arbutus-berries, and the much-prized holly before mentioned. Then, about six p.m. we started to spend the evening with some charming neighbours.

The host was German, his wife English, and their two children spoke both languages with equal facility, adding thereto no mean proficiency in Italian. An Italian marquis and his younger brother, a married sister of our hostess, with her husband and little girl, a German composer, with our own quartet, made up the party. We were at once ushered into the room in which the Christmas tree had been placed; for the children, at least, were on the tiptoe of excitement as to their gifts; and thence, after due distribution thereof, we adjourned to the dining-room for high tea.

The table was a picture, with its bowls of crimson or pale-pink china roses. Each couvert had its own bouquet of heliotrope, fern, and camellia; while the profusion of handsome silver and of ancient Nuremberg glass combined still further to set off the tasteful appearance of the whole. What with the many German dishes, and the chatter of the German tongue all around me, I seemed to be transferred bodily from the shores of the Mediterranean to the dear and well-remembered Fatherland—an illusion which was not dispelled until an hour or so later on, when we found ourselves walking homewards under the brilliant, starlit sky of the south. On this particular night, too, the stars were shining with a radiancy which in England would be taken a hard frost; only that in this case the stars themselves looked so much larger, and in many instances shone with such intensity as to make themselves the centre of a distinct halo.

We met numbers of people on their way to midnight mass, either at the various shrines in the mountains or at favourite churches in Genoa, and at about eleven p.m. the bells began to ring, and went on at intervals for four hours, when they ceased for a time, to recommence at five a.m., and summon the worshippers to early mass.

I inaugurated Christmas in Italy by dressing with open windows, then joined the younger members of our party in carol-singing outside our hostess's bedroom door; after which we all descended to the dining-room—not, as it

would have been, in England, to spread out icy hands and feet to the welcome blaze of a roaring fire, but to open the long French windows and to stand awhile upon the balcony watching the lizards flitting swiftly in and out among the crevices of the marble, and the green frogs jumping about the boughs of the orange-trees.

Breakfast in Italy was never a heavy meal; but to-day, in honour of the day, polenta cake and chestnut bread were added to the usual omelette and roll, to which due attention having been paid, we returned to the balcony and eagerly awaited the postman.

He brought a goodly supply of letters for each of us, and with thankful hearts we set out for morning service.

The church was full of roses—red, white, and yellow. Arbutus and fern wreathed the east window and the chancel arch; and designs of roses upon a mossy ground filled in the panels of lectern and reading desk and the wide window-sills. There was, of course, a good attendance, and all joined with spirit in the service; but our clergyman rather dampened the conclusion of it by preaching a very long and exceedingly dolorous sermon, in which he harped upon "vacant chairs," absent friends," "broken circles," and "dear invalids," until he had reduced two-thirds of the congregation to tears.

Our dinner-party included a few English friends staying at the hotel, and one or two Italians, the latter being as much interested in our national customs as we were in theirs. It was certainly quaint enough to find that the Eastern Counties doggerel had its counterpart among the shepherds of Sardinia, with whom it is generally used as a cradle song.

"Lu letto meo est de battor canones,  
Et battor anghelos si bei ponem,  
Duos in pes, et duos in cabitta.  
Nostre Segnora a costazu m'istiu.  
Ea mie narat: Dormi e reposa,  
No hapas paura de mala cosa."

In Upper Italy they sing—

"Dormi, dormi, O bel Bambin,  
Rè divin.  
Dormi, dormi, O fantolin,  
Fà la nanna, O caro giglio,  
Rè de Ciel."

And a gentleman who joined us later on wound up our charming evening by singing to a strange old chant the following Burgundian carol, written, as my readers will perceive, in alternate lines of French and Latin:—

"Voici la Roi des Nations,  
Natus ex sacra Virgine:  
Ce fils de bénédiction;  
Ortus de David semine;  
Voici l'Etoile de Jacob,  
Quam prædixerat Balaam:  
Ce Dieu qui détruisit Jéricho,  
In clara terra Chanaam."