

ITALY REVISITED.

I WAITED in Paris until after the elections for the new Chamber (they took place on the 14th of October); for only after one had learned that the odious attempt of Marshal MacMahon and his ministers to drive the French nation to the polls like a flock of huddling sheep, each with the white ticket of an official candidate round his neck, had not achieved the success which the unscrupulous violence of the process might have indicated, — only then was it possible to draw a long breath and deprive the republican party of such support as might be derived from one's sympathetic presence. Seriously speaking, too, the weather had been enchanting, and there were Italian sensations to be encountered without leaving the banks of the Seine. Day after day the air was filled with golden light, and even those chalk-toned vistas of the Parisian *beaux quartiers* assumed the most tenderly iridescent and autumnal tints. Autumn weather in Europe is often such a very sorry affair that a fair-minded American will have it on his conscience to call attention to a rainless and radiant October.

The echoes of the electoral strife kept me company for a while after starting upon that abbreviated journey to Turin, which, as you leave Paris at night, in a train unprovided with encouragements to slumber, is a singular mixture of the odious and the charming. The charming, however, I think, prevails; for the dark half of the journey is, in fact, the least interesting. The morning light ushers you into the romantic gorges of the Jura, and after a big bowl of *café au lait* at Culoz you may compose yourself comfortably for the climax of your spectacle. The day before leaving Paris I met a friend who had just returned from a visit to a Tuscan country-seat, where he had been watching the vintage. "Italy," he said, "is more lovely than words can tell, and France, steeped

in this electoral turmoil, seems no better than a bear-garden." That part of the bear-garden through which you travel as you approach the Mont Cenis seemed to me that day very beautiful. The autumn coloring, thanks to the absence of rain, had been vivid and crisp, and the vines that swung their low garlands between the mulberries, in the neighborhood of Chambery, looked like long festoons of coral and amber. The frontier station of Modane, on the further side of the Mont Cenis tunnel, is a very ill-regulated place; but even the most irritable of tourists, meeting it on his way southward, will be disposed to consider it good-naturedly. There is far too much bustling and scrambling, and the facilities afforded you for the obligatory process of ripping open your luggage before the officers of the Italian custom-house are much scantier than should be; but, for myself, there is something that deprecates irritation in the shabby green and gray uniforms of all the Italian officials who stand loafing about and watching the northern invaders scramble back into marching order. Wearing an administration uniform does not necessarily spoil a man's temper, as in France one is sometimes led to believe; for these excellent, underpaid Italians carry theirs as lightly as possible, and their answers to your inquiries do not in the least bristle with rapiers, buttons, and cockades. After leaving Modane you slide straight downhill into the Italy of your desire; and there is something very picturesque in the way the road edges along those great precipices which stand shoulder to shoulder, in a long perpendicular file, until they finally admit you to a distant glimpse of the ancient capital of Piedmont.

Turin is not a city to make, in vulgar parlance, a fuss about, and I pay an extravagant tribute to subjective emotion in speaking of it as ancient. But if the place is not as Italian as Florence and

Rome, at least it is more Italian than New York and Paris; and while the traveler walks about the great arcades and looks at the fourth-rate shop windows, he does not scruple to cultivate a shameless optimism. Relatively speaking, Turin is picturesque; but there is, after all, no reason in a large collection of shabbily-stuccoed houses, disposed in a rigidly rectangular manner, for passing a day of deep, still gaiety. The only reason, I am afraid, is the old superstition of Italy, — that property in the very look of the written word, the evocation of a myriad suggestions, that makes any lover of the arts take Italian satisfaction upon easier terms than any other. Italy is an idea to conjure with, and we play tricks upon our credulity even with such inferior apparatus as is offered to our hand at Turin. I walked about all the morning under the immense arcades, thinking it sufficient entertainment to take note of the soft, warm air, of that coloring of things in Italy that is at once broken and harmonious, and of the comings and goings, the physiognomy and manners, of the excellent Turinese. I had opened the old book again; the old charm was in the style; I was in a more charming world. I saw nothing surpassingly beautiful or curious; but the appreciative traveler finds a vividness in nameless details. And I must add that on the threshold of Italy he tastes of one solid and perfectly definable pleasure in finding himself among the traditions of the grand style in architecture. It must be said that we have still to come to Italy to see great houses. (I am speaking more particularly of town architecture.) In northern cities there are beautiful houses, picturesque and curious houses; sculptured gables which hang over the street, charming bow-windows, hooded door-ways, elegant proportions, and a profusion of delicate ornament; but a good specimen of an old Italian *palazzo* has a nobleness that is all its own. We laugh at Italian "palaces," at their peeling stucco, their nudity, their shabbiness and duskiness; but they have the great palatial quality, — elevation and

extent. They make smaller houses seem beggarly; they round their great arches and interspace their huge windows with thorough aristocratic indifference to the master-builder's little account. These grand proportions — the colossal base-ments, the door-ways that seem meant for cathedrals, the far-away cornices — impart by contrast an humble and *bourgeois* expression to those less exalted dwellings in which the air of grandeur depends largely upon the help of the upholsterer. At Turin my first feeling was really one of shame for the architectural manners of our northern lands. I have heard people who know the Italians well say that at bottom they despise all the rest of mankind and regard them as barbarians. I strongly doubt it, for the Italians strike me as having less national vanity than any other people in Europe; but if the charge had its truth there would be some ground for the feeling in the fact of their living in such big houses. The most direct, sensible, and — superficially considered — reasonable measure of one's greatness is the size of one's house; and, judged by this standard, Turinese and Genoese, Florentines and Romans leave us all very far behind.

An impression which, on coming back to Italy, I find even stronger than when it was first received is that of the contrast between the fecundity of the great artistic period and the vulgarity of the Italian genius of to-day. The first few hours spent on Italian soil are sufficient to renew it, and the phenomenon that I allude to is surely one of the most singular in human history. That the people who but three hundred years ago had the best taste in the world should now have the worst; that having produced the noblest, loveliest, and costliest works they should now be given up to the manufacture of objects at once ugly and flimsy; that the race of which Michael Angelo and Raphael, Leonardo and Titian were characteristic exemplars should have no other title to distinction than third-rate *genre* pictures and catchpen-ny statues, — all this is a frequent perplexity to the observer of actual Ital-

ian life. The flower of art in these latter years has ceased to bloom very powerfully anywhere; but nowhere does it seem so drooping and withered as in the shadow of the still solid monuments of the old Italian genius. You go to a church or a gallery and feast your fancy upon a splendid picture or an exquisite piece of sculpture, and on issuing from the door that has admitted you to the beautiful past you are confronted with something that has all the effect of a mockery or a defiance of it. The aspect of your lodging (the carpets, the curtains, the upholstery in general, with their crude and violent coloring and their vulgar material), the third-rate look of the shops as you pass them, the extreme bad taste of the dress of the women, the cheapness and baseness of every attempt at decoration in the cafés and railway stations, the hopeless fickleness of everything that pretends to be a work of art, — all this modern infelicity runs riot over the relics of the great period.

We can do a thing for the first time but once; it is but once for all that we can have a pleasure in its freshness. This is a law which is not on the whole, I think, to be regretted, for we sometimes learn to know things better by not enjoying them too much. It is certain, however, at the same time, that a traveler who has merely worked off the primal fermentation of his relish for this inexhaustibly interesting country has by no means entirely drained the cup. After thinking of Italy as simply picturesque, it will do him no great harm to think of her, for a while, as modern, — an idea supposed (as a general thing correctly) to be fatally at variance with the Byronic, the Ruskinian, the artistic, poetic, æsthetic manner of looking at this godsend to literature and art. He may grant — I don't say it is absolutely necessary — that modern Italy is ugly, prosaic, provokingly indisposed to inspire one to water-color sketching or a superior style of album dissertation; it is nevertheless true that at the pass things have come to, modern Italy in a manner imposes herself. I had not been many hours in the country before I became

conscious of this circumstance; and I may add that, the first irritation past, I found myself disposed to take it easily. And if we think of it, nothing is more easy to understand than a certain displeasure on the part of the young Italy of to-day at being looked at by all the world as a kind of soluble pigment. Young Italy, preoccupied with its economical and political future, must be heartily tired of being accounted picturesque. In one of Thackeray's novels there is mention of a young artist who sent to the Royal Academy a picture representing "A Contadino dancing with a Trasteverina at the door of a Locanda, to the music of a Pifferaro." It is in this attitude and with these conventional accessories that the world has hitherto seen fit to represent young Italy, and I do not wonder that, if the youth has any spirit, he should at last begin to resent our insufferable æsthetic patronage. He has established a line of horse-cars in Rome, from the Porta del Popolo to the Ponte Molle, and it is on one of these democratic vehicles that I seem to see him taking his triumphant course down the vista of the future. I will not pretend to rejoice with him any more than I really do; I will not pretend, as the sentimental tourists say about it all, as if it were the setting of an intaglio or the border of a Roman scarf, to "like" it. Like it or not, as we may, it is evidently destined to be; I see a new Italy in the future which in many important respects will equal, if not surpass, the most enterprising sections of our native land. Perhaps by that time Chicago and San Francisco will have become picturesque, and their sons and daughters will dance at the doors of *locandas*. However this may be, a vivid impression of an accomplished schism between the old Italy and the new is, as the French say, *le plus clair* of a new visit to this ever-suggestive part of the world. The old Italy has become more and more of a simple museum, preserved and perpetuated in the midst of the new, but without any further relation to it — it must be admitted, indeed, that such a relation is considerable — than that of the stock

on his shelves to the shop-keeper, or of the Siren of the South to the showman who stands before his booth. More than once, as we move about, nowadays, in the Italian cities, there seems to pass before our eyes a vision of the coming years. It represents to our satisfaction an Italy united and prosperous, but altogether commercial. The Italy, indeed, that we sentimentalize and romance about was an ardently mercantile country; though I suppose it loved not its ledgers less, but its frescoes and altar-pieces more. Scattered through this brilliantly economical community — this country of a thousand ports — I see a large number of beautiful buildings, in which an endless series of dusky pictures are darkening, darkening, fading, fading, through the years. At the doors of the beautiful buildings are little turnstiles, at which there sit a great many men in uniform, to whom the visitor pays a ten-penny fee. Inside, in the vaulted and frescoed chambers, the art of Italy lies buried as in a thousand mausoleums. It is well taken care of; it is constantly copied; sometimes it is "restored," — as in the case of that beautiful boy-figure of Andrea del Sarto, at Florence, which may be seen at the gallery of the Uffizi, with its honorable duskiness quite peeled off, and Heaven knows what raw, bleeding cuticle laid bare. One evening lately, in Florence, in the soft twilight, I took a stroll among those encircling hills on which the massive villas are mingled with the vaporous olives. Presently I came, where three roads met, upon a way-side shrine, in which, before some pious daub of an old-time Madonna, a little votive lamp glimmered through the evening air. The hour, the lovely evening, the place, the twinkling taper, the sentiment of the observer, the thought that some one had been rescued here from an assassin, or from some other peril, and had set up a little grateful altar, in consequence, in the yellow-stuccoed wall of a tangled *podere*, — all this led me to approach the shrine with a reverent, an emotional step. I drew near it, but after a few steps I paused. I became conscious of an incongruous

odor; it seemed to me that the evening air was charged with a perfume which, although to a certain extent familiar, had not hitherto associated itself with rustic frescoes and way-side altars. I gently interrogated the atmosphere, and the operation left me no doubts. The odor was that of petroleum; the votive taper was nourished with "ile"! I confess that I burst out laughing, and a picturesque *contadino*, wending his homeward way in the dusk, stared at me as if I were a frolicsome ghost escaped from one of the old villas near by. If he noticed the petroleum, it was only, I imagine, to sniff it gratefully; but to me the thing served as a symbol of the Italy of the future. There is a horse-car from the Porta del Popolo to the Ponte Molle, and the Tuscan shrines are fed with the Pennsylvanian fluid!

If it is very well to come to Turin first; it is still better to go to Genoa afterwards. Genoa is the queerest place in the world, and even a second visit gives little help toward a lucid understanding of it. In the wonderful crooked, twisting, climbing, soaring, burrowing Genoese alleys the traveler is really up to his neck in the old Italian picturesqueness. Genoa is, I believe, a port of great capacity, and the bequest of the late Duke of Galliera, who left four millions of dollars for the purpose of improving and enlarging it, will doubtless do much toward converting it into one of the great commercial stations of Europe. But as, after leaving my hotel, the afternoon I arrived, I wandered for a long time at hazard through the tortuous by-ways of the city I said to myself, not without an accent of private triumph, that here was something it would be as difficult to modernize as it was to cleanse the Augean stables. I had found my hotel, in the first place, extremely entertaining — the Croce di Malta, as it was called, established in a gigantic palace on the edge of the swarming and not over-clean harbor. It was the biggest house I had ever entered, and the simple basement would have contained a dozen American caravansaries. I met an American gentleman in the vestibule who (as he

had indeed a perfect right to be) was annoyed by its troublesome proportions — one was a quarter of an hour ascending out of the basement — and desired to know whether it was a “correct sample” of the Genoese inns. It appeared to be an excellent specimen of Genoese architecture generally; so far as I observed, there were few houses perceptibly smaller than this Titanic tavern. I lunched in a great, dusky ball-room, whose ceiling was vaulted, frescoed, and gilded with the inexpensive skill of a couple of centuries since, and which looked out upon another ancient house-front, equally huge and equally battered, from which it was separated only by a little wedge of dusky space (one of the principal streets, I believe, of Genoa), out of the bottom of which the Genoese populace sent up to the windows — I had to crane out very far to see it — a perpetual clattering, shuffling, chaffering sound. Issuing forth, presently, into this characteristic thoroughfare, I found an abundance of that soft local color, for the love of which one revisits Italy. It offered itself, indeed, in a variety of tints, some of which were not remarkable for their freshness or purity. But their combined effect was highly pictorial, and the picture was a very rich and various representation of southern low life. Genoa is the crookedest and most incoherent of cities; tossed about on the sides and crests of a dozen hills, it is seamed with gullies and ravines that bristle with those innumerable palaces for which we have heard from our earliest years that the place is celebrated. These great edifices, with their mottled and faded complexions, lift their big ornamental cornices to a tremendous height in the air, where, in a certain indescribably forlorn and desolate fashion, overtopping each other, they seem to reflect the twinkle and glitter of the warm Mediterranean. Down about the basements, in the little dim, close alleys, the people are forever moving to and fro, or standing in their cavernous door-ways or in their little dusky, crowded shops, calling, chattering, laughing, scrambling, living their lives in the conversational

Italian fashion. For a long time I had not received such an impression of the possible crowdedness, density, and, as it were, cheapness of human life. I had not for a long time seen people elbowing each other so closely, or swarming so thickly out of immense human hives. A traveler is very often prompted to ask himself whether it has been worth while to leave his home — whatever his home may have been — only to see new forms of human suffering, only to be reminded that toil and privation, hunger and sorrow and sordid effort, are the portion of the great majority of his fellow-men. To travel is, as it were, to go to the play, to attend a spectacle; and there is something heartless in stepping forth into the streets of a foreign town to feast upon novelty when the novelty consists simply of the slightly different costume in which hunger and labor present themselves. These reflections were forced upon me as I strolled about in those crepuscular, queer-smelling alleys of Genoa; but after a time they ceased to bear me company. The reason of this, I think, is because (at least to foreign eyes) the sum of Italian misery is, on the whole, less than the sum of Italian serenity. That people should thank you, with a smile of striking sweetness, for the gift of two-pence is a proof, certainly, of an extreme and constant destitution; but (keeping in mind the sweetness) it is also a proof of an enviable ability not to be depressed by circumstances. I know that this may possibly be great nonsense; that half the time that we are admiring the brightness of the Italian smile the romantic natives may be, in reality, in a sullen frenzy of impatience and pain. Our observation in any foreign land is extremely superficial, and our remarks are happily not addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who, at a hundred points, would certainly exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture. The other day I visited a very picturesque old city upon a mountain top, where, in the course of my wanderings, I arrived at an old disused gate in the ancient town wall. The gate had not been absolutely forfeited; but the recent com-

pletion of a modern road down the mountain led most vehicles away to another egress. The grass-grown pavement, which wound into the plain by a hundred graceful twists and plunges, was now given up to ragged contadini and their donkeys, and to such wayfarers as were not alarmed at the disrepair into which it had fallen. I stood in the shadow of the tall old gate-way, admiring the scene, — looking to right and left at the wonderful walls of the little town, perched on the edge of a shaggy precipice; at the circling mountains over against them; at the road dipping downward among the chestnuts and olives. There was no one within sight but a young man, who was slowly trudging upward, with his coat slung over his shoulder and his hat upon his ear, like a cavalier in an opera. Like an operatic performer, too, he was singing as he came; the spectacle, generally, was operatic, and as his vocal flourishes reached my ear I said to myself that in Italy accident was always picturesque, and that such a figure had been exactly what was wanted to set off the landscape. It suggested a large measure of that serenity for which I just now commended the Italians. I was turning back, under the old gate-way, into the town, when the young man overtook me, and, suspending his song, asked me if I could favor him with a match to light the hoarded remnant of a cigar. This request led, as I walked back to the inn, to my having some conversation with him. He was a native of the old hill-town, and answered freely all my inquiries as to its manners and customs and the state of public opinion there. But the point of my anecdote is that he presently proved to be a brooding young radical and communist, filled with hatred of the present Italian government, raging with discontent and crude political passion, professing a ridiculous hope that Italy would soon have, as France had had, her " '89," and declaring that he, for his part, would willingly lend a hand to chop off the heads of the king and the royal family. He was an unhappy, underfed, unemployed young man, who took a hard, grim view of everything, and was pict-

uresque only quite in spite of himself. This made it very absurd of me to have looked at him simply as a graceful ornament to the prospect, — a harmonious little figure in the middle distance. "Damn the prospect — damn the middle distance!" would have been all *his* philosophy. Yet, but for the accident of my having a little talk with him, I should have made him do service, in memory, as an example of sensuous optimism!

I am bound to say, however, that I believe that a great deal of the apparent sensuous optimism that I noticed in the Genoese alleys and beneath the low, crowded arcades along the port was quite substantial. Here every one was magnificently sunburnt, and there were plenty of those queer types — those mahogany-colored, bare-chested mariners, with ear-rings and crimson girdles — that make a southern sea-port entertaining. But it is not fair to speak as if, at Genoa, there were nothing but low life to be seen, for the place is the residence of some of the grandest people in the world. Nor are all the palaces ranged along dusky alleys; the handsomest and most impressive form a splendid series on each side of a couple of very proper streets, in which there is plenty of room for a coach and four to approach the big door-ways. Many of these door-ways are open, revealing great marble staircases, with couchant lions for balustrades, and ceremonious courts surrounded by walls of sun-softened yellow. One of the palaces is colored a goodly red, and contains, in particular, the grand people I just now spoke of. They live in the third story; but here they have suites of wonderful painted and gilded chambers, in which there are many foreshortened frescoes in the vaulted ceilings, and on the walls many of those halting arabesques in which the rococo taste of the last and the preceding century took pleasure. Those great residents I allude to bear the name of Vandyke, though they are members of the noble family of Brignole-Sale, one of whose children (the Duchess of Galliero) has lately given proof of nobleness in presenting the Gal-

lery of the Red Palace, out of hand, to the city of Genoa.

On leaving Genoa I repaired to Spezia, chiefly with a view of accomplishing a sentimental pilgrimage, which I in fact achieved, in the most agreeable conditions. The Gulf of Spezia is now the head-quarters of the Italian fleet, and there were several big iron-plated frigates riding at anchor in front of the town. The streets were filled with lads in blue flannel, who were receiving instruction at a school-ship in the harbor, and in the evening—there was a brilliant moon—the little breakwater which stretched out into the Mediterranean offered a promenade to the naval functionaries. But this fact is, from the picturesque point of view, of little account, for since it has become prosperous Spezia has grown ugly. The place is filled with long, dull stretches of dead wall and great, raw expanses of artificial land. It wears that look of monstrous, of more than Occidental, newness which distinguishes all the creations of the young Italian state. Nor did I find any great compensation in an immense new inn, which has lately been deposited by the edge of the sea, in anticipation of a *passaggiata* which is to come that way some five years hence, the region being in the mean time of the most primitive formation. The inn was filled with grave English people, who looked respectable and bored, and there was of course a Church of England service in the gaudily-frescoed parlor. Neither was it the drive to Porto Venere that chiefly pleased me,—a drive among vines and olives, over the hills and beside the sea, to a queer little crumbling village on a headland, as sweetly desolate and superannuated as the name it bears. There is a ruined church near the village, which occupies the site (according to tradition) of an ancient temple of Venus; and if Venus ever revisits her desecrated shrines she must sometimes pause a moment in that sunny stillness, and listen to the murmur of the tideless sea at the base of the narrow promontory. If Venus sometimes comes there, Apollo surely does as much; for close to the temple

is a gate-way, surmounted by an inscription in Italian and English, which admits you to a curious (and it must be confessed rather cockneyfied) cave among the rocks. It was here, says the inscription, that the great Byron, swimmer and poet, “defied the waves of the Ligurian sea.” The fact is interesting, though not supremely so; for Byron was always defying something, and if a slab had been put up wherever this performance came off, these commemorative tablets would be, in many parts of Europe, as thick as mile-stones. No; the great merit of Spezia, to my eye, is that I engaged a boat there of a lovely October afternoon, and had myself rowed across the gulf—it took about an hour and a half—to the little bay of Lerici, which opens out of it. This bay of Lerici is charming: the bosky gray-green hills close it in, and on either side of the entrance, perched upon a bold headland, a wonderful old crumbling castle keeps ineffectual guard. The place is classic for all English travelers, for in the middle of the curving shore is the now desolate little villa in which Shelley spent the last months of his short life. He was living at Lerici when he started on that short southern cruise from which he never returned. (His body, it will be remembered, was washed ashore near Pisa.) The house he occupied is strangely shabby, and as sad as you may choose to fancy it. It stands directly upon the beach, with scarred and battered walls, and a *loggia* of several arches opening upon a little terrace with a rugged parapet, which, when the wind blows, must be drenched with the salt spray. The place is very lonely,—all overworn with sun and breeze and brine,—very close to nature, as it was Shelley’s passion to be. I can fancy a great lyric poet sitting on the terrace, of a warm evening, far from England, in the early years of the century. Granted wonderful genius, to begin with, he must have heard in the voice of nature a sweetness which only the lyric movement could translate. It is a place where an English-speaking traveler may very honestly be sentimental and feel moved, him-

self, to lyric utterance. But I must content myself with saying in halting prose that I remember few episodes of Italian travel more sympathetic, as they have it here, than that perfect autumn afternoon; the half-hour's station on the little battered terrace of the villa; the climb to the singularly picturesque old

castle that hangs above Lerici; the meditative lounge, in the fading light, upon the vine-decked platform that looked out toward the sunset and the darkening mountains, and, far below, upon the quiet sea, beyond which the pale-faced villa stared up at the brightening moon.

Henry James, Jr.

A DECEMBER NIGHT.

ALL day the sky has been one heavy cloud,

All day the drops have plashed against the panes,
The brimming eaves-spouts gurgled full and loud;
And now the night has come, and still it rains.

The frosts and rifling winds, those treacherous thieves,
Have stripped the shivering branches stark and bare;
Beneath, the walks are thick with trodden leaves,
Which fill with woodsy odors all the air.

Yon street-lamp glows, a disk of luminous fog,
Lighting a little space of mud and rain,
Where hurrying wayfarer or homeless dog
Starts sudden into sight, and fades again.

Its faint gleam struggles with the dark, and shows
A lonesome door-yard, with its leafless vine,
And Monday's luckless washing, — rows on rows
Of dripping garments hanging on the line.

Along the roadside gutters rush the streams
Like turbid rivers in a sudden flood;
And at the crossings drivers urge their teams
To splash the wroth pedestrian with mud.

From far across the harbor, low and faint,
A fog-horn's friendly bellow greets the ear;
Or some slow, cautious steamer's hoarse complaint,
Warning its kindred not to come too near.

Small knots of draggled pilgrims stand and wait
Upon the muddy curb, and peering far
Up street and down, in vain, find fault with fate,
And sharply blame the dilatory car;