

"Nancy," expostulated Shelda, whilst her cheeks flushed crimson, and her voice trembled with eagerness, "I never said so—I never thought so—I never——"

"Well," said Nancy, "you acknowledged that you would be lonely. You said that you were going back to the prose of life again: I don't know what that means if it does not mean that all your views are changed."

Shelda said no more. The colour had died out of her face again, and had left it very white. She sat looking down, conscious of one thing only—that Tom's eyes were bent upon her and that he was reading her inmost thoughts, her very soul. A silence had fallen upon them all; it seemed to Shelda as though that silence had lasted for hours already: she would have given the world to break it, but her self-possession had deserted her, and she could think of no word to say. Presently a clear voice came from some upper room, calling, "Nancy!—Nancy!—Where are you?" and

Tom said, with unnecessary earnestness, "Bella is calling, Nannie. Had you not better go?" And Nancy went.

Shelda looked up then. She and Tom were left alone, facing one another, looking in one another's faces, but both silent. But there is a silence that tells more than speech, and when Tom spoke at last, it seemed to Shelda as though she had known what his words would be.

They were simple, direct, manly words: "Shelda, we love one another. Give me the right to be careful of you all through life."

She made no answer, but she looked up timidly and shyly at him, and love is clever to catch the consenting or dissenting of a glance. The next moment Tom had his arm about Shelda's waist, and her head was leaning against his shoulder, and a "girl-graduate" was the only woman in the world for Tom, and the charms of "independence" were forgotten by Shelda for ever.

JANE MAY.

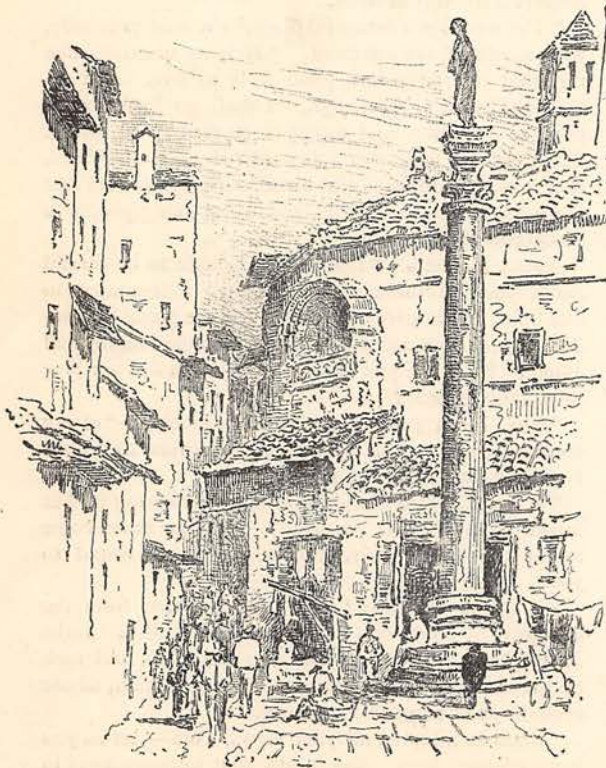
### A NEW PEEP AT OLD FLORENCE.

**E**VEN the casual traveller, whose tourist ticket allows him but a scanty sojourn within her walls, cannot fail to be fascinated by the extreme beauty of Florence, with her domes and delicate campaniles soaring from the banks of the golden

Arno against a luminous background of purple hills. To the student of history Florence recalls a long list of illustrious names, while to the lover of art it is indissolubly linked with the memory of the mighty masters of the Renaissance, whose genius shook off the paralysing traditions of Byzantine art, and, by returning to naturalism, reached eventually the glorious perfection of the sixteenth century.

The most striking objects of interest in Florence, such as Giotto's campanile, the Cathedral, the Baptistery, &c., have been so often described that we do not propose to speak of them here. We wish rather to try to interest our readers in some of the buildings of which less has yet been written, but which, in their own way, are equally deserving of attention. And the first of these is perhaps the Ponte Vecchio.

As one strolls down the Lung' Arno, which is a long street skirting the river, the eye is at once arrested by the quaintest of quaint old bridges. This is the Ponte Vecchio. Some of its features still remind us, when we reach it, of the Rialto at Venice; but here, at a distance, it resembles far more closely old London Bridge; for the Ponte Vecchio also is laden with picturesque houses, and under the arches that support them the river rushes swiftly in its passage to the sea. The Florentine bridge, however, far surpasses that of old London in antiquity. For, first, its piers are Etruscan, and have in their time supported two earlier bridges, till the floods came and swept them away. The present structure was erected by Taddeo Gaddi in 1345; since then it has stood strongly and firmly, resisting the fury and violence of the turbulent Arno.

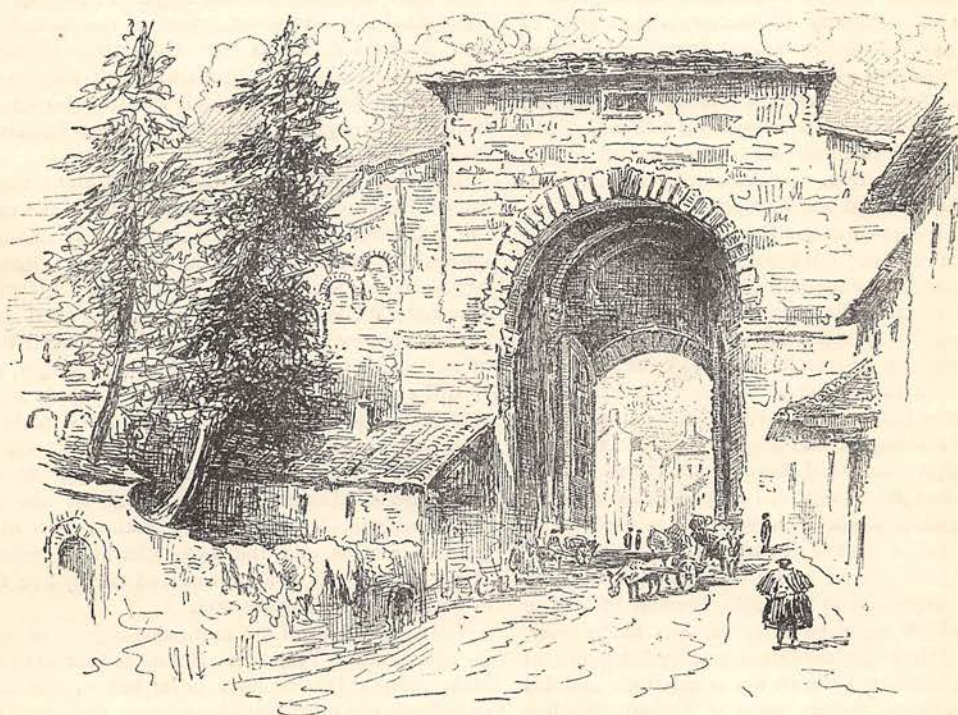


MERCATO VECCHIO.



It is when we walk across the Ponte Vecchio that we are struck with its resemblance to the Rialto; for both sides of the bridge are lined with little shops. A pleasing scene they present, with their glittering wares, old tiled roofs, and dark, mysterious doorways, and a general air of dilapidation and picturesqueness pervading the whole. Thanks to the Grand Duke

century, came here every year in solemn procession with his clergy to prostrate himself before the shrine of the saint. The church, however, fell into decay during the troubled times that followed, and the present building was commenced by Hildebrand, Bishop of Florence, in 1013. Five centuries later, Baccio d'Agnolo added the beautiful bell-tower. It was this



PORTA ROMANA.

Cosimo the First, the butchers who formerly occupied the shops were dismissed, and goldsmiths established in 1593 in their stead. From those days down to our own they have continued, in company with jewellers and other workers in metal, to pursue their more agreeable, if not more useful trade. A long gallery, built by Vasari, runs above the shops. In old times it acted as a secret passage to connect the Palazzo Pitti with the Uffizi. It now serves the more prosaic purpose of leading from one picture gallery to the other. No description of the Ponte Vecchio would be complete, which failed to notice the open loggia in the middle, and from which is afforded a view described by Charles Dickens as "a precious glimpse of sky, and water, and rich buildings," closed by the Apennines on one side and the mountains of Carrara on the other.

High up on a hill on the eastern side of the city rises the tower of the Church of San Miniato al Monte, majestic in its simplicity. A church was erected on this site in honour of San Miniato in very early times; and San Frediano, Bishop of Lucca in the seventh

hill that Michael Angelo fortified when the despairing citizens appointed him Commissario Generale, and he endeavoured to save the city from the tyranny of the Medici. The artist was so distressed at the idea of the beautiful tower being injured by the balls of the enemy, that he hung mattresses round it during the siege, but failed to save it entirely from injury.

The old walls and gates of the city are still to be seen, and one of the finest and most interesting of the latter is the Porta Romana, which is on the high road to Rome. Leo I. and the Emperor Charles V. made their entrance into Florence by this gate in 1536, on their way to the Palazzo Medici, where they took up their abode, and Fra Bartolommeo lived near it in his youth, and thence obtained his nickname of Baccio della Porta.

In the centre of the city, beyond the Ghetto, or Jews' quarter, is the Mercato Vecchio, the old market of Florence, where once stood the finest houses of the nobility. As one treads the dilapidated pavement, and gazes up at the tall, irregularly-built houses, with dirty children playing on their steps, one is forcibly re-



mind of the changes made by time; for here the most distinguished Florentines once resided. Now the quarter is inhabited by the poorest and lowest of the people. Business is still done here, however, and the Mercato Vecchio presents an intensely interesting sight to the lover of the picturesque, with the ragged buyers and vendors of poultry, vegetables, old iron, &c. &c., crying their wares in the passionate, harmonious Italian tones, dressed as Italians only know how to dress, in all sorts of odds and ends, which produce somehow a marvellously satisfactory appearance of colour and general effect. Behind them rise the time-and-weather-stained walls of the leaning houses, their gaunt lines broken by roofs, windows, little shrines, clothes hanging in festoons—anything and everything—but all seeming to come just where they are needed to complete the picture. At the corner of an adjoining street stands what was formerly a fine old palace, now popularly known as the Palazzo della Cavajola, or the “Palace of the Cabbage Woman,” and which formerly belonged to the family of the Vecchietti. It was under this roof that Bernardo Vecchietti hospitably received for a space of two years Giovanni di Bologna, when he first arrived in Florence friendless and alone. At the corner of the street is still to be seen a bronze figure of a devil, which was made by Giovanni di Bologna, and placed there at the spot where a pulpit once stood, from which Pietro Martire preached when he is reported to have exorcised the fiend, who galloped past in the shape of a black horse.

All will feel a mournful interest in visiting the convent of San Marco, where Girolamo Savonarola passed so many years of his noble, devoted life. The little cell, which he used after he was made prior, is shown. Here he doubtless endured agonies of mind, fierce conflicts between his convictions and his inclinations, many anxious hours of thought, sleepless nights, and weary days. The writing-table is still pointed out on which he wrote many momentous letters and stirring sermons, some of the copies of which, written in his own beautifully clear, small-hand writing, are to be seen. On the desk stands his wooden crucifix; on the wall hangs his portrait, painted by Fra Bartolommeo, and showing the rugged, honest, noble countenance to great advantage. Opposite the window is a glass case containing his hair shirt, his rosary, and a piece of the stake at which he was burnt. In the adjoining little cell is a copy

of an old picture, which represents the burning of Savonarola in the Piazza Signoria.

There are many delightful excursions to be made from Florence, and one of the most interesting of these is to the little town of Prato, some twelve miles farther west. It is situated at the point where the mountain valley of the Bisenzio opens into the plain of the Arno. The massive walls, dominated by the Castello dell' Imperatore, present a striking picture with their beautiful surroundings. Prato was much frequented by the great artists of the Renaissance, and important works by Donatello, Michelozzo, Luca della Robbia, Botticelli, and Fra Filippo Lippi now attract from Florence all visitors who desire to become thoroughly acquainted with the Renaissance style.

The chief attraction of the town itself is the well-known Duomo, with its fine campanile. Like most of the Florentine churches, the building is inlaid with stripes of black and green serpentine, from the neighbouring Montiferrato, alternating with greyish limestone. The cathedral was commenced in the twelfth century, to commemorate the alleged finding of the Sacra Cintola, or Girdle of the Virgin, which is still exhibited twice a year to the people who assemble in the Piazza. The exhibition is made from Donatello's celebrated pulpit, which projects from one corner of the façade of the cathedral. Beautiful bas-reliefs of children are sculptured on the seven compartments of the pulpit, all instinct with life and graceful motion and the *naïve* charm of childhood. Donatello is said to have received twenty-five florins of gold for each compartment.


These are some of the numerous objects of interest in and around Florence. Short as our sketch has been, we trust that we have, nevertheless, said enough to indicate the inexhaustible treasures that the Tuscan city contains. It is sad to think that in a few years some of these fascinating relics of the past will probably have ceased to exist, since plans are already being discussed for pulling down the quaint old houses on the Ponte Vecchio and the ancient market-place, which we have described above. We would advise those who have never seen Florence yet to take the first opportunity of paying it a visit, while the city is still intact. And when they have once been there, they will love to return again, for an irresistible charm hangs round its ancient walls.

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 BY THE RIVER.


 EACH of them loving, each of them loved,  
 Gliding down with the river,  
 Nature smiled, and the sun above  
 Brighter shone to behold such love  
 By the fairy banks of the river.

Years had passed, and a woman wept,  
 Wept as she sat by the river,  
 Wept for the love that had died away,

Wept for the love that was lost for aye,  
 By the dull cold banks of the river.

Ever the careless streamlet flows  
 Ever on to the river,  
 Only the breeze a requiem sighed,  
 For the heart that broke, for the love that died,  
 By the fairy banks of the river.

C. D. S.