

RIMINI.

By HELEN ZIMMERN.

With Illustrations by NORBERTO PAZZINI.



RIMINI is chiefly familiar to the world through its connection with Francesca and Paolo, as immortalized by Dante in some of the most splendid lines he ever wrote. But this is not the only world-famous love story connected with Rimini; there are the loves of Sigismondo, Malatesta, and Isotta, an episode immortalized in stone in that most wonderful building, the Malatesta Temple, which is so little Christian in its character that no one thinks of calling it a church, though it is in reality dedicated to St. Francis. That famous Condottiero of the fifteenth century, that curious mediæval figure, half savant, half warrior, who in this magnificent building reared a monument to his paramour Isotta degli Atti, was the son of Pandolfo Malatesta, whose tomb, as well as that of Bianca Maria his wife, beautiful, but in a mournful state of decay, are still to be seen at Fano. Sigismondo was a brave, good soldier, a skilful tactician, the inventor of several new weapons, among them of the grenade, whose effigy adorns the caps of grenadiers the world over. He had three wives, besides Isotta, whom he eventually married, probably with the intention of legitimizing her son; the first he repudiated, the second he poisoned, the third was strangled at his desire; his devotion to Isotta lasted through all three connections and survived them all, as she finally survived him. He chose as the type of his lady-love the rose, and for himself the elephant, as denoting power and intelligence; and rose and elephant, side by side, decorate every nook and corner of the temple. The two symbols perpetually recur, combined now with the shield of the Malatesta family, now with the intertwined cipher of the lovers. As architect for his temple Sigismondo chose Leon Battista Alberti, a Florentine who, under the tyrant's own personal supervision, upreared the work on the site of a former church. The details of the interior were confided by Alberti to other Florentine artists, especially to a certain Simone Fiorentino, and no less a person than Lorenzo Ghiberti, the maker of the famous bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery, is said to have assisted in the decoration. Some exquisitely beautiful bas-reliefs representing virtues and allegorical subjects adorn the pilasters of the Malatesta temple; all of them have in a more or less degree a marked Florentine character. The figures of dancing boys which decorate the first chapel, visible in our view of a piece of the interior, are by Simone; they resemble greatly the famous singing boys of Donatello. Indeed, Vasari says that Simone was brother to Donatello, but he was more probably only his pupil, as Donatello is not known to have had a brother. One of the first details that strike the eye on entering the church, after the first rather overwhelming impression is past, is the chapel of San Michel, whose wall bears the tomb of Isotta erected for her by her lover during her lifetime, and bearing the inscription—

“D. ISOTTAE ARIMINENSIS SACRUM. MCCCCL.”

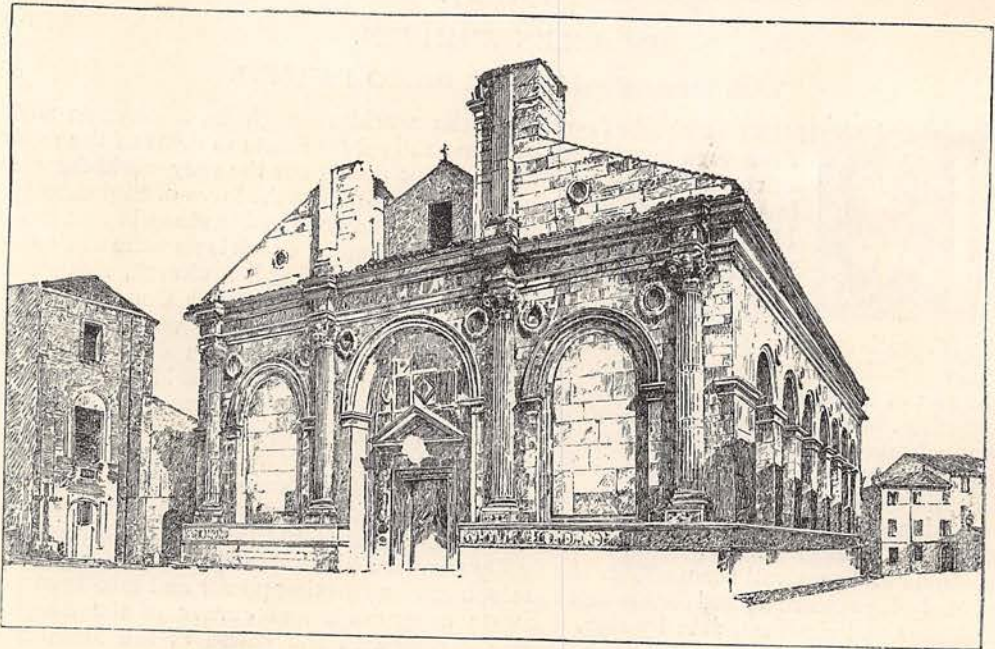
The sarcophagus is surmounted by the Malatesta crest and supported by two elephants holding shields with the motto “Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi.” The

arches of the entrance to this chapel of Isotta, as well as that containing the tomb of the ladies of Sigismondo's family, are supported on the backs of large elephants cut in black marble, while elephants' heads in red porphyry also decorate the railings of one of the chapels. Indeed, all these railings are of carved precious marble and porphyry, exquisite works of art, surmounted by small figures of angels, beautiful exceedingly. In the chapel—nominally dedicated to St. Michael, and in reality to Isotta, over whose arch, like that of every arch throughout the building, outside and in, runs the proud legend :

“Sigismundus Pandulphus Malatesta Pan
F. Fecit Anno Gratiae MCCCL.”

—stands a figure of the Archangel trampling under foot the dragon.

To the angel has been given the features of Isotta ; indeed, everything throughout the building recalls this paramour, every object is surmounted by the monogram I.S., her initials conjoined to those of Sigismondo. As Symonds rightly remarks, “The



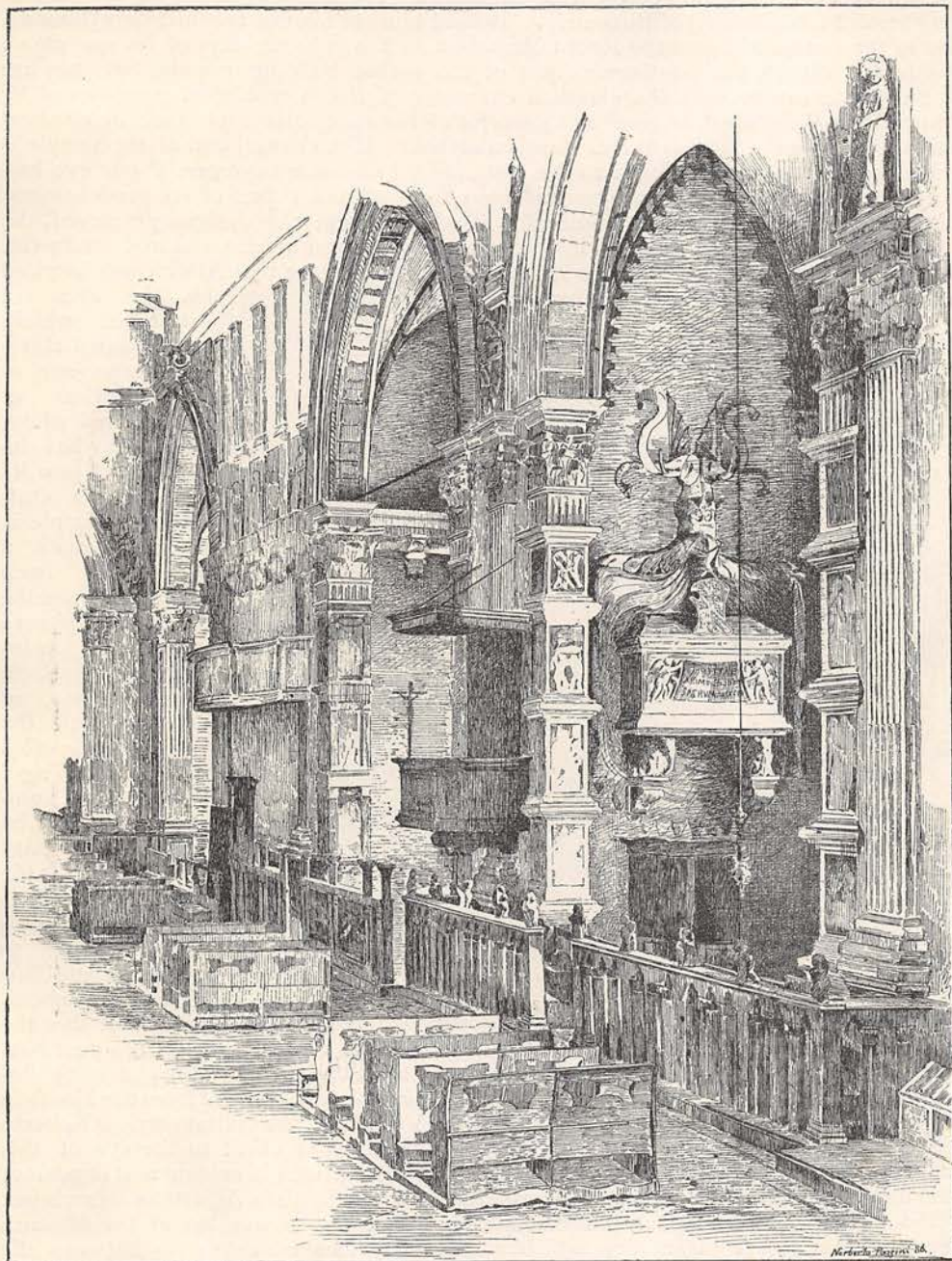
TEMPIO MALATESTIANO, RIMINI.

presence of the two lovers so fills this house of prayer that there is no room left for God.” Sigismondo's own tomb, with the cuckold's horns and the scornful epitaph

“Porta le corna ch' ognuno le vede
E tal le porta che non se le crede,”

stands beside the great and only door that gives entrance to the church. It is rich in designs, but less so than the other graves, and the general impression it leaves upon the mind is that of being grave and severe, in great contrast to the splendid sarcophagus the Lord of Rimini upraised at the same time to the bones of all his ancestors. Above his own tomb, of which he superintended the designs himself, is a portrait medallion of his face, and at the other side a portrait of the great architect Alberti. These portraits were placed at the tyrant's own command, showing how highly he valued the constructor of the temple that was destined to hand down his glory. On a pilaster close by his tomb is engraved an inscription dictated by him, which in translation runs thus :—“To God immortal,” (he did not perchance quite venture to say to the immortal gods, though he would doubtless have preferred to do so,) “Sigismondo

Pandolfo Malatesta, son of Pandolfo, from many and great dangers in the Italian wars victoriously preserved, for these undertakings so powerfully and fortunately executed, to God immortal and to the city, a temple, as in the very presence of battle he had

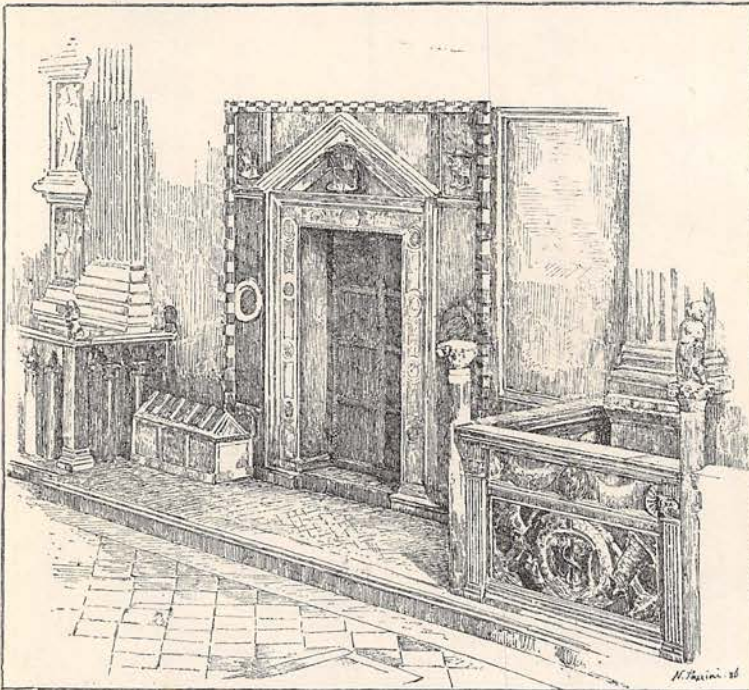


FIANCO DEL TEMPIO MALATESTIANO.

vowed, magnificently spending, erected and left, a most holy and renowned memorial." Magnificently spending indeed, for was not the marble brought from all the most renowned quarries of Italy and Dalmatia? Were not the best artists, the time or any time could boast, called from their various homes in order to lend their services to adorn this temple? The lust of the eye and the pride of life undoubtedly

reigned supreme in this church erected to keep green the memory of Diva Isotta.

A beautiful square door gives entrance to a chapel containing an interesting fresco by Piero della Francesca, representing Sigismondo Malatesta kneeling at the foot of his patron St. Sigismund of Burgundy. Behind him are his two favourite greyhounds, and in the distance is seen the Rocca Malatesta as it was in the days of its splendour. Inside the church the Gothic windows of the earlier building remain, but they are skilfully interwoven with the classical character of the later edifice, pronounced by Symonds as "the most original and graceful of the many attempts made by classical builders to fuse the mediæval and classical styles." The chancel end of the temple is quite modern and much inferior to the rest; indeed almost an eyesore, if our eye had time to wander towards its meagreness away from all the riches of its predecessors. The façade is unfortunately unfinished. To judge from the designs preserved, the conception was able and original in the extreme; a fusion of classical and mediæval, by its suggestion of a triumphal arch, leading us to suppose that Alberti was inspired



PORTA DELLA CAPELLA DELLE RELIQUIE.

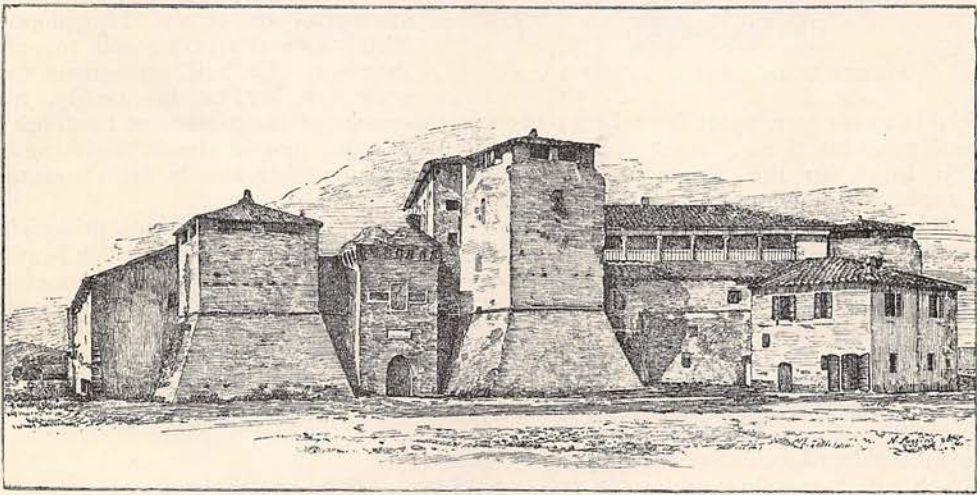
by the arch of Augustus, which, in a ruined state, still forms one of the glories of Rimini, and whose effigy it has incorporated into its coat-of-arms. Outside the temple is adorned with a series of open arches, whence the daylight pierces the Gothic windows. Under these stately niches, in keeping with the pseudo-classical spirit of the age, Sigismondo commanded should be placed sarcophagi containing the ashes of those learned men who had helped to render his rule illustrious, and whom,

after the fashion of the day, he delighted to honour. Only those arches that face the street have been thus filled. In the seven colossal tombs rest the ashes of the poet Basso of Panma, of Giusto dei Conti the singer of "La bella Mano," the platonic philosopher Pletho from Constantinople, whose bones Sigismondo brought from the Morea in 1465 when he was a general in the service of the Venetians, the military writer Roberto Valturi, besides other physicians and philosophers. The effect to the eye of this long line of arches of vast height and magnificent proportions is solemn and imposing. It is difficult certainly to form an adequate idea of Leon Battista Alberti as an architect without visiting this splendid, unique building, a concrete expression of the fifteenth century, that age of transition which forms a species of *intermezzo* between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, both in letters and in art. This curious passage from the Christianity of the Middle Ages and the Paganism of the sixteenth century explains the strange association of ideas which we find in the decoration of the temple, which oscillates between representing the planetary divinities and the objects of the Catholic cultus. Thus we can see in the cathedral of Rimini, side by side with the cross, bas-reliefs representing Saturn, Jove, and Venus. Upon the building is marked as clearly the character of the age in which it was reared, as the character of the man

who reared it ; both the time and the man are impressed indelibly upon this temple—a temple truly, no house of prayer to the Christian God. As Crowe and Cavalcaselle have well remarked :

“ There is nothing more curious in the history of Italy in the fifteenth century, than to see truculent soldiers, known as faithless leaders of armies, or guilty perpetrators of dreadful crimes, spending the fruit of their depredations on the erection of sacred edifices, and employing not only the best architects of the world to plan and erect, but great painters to adorn.”

So long as one stone stands upon another cannot fade from history the memory of that house of Wrongheads, whose story, from their establishment under Otho III. as lieutenants of the Empire in the marshes of Ancona, down to their final subjection by the Papacy in the age of the Renaissance, is made up of all the vicissitudes which can befall the mediæval Italian despot, and has a perhaps more strongly marked character than any other house of Italian tyrants, combining for generations those qualities of the fox and the lion, which Macchiavelli thought indispensable to a skilful despot. Of this promising set Sigismondo was apparently the most lion-like and the most distinguished, combining in his person all the faults and all the virtues of his



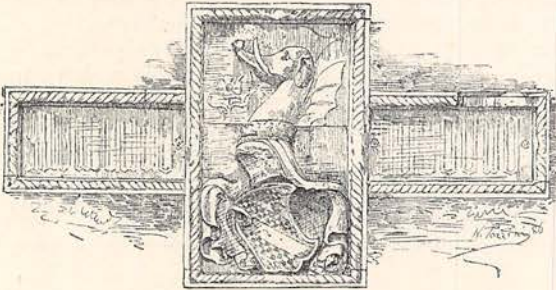
ROCCA MALATESTA

ancestors. Devoid of either pity or scruple, rough-hearted, nay, brutal at times, he was together with this the most courteous of hosts, the most learned and agreeable of companions, besides being the most passionate, devoted, lackadaisical, lovesick swain that even that period could produce. When he was young he met Isotta degli Atti, inditing to her sonnets and poems, some of real literary merit, of which we cull one fragment as a specimen of their character :

“ Lovely and proud, and brightest, sweetest soul,
 Creature most gentle, face of dignity,
 Angelic light of dear benignity,
 Whose virtue is my spirit's only hope ;
 Thou art the anchor of my feeble bark,
 Thou art the firm prop of my health and life,
 Thou turtle dove, most candid and sincere.
 Before thy steps the flowers and grasses bend,
 Glad to be pressed by that most gentle foot.
 Moved by the sight of that cerulean robe,
 The sun, when he arises in the morning
 Boasting himself, beholding thee grows pale,
 And vanquished, weeping, yields the place to thee.”

He then calls upon the birds to carry messages to his lady, and compares himself to King Solomon—who vanquished by love, adored strange gods,—to Hercules conquered by Omphale ; to David mad for love of Bathsheba ; to Jacob serving seven years for

Rachel ; to Samson, to Paris, to Aeneas,—in fact to all the famous lovers of the world ; and he closes his poem with an invocation to all the angels and cherubims to touch with their music the hard heart of Isotta, who will not listen to his prayers. Sigismondo must have been exceedingly handsome, if we may judge from his portrait carved on a medallion in the temple, while Isotta, on the contrary, does not seem to have possessed beauty in any marked degree. There is a head in the London National Gallery, said to be a portrait of her, painted by Piero della Francesca, which gives all the peaky look which we also see on the coins and medallions struck in her honour.

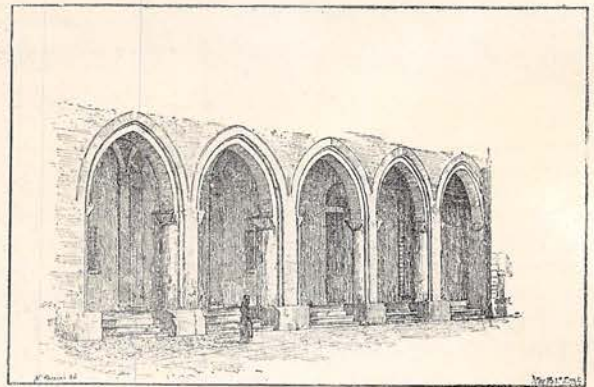


STUMMA SULLA PORTA DEL CASTELLO.

But if she was not beautiful, she was undoubtedly clever, and the tradition of the times declares her to have been learned exceedingly. Yriarte, the historian of the Malatesta, who suffers from an itch to present a new version of facts, disputes this tradition, on what seem very slender grounds. However this may be, she certainly managed to retain Sigismondo Malatesta's affections, and to rule the ruler. He held no honour too great for her or her family, his initial is never seen apart from hers ; even on the tombs of his parents at Fano her I transfigures his S as it does at Rimini, and while the temple shows Sigismondo as a lover, so the Rocca, as the citadel is called, reveals him in his character as a soldier and a constructive engineer.

This citadel, which now serves as a prison,—indeed is one of the principal prisons in northern Italy—is known also as Castel Sigismondo. Over its portal, which is still standing, is seen sculptured the chequered shield of the Malatesta, surmounted by the elephant's head, to which the strange wing gives a resemblance to that elegant

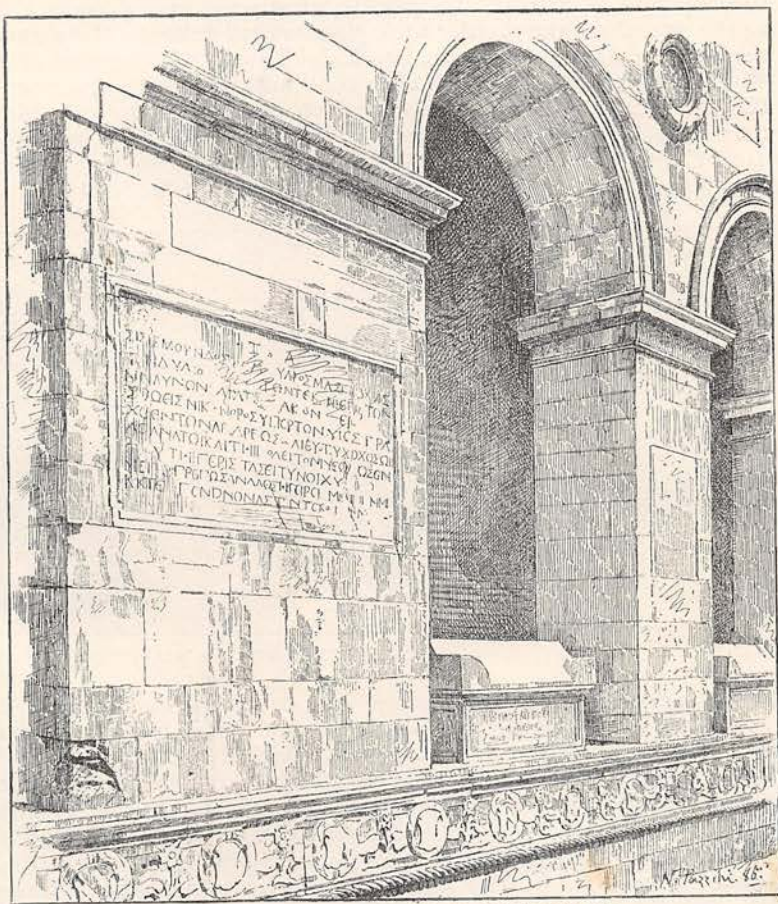
little animal, the hippocampus, which haunts the Adriatic Sea. Beside the elephant is seen, of course, the inevitable rose of Isotta. The Rocca is in an exceedingly dilapidated condition, though enough of it remains to-day to give an idea of its former strength. The large tower on the right goes by the name of The Male (Il Maschio). Although the fortress was the first erected after the invention of artillery, it is constructed upon the ancient pattern. It was during his period of service with the Popes that the necessity of fortifying his own town became patent to Sigismondo,



CINQUE ARCHI, UNICO AVANZO DELL' ANTICO PALAZZO.

and he began by the demolition of an old castle, that had stood on the same site, known as the Gattolo Malatesta (The Malatesta Jail). He was aided in the construction of the new building by Roberto Valturi, whose tomb is among those outside the temple. This writer, a precursor of San Gallo and Vauban, was born at Rimini in 1314 ; his connection with military affairs appears to have been purely theoretical. Yriarte, who gives a very detailed description of the building of the citadel which originally formed part of a continuous chain of defences surrounding the city, says that the works of Roberto Valturi formed part of the private library of Leonardo da Vinci, and were so prized by the painter that they figure fourth on the list of his books written by his own hand. A restoration of the Rocca has been made by Signor Guglielmo Melozzi of Rome, formerly an officer of engineers, from which it would appear that it was surrounded by a moat, and strongly fortified all around. In the general view of the city in which it figures it harmonises very well from a distance.

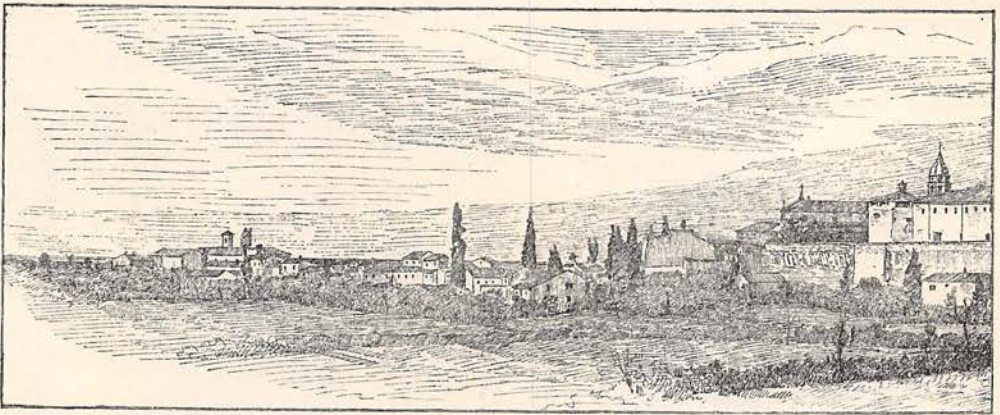
This old fortress was for many years the residence of the Malatesta family, and most of the authorities declare it to have been the scene of the terrible tragedy of Paolo Malatesta and his sister-in-law, Francesca, though of course this must have taken place in the original building removed by Sigismondo to make room for the existing fortress. Other authorities place the scene of the double murder in the place now used as the Town Hall, where the Malatestas lived at one time. Others fix the place of the tragedy as the Castle of Verrucchio, the family seat of the Malatestas, belonging to the father of Giovanni and Paolo. It most appeals to romance to think that it took place somewhere within those sad and frowning walls which now serve as a prison. Even the most searching investigation fails to destroy the evidence of the awful deed. Humpbacked Giovanni, son of Malatesta dei Verrucchio, the founder of the dynasty, called the Centenarian from his great age, was one of four sons, two of whom only survived their father. The second-born was the unfortunate Paolo. Giovanni, despite his deformity, was a brave and able soldier, whose services were sought by many towns and great republics in the responsible position of captain of the people.



PARTE DEL FIANCO DEL TEMPIO MALATESTIANO.

As early as the age of twenty he had made himself a name and was looked upon as his father's probable successor; therefore, despite his moral and physical disadvantages, he was what would be called in these days a desirable match. The town of Ravenna, in whose vicinity stands the Castle of Verrucchio, the stronghold of the Malatesta, was divided by factions, one of which was headed by the Traversari, the other by the Polenta. The head of the latter family was Guido, the father of Francesca. Pressed hard by his adversaries, Guida da Polenta applied to Malatesta for assistance. He sent his son Giovanni to head the expedition against the Traversari, which proved successful. The hand of Francesca was the prize of victory and the pledge of alliance. Giovanni married Francesca in 1275. Paolo the Handsome, Giovanni's beautiful brother, was born in 1252; he was, therefore, only twenty-three at the period of this ill-starred marriage, and he must have been remarkably beautiful, for even in notarial acts and briefs he is designated as *Il Bello*. It was he who went, as Lancelot did, to espouse Francesca in his brother's stead, and bring her to Rimini. This similarity in their stories may have led Dante to associate Francesca and Paolo with Guinevere and Lancelot. If, as Yriarte seems inclined to

think, the mutual passion of Francesca and Paolo dated from the nuptial journey, the lovers must have possessed both principle and self-control, as the *fatto terribile*, as it is always called both at Rimini and Pesaro, took place in 1285, ten years after the marriage. Giovanni, who was at the time Podesta of Pesaro, warned, apparently, by a servant, perhaps a spy, rode back unexpectedly to Rimini, and finding his suspicions justified, slew both his brother and his wife. Dante, with unerring poetical instinct, was probably right; it was but one moment that conquered them. History, which has swept away so much that is dramatic, has spared this episode, which seems still living to the people of Rimini. Only quite a few years ago a really violent controversy as to the site where the murder took place waged between Monsignor Marini, Prefect of the Vatican Archives, and the late Luigi Tonini, the historian of the earlier period of Rimini's glory. His son, who has continued his history, is now the librarian of the Gamba Lunga Library, a library which contains many valuable MSS., and among them a copy of the *Divina Commedia*, in which occurs an important variant. In line 102, Canto 5 of the *Inferno*, Francesca is made to say, instead of *Il modo ancor m'offende*, *Il mondo ancor m'offende* (the world doth still offend me). On this point, too,

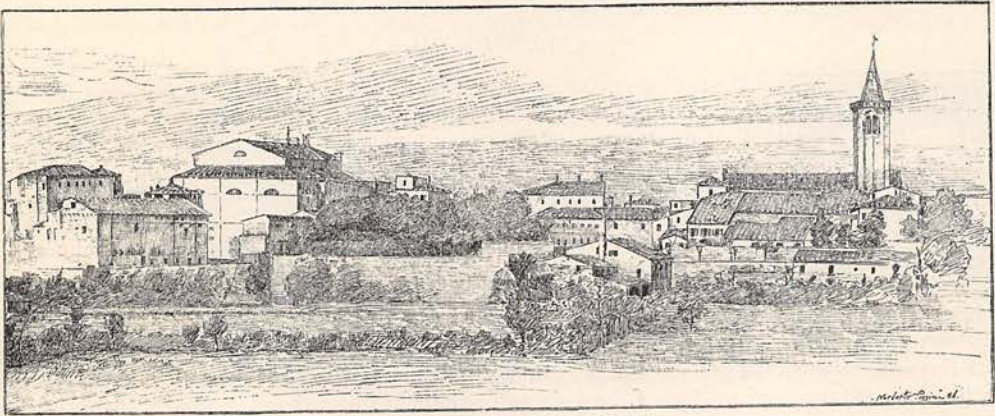


VEDUTA DEL CASTELLO MALATESTA.

controversy wages hot and strong; but surely this reading must be a clerical mistake, as there is little sense in the substitution of "world" for "manner." This codex is enriched with amusing illustrations, in which the beautiful Paolo is represented as a funny-looking bald little person, kneeling in a penitent attitude beside his female companion, at the feet of Dante and his guide. A sort of dismal idea that there might be some traditional resemblance in this queer little effigy assailed my mind at the sight, but the reflection that Paolo was only thirty-four at the time of his death, drove it away. In this collection is also to be seen a magnificent copy of St. Augustine's *City of God*, commissioned by Sigismondo, and dedicated of course to the inevitable Isotta.

The five arches still remaining in the front of the Town Hall of Rimini are all that is left of the antique building destroyed by one of those periodical earthquakes which visit Rimini once every hundred years. They date back to the year 1204, and were therefore standing when Francesca da Polenta entered Rimini as a bride; the triumphal processions—and there were many of them—in which Isotta figured beside her devoted Sigismondo, filed past them, and Dante must have walked beneath them. They are now incorporated with the modern building. In this Town Hall are to be seen some excellent pictures, among them a Ghirlandajo and a Giovanni Bellini. It is a noble erection, this Town Hall, built with a feeling for the older arches it has incorporated, and worthily flanks one side of the Piazza, while another is adorned with a good modern theatre, and yet another with an elegant fish-market, where constant sprays of water from flowing fountains keep the strange and tasty products of the Adriatic sweet and fresh. The centre of the Piazza is occupied by a fine marble fountain, and behind this towers a colossal bronze statue of what was once Paul V., and what, to preserve it from destruction during the sway of the Cisalpine Republic, was converted by modifications, such as the removal of the triple crown and the keys,

into an image of the city's patron saint, Santagio. Rimini, whether we look back at it from the sea, or survey it at a distance from outside the walls, looks reverend and impressive, with its close-packed houses and monuments, its tall church spires rising up into the clear blue Adriatic sky, for the sky on this side of the Italian coast has a different colouring and a different cloud formation from that of the Mediterranean side of the watershed. The tall campanile visible at the right of the general view of the town is that of St. Augustine, the tallest tower in Rimini. It is in a very dilapidated condition, so much so that it threatens, even without the help of the centenary earthquake, to fall upon the devoted heads of the passers-by. The authorities of Rimini have petitioned the Italian government for funds to execute the necessary repairs; but, in the present grievous financial conditions of the land, they find it impossible to obtain them. "Let it fall," was the Ministerial reply; "it is not a first-class work of art, and Italy has many such second-class objects. Let us hope that if the tower falls it may fall by night, when there is not any one passing by." This resigned wish was uttered by Professor Tonini, while telling me the unsuccessful attempt of his townsmen to obtain the aid of the Italian government in their need.



VEDUTA DEL CASTELLO MALATESTA.

But Rimini, which is the ancient Ariminum, boasts monuments older than those of the Malatesta and their mediæval predecessors. A great bridge, in a wonderful state of preservation, which was begun by Augustus and finished by Tiberius, is impressive in its grand simplicity, and is in the best style of Roman masonry. It now looks full in the face a modern iron brother, which carries that mark and invention of our age, the railroad. The river which runs beneath it is called the Marecchia.

Another old Roman remain is the arch of Augustus, now known as the Porta Romana and built over by a machicolated brick wall. This, too, is still in wonderful preservation. It is adorned in its centre on one side by a bull's head, and on the other by a horse's, and fine Roman medallions decorate either side. This arch was erected to celebrate the restoration of the Via Flaminia, which led from Rimini to Rome. The base of a column, which stands in the square called Julius Cæsar, and which is the site of the ancient Forum, is said to be the stone whence Cæsar harangued his legions after the passage of the Rubicon.

To approach the shore of Rimini, one must pass the remains of the ancient walls, of which some picturesque bastions and towers still stand, built in 1359, by Gleotto Malatesta. It is from the shore that we get the best view of the wonderful three-peaked mountain on which stands San Marino, a mountain whose sharp conformation shows us that the backgrounds of Leonardo da Vinci were no artist's dream but a copy from reality. Still it is only a moment our attention is thus diverted, the instant we return into the city the records of Francesca and Isotta crop up anew. In Rimini we cannot get away from either of them, and though Francesca has no tomb to show, she lies embalmed for ever in the verses of the stern Florentine who was her father's guest and who was filled with a poet's pity for her story. And for Francesca's sake the name of Rimini will go down to all time, and is familiar to the uttermost ends of the earth.