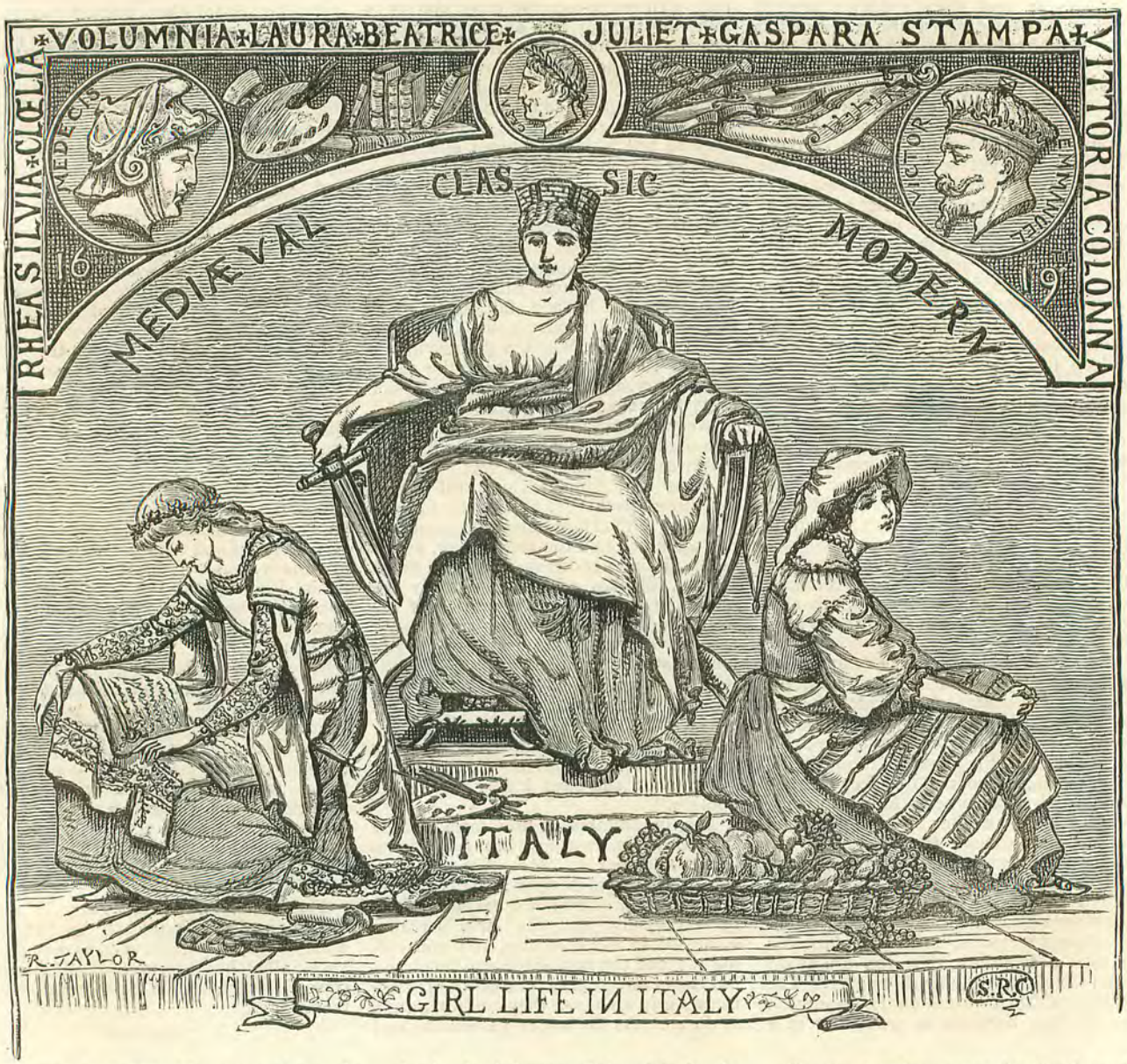


GIRL life in Italy! The very phrase is fascinating; what then must the reality be?

Surely the happiest and most to be desired of all girl life in whatsoever country of the world.

To be a girl in sunny Italy, to live under its blue sky, to cull its brilliant flowers and eat its luscious fruit; to satisfy her love of the beautiful in every glance she casts around her, to feel herself an inheritor of its old memories and grand works, is an attractive picture, and if nothing more were necessary to ensure a healthy, happy, useful life, then undoubtedly the Italian girl would bear off the palm.

It will not be easy to describe girl life in Italy, and for various reasons; the most important being that in the sixty-nine provinces which the kingdom contains, habits and customs, occupations, and even speech vary so much that a picture of life in one is by no means necessarily a picture of life in all.*

Again, the influences that modify the character of the various classes are also very numerous—even mothers, who are acknowledged to have great influence in directing the studies and forming the manners of their daughters, are themselves so often biassed by priestly or political prejudices that the girls of two families in the same class have scarcely anything in common.

This being so, I can only place before you the little which I myself have seen and observed while living in various parts of Italy, and leave you to form an opinion.

It will be necessary to say in starting that the same form of religion is professed, with but few exceptions, by the people of all ranks in all parts of the kingdom.*

About the doctrines, teaching, and teachers of Roman Catholicism I have nothing to say, but I should find it difficult to give any description of girl life in this land without placing before you the fact that wherever this is the religion of a country, there poverty obtains in a large degree.

To give a surface reason for this I would suggest that the Church Festivals ("Giorni di Festa") are so numerous and so strictly observed (for by the Church's order no servile work may be done on them) that two-thirds of the year are spent in abstinence from work, which means not only earning no money but spending all that is earned on the working days ("Giorni di lavoro").

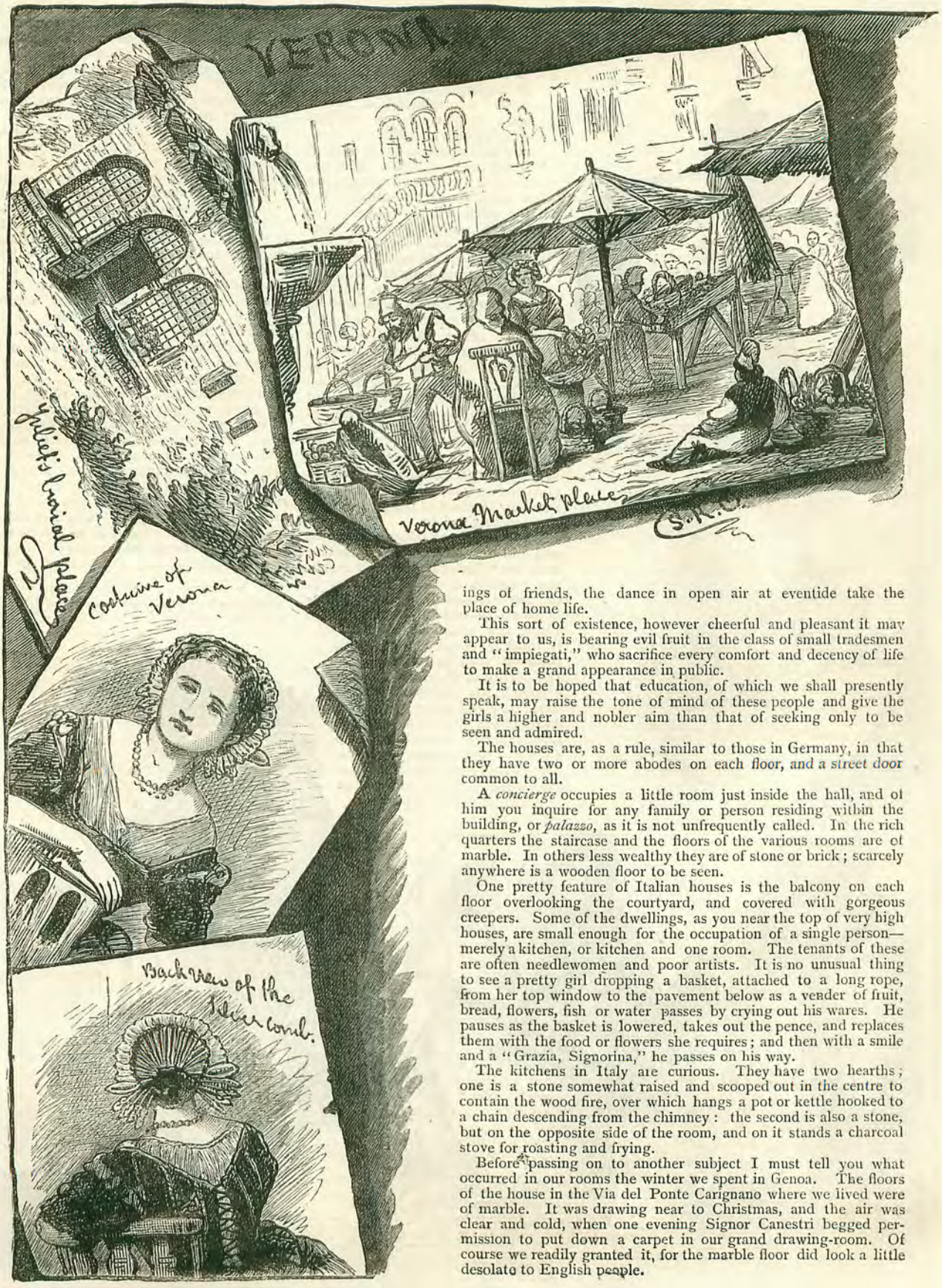
This alone will account for the poverty one sees among the classes that in our country and in Germany would be self-supporting.

Home life, as we understand it, does not exist in Italy. Enter what house you may, there is an absence of that comfort and refinement so characteristic of an English home presided over by women or girls.

Your eye will look in vain for the dainty work, the basket of wools, the new volume, magazine, or music, which indicate the presence of refined and educated girls. The climate is in a measure answerable for this, for from earliest years girls are taught to look for all that makes happiness outside their homes—the Corso, the Public Gardens, the bands of music, the restaurants, the fine dresses, the greet-

* The North Italian girls exhibit much of the taste and outward refinement of the French nation, while the women and girls of the working class of Lombardy resemble in industry, cleanliness, and economy their German neighbours, and women and girls of the south are dominated by climate and love of ease.

* Taking the population as 28,500,000, Protestants number only 59,000, and Jews 35,400, leaving therefore 28,405,600 Roman Catholics.



ings of friends, the dance in open air at eventide take the place of home life.

This sort of existence, however cheerful and pleasant it may appear to us, is bearing evil fruit in the class of small tradesmen and "impiegati," who sacrifice every comfort and decency of life to make a grand appearance in public.

It is to be hoped that education, of which we shall presently speak, may raise the tone of mind of these people and give the girls a higher and nobler aim than that of seeking only to be seen and admired.

The houses are, as a rule, similar to those in Germany, in that they have two or more abodes on each floor, and a street door common to all.

A *concierge* occupies a little room just inside the hall, and of him you inquire for any family or person residing within the building, or *palazzo*, as it is not unfrequently called. In the rich quarters the staircase and the floors of the various rooms are of marble. In others less wealthy they are of stone or brick; scarcely anywhere is a wooden floor to be seen.

One pretty feature of Italian houses is the balcony on each floor overlooking the courtyard, and covered with gorgeous creepers. Some of the dwellings, as you near the top of very high houses, are small enough for the occupation of a single person—merely a kitchen, or kitchen and one room. The tenants of these are often needlewomen and poor artists. It is no unusual thing to see a pretty girl dropping a basket, attached to a long rope, from her top window to the pavement below as a vender of fruit, bread, flowers, fish or water passes by crying out his wares. He pauses as the basket is lowered, takes out the pence, and replaces them with the food or flowers she requires; and then with a smile and a "Grazia, Signorina," he passes on his way.

The kitchens in Italy are curious. They have two hearths; one is a stone somewhat raised and scooped out in the centre to contain the wood fire, over which hangs a pot or kettle hooked to a chain descending from the chimney: the second is also a stone, but on the opposite side of the room, and on it stands a charcoal stove for roasting and frying.

Before passing on to another subject I must tell you what occurred in our rooms the winter we spent in Genoa. The floors of the house in the Via del Ponte Carignano where we lived were of marble. It was drawing near to Christmas, and the air was clear and cold, when one evening Signor Canestri begged permission to put down a carpet in our grand drawing-room. Of course we readily granted it, for the marble floor did look a little desolate to English people.

Imagine our surprise when next morning we saw three men, each with a large bundle of straw, making their way into the drawing-room. We should have thought it a mistake, but that the landlord was with them and his arms similarly occupied. We watched, and saw them untie the bundles and lay the straw over the whole room in thick but quite even layers; the process was not unlike that of thatching in England. This being satisfactorily accomplished, a bright, showy tapestry carpet was laid over without disturbing a straw, and hooked on to brass pins all round the room. The effect was to render it soft and springy, like a good Axminster carpet; but the smell was as unpleasant as though we were living over stables. I asked Signor Canestri why he could not have given us the carpet without the straw. He answered politely, but not without a certain contempt in his tone—"Such a carpet as I can afford would give no warmth without the straw—and the straw is a great saving to my carpet." A second thing I noted was that whenever the room had been thoroughly cleansed, instead of being fresh and sweet it smelt of decayed vegetables. On looking into the matter I found stale cabbages and lettuces were cut up fine and thrown over the carpet before sweeping, instead of using tea-leaves, as we in England do.

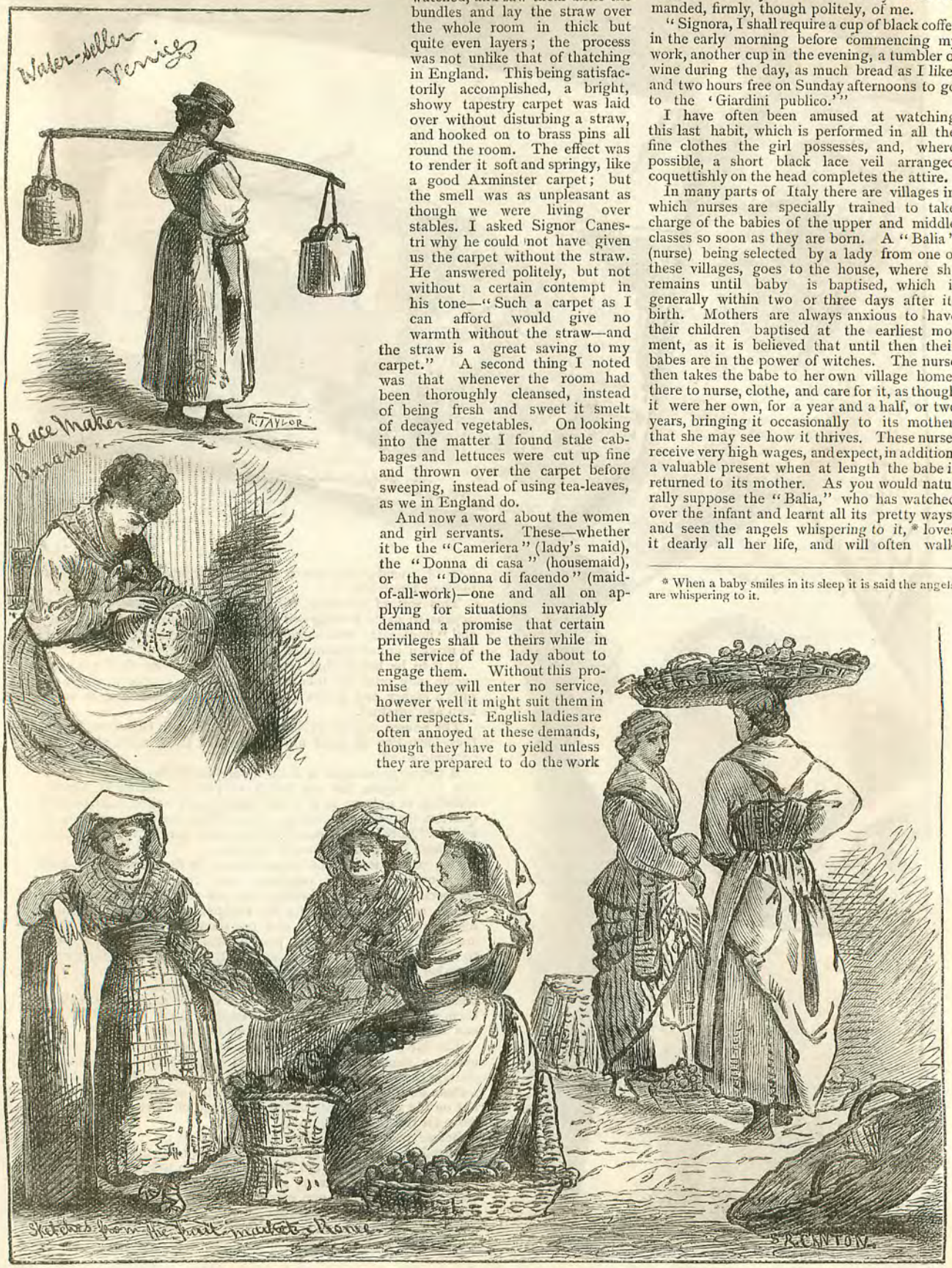
And now a word about the women and girl servants. These—whether it be the "Cameriera" (lady's maid), the "Donna di casa" (housemaid), or the "Donna di facendo" (maid-of-all-work)—one and all on applying for situations invariably demand a promise that certain privileges shall be theirs while in the service of the lady about to engage them. Without this promise they will enter no service, however well it might suit them in other respects. English ladies are often annoyed at these demands, though they have to yield unless they are prepared to do the work themselves. You would like to know what these points are that a servant girl in Italy thinks so necessary to her dignity and comfort; well, I will tell you them as they were demanded, firmly, though politely, of me.

"Signora, I shall require a cup of black coffee in the early morning before commencing my work, another cup in the evening, a tumbler of wine during the day, as much bread as I like, and two hours free on Sunday afternoons to go to the 'Giardini publico.'"

I have often been amused at watching this last habit, which is performed in all the fine clothes the girl possesses, and, where possible, a short black lace veil arranged coquettishly on the head completes the attire.

In many parts of Italy there are villages in which nurses are specially trained to take charge of the babies of the upper and middle classes so soon as they are born. A "Balia" (nurse) being selected by a lady from one of these villages, goes to the house, where she remains until baby is baptised, which is generally within two or three days after its birth. Mothers are always anxious to have their children baptised at the earliest moment, as it is believed that until then their babes are in the power of witches. The nurse then takes the babe to her own village home, there to nurse, clothe, and care for it, as though it were her own, for a year and a half, or two years, bringing it occasionally to its mother, that she may see how it thrives. These nurses receive very high wages, and expect, in addition, a valuable present when at length the babe is returned to its mother. As you would naturally suppose the "Balia," who has watched over the infant and learnt all its pretty ways, and seen the angels whispering to it,* loves it dearly all her life, and will often walk

* When a baby smiles in its sleep it is said the angels are whispering to it.



miles to feast her eyes for a few minutes upon her foster child.

You see, therefore, that the Italian baby girl, in her first experience of life, knows nothing of the devoted, loving watchfulness of its own mother, which is an English girl's heritage. You must not judge by this too harshly, for, as a rule, the wives and mothers are frugal housewives and kind mistresses, and work often with head and hand in their families.

Infants are swathed somewhat as in Germany, but over the swaddling clothes a long white dress is often placed, which gives them a better appearance; but the evil is there all the same—viz., confined and soiled limbs—for the bath forms a very insignificant portion of the blessings of Italian baby girls. I do not know whether girls begin their lives with greater powers of endurance than boys, but the number of the former who pass safely through the uncomfortable stage of infancy is much greater than the latter.

The babes of the poor are better off in that they are nursed by their own mothers, who, unfortunately, have but little knowledge in dealing with their young if sickness and disease overtake them. We have frequently been greatly distressed by mothers coming up to us in the churches and placing before our eyes their little babes, eaten up with dirt and disease, dying, perhaps, of consumption, or, as once in Pisa, of small-pox, begging us for the love of God to go on our knees and pray for their recovery, and, if we could, to give them some medicine which would cure them, when their only chance of life would have been pure air, fresh water, and skilful home nursing. When a child dies a mother never speaks of it as dead, but as an angel, which is not only a pretty idea, but one that contains a vast amount of comfort.

These poor people, as soon as their children can crawl, let them amuse themselves in the doorways or by the wayside—beautiful little darlings many of them, in spite of dirt, bare feet, and scanty clothing.

In the matter of the education of its girls Italy stands far behind other European nations. Twenty years ago the whole civilised world was shocked to find that out of every thousand women and girls above the age of six, in Italy, 754 could neither read nor write. Ten years ago saw an improvement: 530 in every thousand were in this condition of ignorance; and last year there were still 470 in each thousand who were utterly unlettered. This should not be, for Italian girls are intelligent and quick to learn.

It appears that girls (young women, rather) between the age of twenty and twenty-five are now making great efforts to improve themselves, and by so doing they are gradually lessening the unenviable notoriety their country has gained for ignorance, poverty, and begging—for, somehow or other, these conditions seem to go hand-in-hand. There is no longer any excuse for ignorance, as education is now within the reach of all; one great hindrance to progress in this direction has been, and is, the great lack of good teachers.

Children begin their education now at a much earlier age than formerly, in consequence of the establishment of infant schools throughout the country. The school year is divided into two parts, called "semestre," viz., from October till Easter, and from Easter till August. There are some days, however, so overpoweringly hot that neither teachers nor scholars can work, and then the school is closed — often for three or four days at a time.

There are four elementary classes through which a girl must pass before entering the four higher, each class being in a separate room, and having a special teacher.

The first thing Italian girls learn is to sew, just as a German child learns knitting. At the close of the school year there is a two days' examination by a Government inspector, at which parents and friends are permitted to be present.

Of course, these examinations afford scope for effect in dress, which every parent makes use of. All the scholars are in white on these occasions, and great taste is displayed in the make and the adorning. One thing that strikes me as an error is that the inspector allows the various teachers to examine their own classes, while he stands by, putting only a question now and then. Of course, this gives rise to an inferior sort of teaching, in the place of a steady, solid education. It is so easy for the teachers to make a good deal of show even when progress has had no existence.

As a sort of rest between the various subjects, the girls recite poetry, sing songs, and play the piano, all having been duly prepared beforehand.

At the close of the examination the girls and guests invariably sing the national anthem, "Viva il Rè," or "Viva l'Italia," after which the inspector and visitors make their way to the exhibition room, where the needlework, drawings, and paintings of the scholars are arranged with taste, each having the name of the worker attached. To my mind, the work in this room is always more satisfactory than the geography, grammar, history, and arithmetic; and for this reason —that the work here displayed has been a labour of love, and comes naturally to Italian girls, while the other subjects demand vigour, persistency, and often drudgery, all of which are detested in Italy by both sexes and all classes. Two books,* which are used in the elementary schools, I brought away with me, thinking them very good and worthy of being adopted in our own schools.

Italian girls have, it will be seen, less of external education than those of other nations, but they have an inborn education of the heart, and a vast amount of tact rarely met with elsewhere. In one thing English girls may learn of them—indiscriminate novel-reading is absolutely forbidden.

You will expect to hear that Confirmation follows close upon the termination of school-life, as in Germany; but it is not so, having taken place long before. In some parts of Italy the girls are confirmed at the early age of seven, the usual age, however, being at nine or ten. It is the custom for the god-mothers to make on this occasion costly presents to the godchildren, such as some article of jewellery or a watch. The usual present from godmothers of the *contadini* to their god-children is a necklace composed of a peculiar kind of sweet pastry in the shape of round, hard biscuits with a hole in the middle. These are strung together to form a necklace which often reaches below the knee. This is worn by the children the whole of the day on which they are confirmed.

Godmothers in Italy undertake, in addition to the usual duties, to be responsible for the welfare of the children in case of sickness or death of their parents.

The next point is, how do Italian girls live? They are very moderate, both in eating and drinking; and this applies to girls of all ranks. The inevitable cup of black coffee is drunk early in the morning. "The climate demands it," said a pretty Italian girl to me.

Breakfast, about nine, consists of coffee with milk and white bread, or sometimes grisini—long pipes of bread, which look like macaroni. There is no coarse black bread, such as is eaten in Germany—although among the very poor in the mountains a bread made of sweet chestnuts is eaten.

The "seconda colazione" (mid-day meal) consists chiefly of cheese, fruit, bread, and a glass of good table wine. It is curious to note the effect of the mid-day bell ringing, which is called the angelus or "desinare." Everyone leaves off work instantly—no matter what the work may be—ostensibly to eat, but really to repose for a couple of hours—a period of *dolce far niente* infinitely dear to Italians.

At the evening meal, six o'clock, soup is never wanting. "Risi bisi" is the favourite soup, made of rice and green peas, and eaten with tomatoes and Parmesan cheese. This, together with a little meat of two kinds, roast and boiled, fruit, and *pane dolce*, makes up the meal.

Polenta constitutes the chief nourishment of the poor. It is made of maize flour and a little salt (*Gran Turco*), mixed into a thick paste with water. While boiling, it must be stirred constantly with a piece of wood until it gets hard; it is considered much better when served on a wooden platter. You must often have seen pictures in our shop windows of the *contadini*, on their return home at even, stirring the polenta in a round kettle or pot hanging from the chain in the chimney over their wood fire.

Girls receive a great deal of consideration from men; this has, perhaps, induced dependence upon them, for it is quite contrary to etiquette that in Italy girls or women should walk out without the escort of men. It was only a few days ago that I heard of an English girl lodging in Rome with an Italian family while she pursued her studies as an artist. As was her custom in England, so there she walked out and home alone, and when desirous of a walk, hesitated not to take it, without waiting for companionship. The lady with whom she lodged told her that this must be discontinued; it was contrary to the habits of Italian girls, and if she persisted in her independent ways she must leave her house, as it would certainly bring it into ill repute; and leave it she was compelled to.

Italian girls of all classes are kind, intelligent, quick in thought and action, fond of dress, in which they exercise great taste; they love admiration, though at the same time are modest and shy. I never saw them treat strangers rudely, or laugh at their many mistakes. The girls of the highest class, specially in Southern Italy, are very indolent, which must in a measure be owing to the climate, for strangers from the far North going there to reside for a time become very soon as indolent as the inhabitants themselves.

Very late hours are kept in Italy, owing to the great heat and the siesta at midday. Life scarcely begins until after sunset, and no one thinks of returning home until after midnight.

The better classes go to eat ices or drink black coffee outside the restaurants or in the public gardens to the sound of good music, or to the theatres and dancing parties, while the poorer dance in the shady nooks, and eat figs, macaroni, and fruit at the corners of the streets. Excursions are made to coffee-houses and gardens outside the cities by the girls and young men, whom you may see returning at midnight with songs and garlands of flowers, as happy as though they possessed thousands. Certainly the lack of riches does not make these people miserable.

Girls of the better class love to dress themselves in black silk and a long black lace veil over their heads, but the girls of the *contadini*, or peasant class, love bright colours, and always choose such for their petticoats, which, with their black bodices, white sleeves, and coquettishly-arranged handkerchief over their heads, give them a most picturesque appearance.

Jewish girls live apart in the Jews' quarter, which is to be found in most Italian cities, and goes by the name of the Ghetto.

* "Nomenclatura Italiana," "Mille Temi."

We must not forget to speak of the ortolane (female greengrocers and fruiterers), who may be seen coming into the various towns laden with the fruits which they have gathered in the early morning. A good many settle themselves down in the open air in the Piazza del Mercato, where they sit all the morning as queens in the midst of their baskets, full of the produce of their fields and gardens. When the sun is very hot they open a huge blue or red umbrella, which adds greatly to their picturesque appearance. The noise, talking, and quarrelling because one sells more than another, make a most comical scene. Some ortolane, instead of settling in the market-place, go from house to house with one basket on the head and one on each arm. Children are always on the look-out for the visit of these people, which means for them plenty of fresh fruit for the day.

I well remember going to the market of Verona, and buying of one of the handsome ortolane a basket of luscious figs and grapes for our little girl of five years old, who was in a state of delight at her possession. Unfortunately, when we offered the money for payment—the only Italian money we had—she explained to us that she could not take provincial paper, as she would lose so much by it. We had nothing to do but to leave the basket of fruit behind, to the grief of the child, who tried hard not to cry. The ortalana was exceedingly grieved, and wished to give the fruit. Of course, we could not allow this, and went on our walk. On returning to our hotel a couple of hours later, there we found the ortolana with the basket of fruit, saying it broke her heart to see the little lady cry; she had been to every hotel where she thought it likely she would find us. This she had done, although she had walked miles from the mountains in the morning, and would have to take the same journey in the evening. We thanked her, and would have paid her for her loss of time, but she smiled and said, No, no, she could not take it, but perhaps the little English lady would give her a kiss. This being complied with, she appeared quite happy. Whenever we have been since to Verona we have not forgotten to see her or inquire after her. I mention this to show you the real kindness of heart which these, in common with all Italian girls, possess.

Until quite lately—that is, until education was brought within the reach of all—it was considered quite wrong for girls of a better class to strive for an independence by good honest work; now, many of these have stepped out bravely from the ranks of the idle and dependent, and are by the labour of head and hands not only earning a livelihood, but laying by, week by week, a part of these earnings to provide a dowry should they be asked in marriage.

This brave resolve of the girls to separate themselves for the purpose of work will take away the reproach which always attaches to the birth of girls. It is always a grief to parents when a girl is born, and it is no extraordinary phrase to hear, "Oh, dear! another expense, another mouth to feed; while a boy would have been a prop to the house and an extra bread-winner."

Their occupations vary according to their position, education, and capabilities, and depend, also, upon the district in which they live. Some are engaged as teachers, post-office and telegraph clerks, letter-writers, music copyists, while others earn their bread by the making of lace, embroidery, spinning, straw-work, and the making of nets.

The great object and aim of an Italian girl's life is to get married, and, strange to say, most of the marriages are love matches. In consequence of the absence of what we understand by home life, a young married woman has in Italy more time on her hands, and therefore she can indulge her love of going out, admiring and being admired, and is with it all innocently coquettish.

Betrothal and marriage among the *contadini* have always something very quaint and interesting about them, and are most unlike the same ceremonies in the upper ranks.

The strict observance by the *contadini* of the old customs and traditions of their forefathers gives the visitor who is fortunate enough to get an invitation a rare peep into the ages gone by.

If a young man sees a pretty girl and falls in love with her, he does not torment himself, nor lose his appetite, nor get sleepless nights, because of the fear that she may be already engaged, but he goes direct to her and asks her if she is betrothed. Then, if she be free, she answers modestly, "No one hath yet asked for me." This gives him courage, and he at once goes to the point and asks if she will permit him to pay her attention for a time, in order that she may see if she can care for him, and that if at the end of this period both are agreed, may he ask her of her father.

This "asking for her" is one of the most curious points. The lover goes to her house and knocks at the door, saying, "I am come to seek a fair and beautiful maiden whom you possess; I desire her, that she may be the beauty of my flock and the consolation of my old age." And then the father or mother, as the case may be, giving their consent, call out, one by one, the women and girls of the household, asking, as each appears, whether it is she whom he seeks, to which he answers, No. When this pretended search is over, *the one* is at length brought forward, to the delight of the lover, who says, "This is she whom my heart longs for." They then give each other the hand in token of betrothal. As soon as this ceremony is over, preparations go forward for the *trousseau*, house linen, and furniture, all of which the girl supplies. In some parts of the country the conveying these things to the lover's house is quite a grand affair. The bed, with all its belongings, is placed upon a wagon drawn by oxen, who are decorated with garlands of flowers; and following this are the girl's friends, each carrying some package of goods, all moving on to the sound of laughter and music.

On the morning of the marriage the bridegroom goes to fetch his bride, and receives her from the mother; then, accompanied by many friends, they go to ask their priest's blessing; then on to the church, where the marriage is celebrated, and lastly to the "Comunita," for the legal part of the ceremony, after which the day is one of feasting and merriment. When the bride leaves her home, comfits are showered upon her for luck (not rice) and future prosperity.

The Italians do not approve of second marriages; indeed, they are very unpopular, owing to the superstition that they trouble the souls of the dead wife or husband. When such a marriage takes place the young men of the village give the newly-married pair rough music for several nights outside their abode.

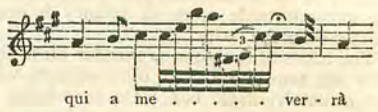
To conclude, I would say that of all Italian girls Roman girls are proudest of their birth. Even one of the lower class, uneducated though she may be, loves the fine arts and music, and notwithstanding that in her jealousy she is terrible and revengeful, she has a great sense of her own dignity in being "Una Roma."

As yet they are not much given to cleanliness and order, but they may be easily brought to adopt both.

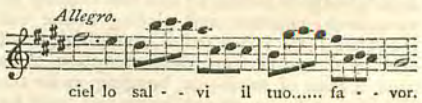
VARIETIES.

Musical Decoration.

Musical decoration, in the form of cadences and passages of agility, adds much to the meaning of the music in which it is judiciously introduced, and is as reasonable and as consonant with the canons of art as architectural decoration. Whatever the origin or precise meaning of a trill may be, its effect, in the right place and well executed, is prodigiously fine. Indeed, the result of ornament is often greatly out of proportion to its appearance. When the two sisters Marchisio appeared at Milan about the year 1856 in *Semiramide*, the soprano introduced a little passage at the end of the air, "Bel raggio," thus:—



and later, in the duet "Ebben, a te, ferisci"—



These passages do not look very much on paper, but their effect, executed without the smallest apparent premeditation, and with a spontaneous *élan de voix*, was simply electric. —*Grove's Dictionary of Music.*

Caught by Guile.

William Guthrie, minister of Fenwick, in Scotland, when walking in a lone and remote part of his parish, found a man fishing in an upland stream. He proved to be one of his parishioners, but one whom the minister had never seen at church. He frankly avowed himself to be a man who was not, as they say, "kirk-greedy." To induce him to come Guthrie promised him half-a-crown—a big sum in those days—every time he came to the house of God and afterwards to the manse to ask for it.

Next Sabbath he was there, and came duly for his half-crown—the two following Sabbaths the same, but he never came to the manse afterwards. God blessed the word to him, and he became an eminent Christian—taken as it were, to use Paul's words, "by guile!"

How to Succeed.—Without steady hard work it is impossible to excel in anything.

Better than Riches.—"Good instruction is better than riches," was the motto that William Penn, the illustrious founder of Pennsylvania, placed on the seal of a library corporation granted by him more than a hundred and fifty years ago.

Observing and Observed.—Remember that as thine eye observes others, so art thou observed by angels and by men.—*Jer. Taylor.*

Answer to Double Acrostic (page 167).

A c i S
Berenic E
Y e S
Draugh T
O lisip O (*a*)
Simonide S (*b*)
Abydos. Sestos.

(*a*) Sometimes spelt "Ulyssipo," now "Lisboa" or "Lisbon."

(*b*) Simonides is believed to have added the long vowels "η" and "ω" and the double consonants "ξ" and "ψ" to the Greek alphabet.