

STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

Florence, April 1896.

Via della Scala.

MY DEAR L.,—I arrived here at midnight, dusty, begrimed, sleepy, and stupid. Of course I was assailed with the usual number of importunate cabmen. I got into the vehicle whose driver was the most importunate; he bundled me in somehow, and, after a while, I heard my trunk go up on the rack.

"Dov'è?" he then asked, looking at me graciously, and thinking me, no doubt, an easy prey for an obstreperous demand later.

I gazed at him as though I had been shot, and suddenly remembered I couldn't speak a word of Italian.

He repeated the question a second time, and as I still stared stupidly I heard him say "accidente," under his breath.

At last the brilliant idea occurred to me to give him my address, which I did, first in English, then in French. Happy thought, the latter being almost exactly similar to the Italian was understood, and in a moment I was rattling down the quiet stone-paved streets.

I drew aside the blinds of the cab. I was in fair Firenze; the city of the Medici, the Land of Flowers. The moon was shining on its zig-zag streets and on its ancient palaces. I was in fairy-land indeed, but alas! I was also in the land of dreams, and presently, just as I passed a lovely demon fashioned by some artist's hand in stone, my heavy eyes closed stupidly, and I fell asleep.

I was rudely awakened by the sudden cessation of my rumbling lullaby. The cab had stopped before a tall white house.

"Qual Piano?" hollared out my cabman. My sleep had sharpened up my wits, and I answered promptly third; then I tried "troisième," and then, oh happiness, I suddenly remembered "tertia."

How can I describe the train of circumstances before arriving at that third storey. First a bell was rung, and by some influence unseen, the pair of heavy, iron-clamped doors were parted vigorously asunder; a corridor of stone was traversed, and another bell was rung, which opened, with a clang and clash, a pair of tall iron gates; then wrapped in a gloom unutterable, three flights of stone steps had to be mounted with accompanying corridors, and then, oh joy, I saw a light. My padrone was waiting for me, and by her side a comely little maid.

The relief was great. I had then, been expected, and, in spite of inexperience, had reached my goal at last. My peace, however, was not yet established, for walking close behind me was my cabman; his step was rather unsteady, his eyes gleamed ominously from beneath his shaggy brows.

"Pay him! Pay him for me," I whispered nervously to the fair padrone. "I don't understand Italian, and I don't know the worth of these tiny bits of paper."

She smiled and motioned to the maid to show me to my room.

I got there shortly but I could not rest. I heard fierce altercations going on outside. I got my first lesson in the unwholesome art of haggling. A number of wicked sounding words were heard; a dispute was on which reminded me strongly of the meeting of unfriendly cats upon the garden wall, but eventually I understood that mind had triumphed over matter. La signora padrone had got her way, and the echo of the cabman's footsteps grew fainter and fainter in the distance.

The maid had spread upon my table a tempting little meal, the elegant padrone had wished me "buona notte," my door was gently closed, and again I found myself alone.

My late adventure, or my cup of coffee had awakened me considerably, and I looked around me curiously; but, first of all, with

true feminine instinct I ran towards my mirror.

I could have almost cried at the reflection given back, and like the little old woman in the nursery rhymes, I murmured to myself disconsolately, "this is surely none of I."

My nose had a long black mark drawn neatly down the bridge, my hair was damp, and laid in streaks upon my forehead; my hands were grimy as a coalheaver's, and my clothes were bedded in a thick grey dust.

I left the looking-glass precipitately, and seated myself in an armchair by my bedside. Then I looked around. My room was very lofty and handsome; the ceilings frescoed and the walls distempered, the few pictures were in good taste, the furniture antique. I sighed heavily. This was not what I wanted. It was all too grand, and I should have to pay for it. I wanted something much more humble, because (as you know) I never have been blessed with means. However, there I was, and there in the corner was my little bed, its coverlet and curtains white and fresh, its downy softness calling to repose.

I undressed hastily and wooed the "Sweet Restorer," but it was very long indeed in coming. Forty-five hours of continual travel with its accompanying worries and fatigue had almost overtired me, and I found my mind running continuously over the grand and glorious scenes through which I had so lately passed. The noble Alps bathed in the rose of dawn, the chalets, and the green, sweet streams, the rugged and mysterious silence of the Borget Lake, the smiling scenery of Turin, Genoa, and Pisa; then, in my mind, I heard the cabman's oaths, and then I fell asleep.

I slept until the sun awakened me by shining through my shutters and warning me the time of day was late. I jumped up quickly, and running towards the window opened it. What a sight I saw; a sight to warm the heart and fill the eyes; my first entrancing view of fair Firenze. The gables, and the ancient towers, the slanting red tiled roofs, the great round domes were all submerged in sunlight, and beyond, the gentle slopes of vine-clad hills showed gracefully against the vivid sky; the Arno like a silver snake was glistening through the landscape until it lost itself from view amidst the green Cascine, and all around, like hoary sentinels, the snow-clad mountains kept their silent guard.

I was in fairyland, and gazed on happily until Zerlinda, the little dark-eyed maid, aroused my mind to things material by bringing in my breakfast. It consisted of a cup of coffee warm and creamy and two hot rolls and butter. This meal I greedily devoured, for I was hungry; and presently I left my room, and wandered forth to view the streets of Florence, and investigate in detail the wondrous line of architectural treasures, whose domes and towers I had already distantly admired.

The Duomo is colossal; a veritable mountain hewn out of marble, perfect in proportion and noble in its structure and detail. Giotto's Campanile, fair and white, looks like an arum lily rising from its stem, and Signoria, rugged in its grace, has age and history marked on every stone. The palaces are tragical and sombre, the streets are winding, dusky and irregular; but colour lurks within their curves, and crunbling frescoes gracefully adorn their walls. The vast interiors of the cold, dark, churches are replete with beauty, and the loggias, and arcades, the Roman arches, bas-reliefs and lintels are picturesque in the extreme.

But enough of architectural Florence. You never cared for what you termed "dry-as-dust, guide-booky details," so I quickly refrain before I burn my fingers.

I returned home rather late for luncheon, or "colazione" as they call it here. It was a

wondrous meal of many courses; and between whiles I had an opportunity to scan my fellow-guests, or rather guest, for there was but one, and he a Yankee. His opening speech betrayed him.

"Say," said he, "guess you're English and a stranger to these parts."

"I am," I answered promptly, "and any information concerning them will be most gladly welcome."

"Well, for pity's sake," he quickly retorted, "don't come to me. Guess I know about as much of Florence as a hog does about preaching."

"And yet you have been here some time?"

"Since last fall. Oh, it was dandy when I first arrived! I was just tickled to death with dodging the guides in the picture-galleries. But I haven't been feeling very good lately, and everything's just hateful!"

"Not the cathedral?" I said aghast at this general and sharp disapprobation.

"Guess yes! The interior is just as plain and ugly as a brown mud fence."

My enthusiasm rose in arms.

"The cathedral is the most beautiful thing in the world!" I exclaimed hotly.

His thin lips wreathed in smiles; his lanky yellow hair appeared to rise an inch or two upon his ugly head.

"That's right," he said. "Just go for me like Hail Columbia! They all do! But, say" (in a confidential undertone), "if you want to see something real good, go to the Cascine, and watch the Prince of Naples and his driving rig; it's as cute as a bug's ear, and just goes like a streak of lightning."

With this bit of valuable information he left me, and I spent the afternoon in "doing" the galleries of Pitti and Uffizi.

What a sin it is to talk about "doing" such palaces of art, and beauty, where all that is greatest of the great, great dead are spread delightfully before you. Such flesh tints in the pictures; such colouring, such marvellous attention to detail I never yet have seen, nor even dreamt of. The statues, too, are wondrous. They feel, they breathe, they live. Oh, what an art is that which can from lifeless stone produce such noble images of ornament and beauty.

Just about twilight I wandered out into the Pitti Gardens or "Boboli" as they are called. The sky was starred and full of mystic splendour; the nightingales were singing in the ilex trees their amorous complaints. The olives, and the obeliskine cypresses were watching all around, whilst perfumes from the roses, from budding fruit trees, and the myriad wild flowers reached me.

Such moments I have rarely spent before. I felt in such a touch with nature, so full of hope and trustfulness, so full of opening life; the spirit of the Infinite and sublime seemed all around me, and I gave myself up willingly to its peaceful contemplation.

This is all I have to relate about my first day in Florence. My ideas and feelings; my hopes, and my ambitions, are as yet hazy and uncertain. As I go to bed to-night, three questions present themselves to me, and worry me completely.

Who is my beautiful, high-spirited padrone, and what is her history?

How am I to get out of her clutches, and away from this house where I am paying six francs a day, and living in a style far too luxurious for my simple tastes; and whom shall I choose to cultivate my voice, for as you know I came out here to sing.

"Good-bye," for a month, by which time I shall expect to give you further details of the Lily City, and a far less crude account of all my doughty deeds. Your affectionate

ELLEN.



MUSICAL ART IN FLORENCE.

By A STUDENT.



Florence, May, 1896.

Villa della Scala.

MY DEAR L.,—It is weeks since I last wrote to you, and quite a book-full of events seem to have occurred to me. In the first place, after a great deal of debate, I have at length settled on my singing-master. "Who shall it be? Who shall it be?" I asked myself in distraction. Everyone had different masters to recommend who was, in his opinion, "The best—the only one!" My list of names at first was quite alarming; but I quickly reduced it to three—Vanuccini, Vanini, and Cortesi—each of them, in the American's opinion, being "just big men." I eventually settled on Cortesi.

He is such a dear old man, about seventy-five years of age, with a complexion fresh and rosy as a child's. His eyes are dark and piercing, and he uses them upon you with wonderful effect. He is one of the only living pupils of the great Rossini, and his method of teaching is simple in the extreme.

"Sing as the birds sing, breathe as you do in sleep, vocalise lightly and with ease. Don't think of your throat, your larynx, or your vocal chords. Forget you have such things. Forget yourself." Such was his opening advice

to me when, ruddy from exertion, my heart beating wildly, and my throat sore, I managed to stumble through my trial song.

He laughed at me for feeling at my throat to see if my larynx was in good position; he laughed at me for putting my hands to my waist to ascertain the direction of my breath; he laughed at me for standing on tip-toe and stretching out my neck at the high notes. All these little tricks so dear to amateurs were to him absurd and infinitely amusing.

His is the slow, simple, straightforward method, comprising hard work, persistent study, well-directed energy. His process of instruction solid and good; no trickery about it, no hypocrisy, no secrets.

The room in which he gives his lessons is small, but very high. The ceiling is domed and frescoed, and the floor tessellated. From the French windows a glowing mass of light and colour meets the eye. It is his garden, in which he takes such great delight, and which might have been laid out specially for the background of a fairy tale. Sad-hued olives, dark green cypress and flaming rhododendrons form the rear. In front are roses, lilies, and carnations, and every flower that blows in wild and beautiful profusion. A brood of pigeons and a large white cat give animation to the scene, and tall grey houses case it as in a frame.

My lessons are a source of intense pleasure, and I feel that I am making steady progress under my patient, earnest, painstaking professor's care.

Talking about music, there is scarcely a street, or lane, or restaurant here that is not dignified by its magic art. Often of an evening the streets will echo back to the sweet strumming of the mandoline and guitar, or some youth, unfledged and ragged, will walk by and sing in mellow tones some Neapolitan air or setting from a famous opera. The restaurants, too, especially the poor ones in the dark, back streets, have always some musician in attendance, whose sweet artistic playing gives an interest to viands and dishes oftentimes most humble in concoction.

It is only in the churches that one never hears anything worth listening to. The good people seem to imagine that to be devout one must be nasal, and the effect of several hundred strong voices singing Gregorian chants through their noses is anything but edifying.

Another peculiarity of these Italian churches is the almost entire absence of real flowers. On the altars, before the statues, in the alcoves are vast collections of floral tributes, but they are not blossoms of the field, but simply paper and tinsel. Is not it a strange incongruity that in this Land of Flowers, where roses grow as weeds, the houses of the Giver of all this beauty should thus be half-heartedly decorated?

Indeed, it is a queer sensation, on entering the vast and noble mausoleums of this city, to notice the Italian taste for gaudiness and show. How they will drape their glorious marble columns with blood-red rags and modify the dignity of their noble altar-pieces by candles made of painted wood or plaster! On saints' days the rags and rubbish that are

brought to light are perfectly appalling; not a vestige of solemnity remains. The great majestic buildings seem to frown down at the monstrous display of tawdry finery; but the Italians smile and say their prayers more ardently than ever, while the word "Bella" is brandished joyously from lip to lip!

A very curious ceremony was celebrated on the day before Easter which, I think, deserves mention. It was called the *Scoppio del Carro* (Car Explosion), and took place in the Piazza del Duomo. During the morning celebration in the cathedral an artificial fire in the form of a dove was lighted by the archbishop at the high altar. This was conducted by a wire through the length of the church, until it stopped outside the door, where a car was awaiting its arrival. The car was a huge wooden construction, adorned with flowers and fireworks, and the little dove, coming in contact with the fireworks, set them off with a great blaze and noise, much to the delight of the on-lookers. The *carro* was drawn along by a team of white oxen. If the dove runs its course without stoppage from the high altar in the Duomo to the car outside, it is considered a good omen for the coming harvest.

There are a few other curious customs which deserve mention. On Ascension Day, for instance, the *contadine* get up early, and go into the meadows of the Cascine to look for the *grillo* (crickets). The crickets are sold in the town, shut up in little cages. They are supposed to bring good luck.

On the Feast of St. Lawrence it is the custom to eat macaroni two inches long, and the bakers have their shops adorned in a most amusing manner on the eve of this *Festa*.

In the middle of Lent, according to a very old custom, the ragamuffins hang on the clothes of the passers-by curious ladders, cut out of paper.

There are many other strange habits indulged in by the *contadine* on their *Festas* but I will not trouble you with any more just now, as my letter is assuming unheard-of proportions. So I reluctantly leave you. I say reluctantly, because the fascinations of this "lily city" grow upon me, and when once I put my pen to paper, I feel I never can dilate sufficiently upon its great charm and beauty.

Meanwhile, if I intend to stop on here, I must leave my *pension*, which is sucking up rapidly all my resources; besides, I sadly want a girl-companion, I feel so dreadfully dull and dreary sometimes. I must have someone in whom I can confide my longings and my aspirations, and all my secret hopes and fond ambitions.

The *padrone* here has had a terrible life. I believe she was once rich, and her husband has squandered away all his and her money in the lotteries over here. She frightens me somehow, and the young American has ceased to be amusing.

I shall ask Cortesi to-morrow if, amongst all his pupils, there is not one who would like to share her lodging and her fate with me.

Addio per ora. A Riverderci.

Yours.



STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

By A STUDENT.

*Third Letter.*Via Seraglio,
Florence, June 1896.

MY DEAR L.,—I have changed my lodging at last, but after a great deal of trouble and trepidation.

As I told you in my last letter I went straight to C— to ask him if he knew of any pupil who wanted a companion lodger. He did not at that moment, but, knowing that my first idea in contemplating this step was one of economy, he sent me with Lorenzo (his faithful servant) to look over a little room opposite to his, which was to be let furnished for the modest sum of eighteen francs a month.

I was delighted with the room though it was rather dark and small. It had a neat, red-tiled pavement, a little white bed that looked like a nest smuggled away in one corner, and a few very bare and unpretentious chairs. I decided to think over my plans before settling matters and then I ruminated on the way I was to take my meals. As I had no idea of cooking, the only solution to my difficulty seemed to go in search of a humble eating-house or *trattoria* (as they are called here) and ask their lowest price for two meals a day.

I found one in which they said they could supply me with dinner and collation at one franc a piece, bringing it round to my room.

Breakfast consisting of coffee, rolls and butter I could have for thirty centesimi (3d.), so you see, had I fallen in with this arrangement my expenses would have been reduced.

I told my plans to the padrone with no little fear and trembling. She was, of course, greatly adverse to my plans, and ended by convincing me of their impracticability.

A week later, however, just as I was waiting to take my lesson in C—'s vast unfurnished *salon*, I found a companion in an American lady.

She was a very pleasant person, pretty and hovering in age between thirty and forty, and it was not long before I had confided in her my trouble about getting a companion with whom I could share my lodging and expenses.

To my joy she at once fell in with my wishes, and told me that she had a vacant room on her flat which she would gladly let me have if it were suitable to my desires. I agreed to call and see it, and I left her full of brilliant prospects of future happiness.

I am at 20, Via Seraglio and have come to terms with Mrs. D—, the American lady. Our flat is charming. It consists of two bed-rooms, sitting-room, drawing-room and kitchen. It is situated on the *terreno* (ground

floor), and the rent, ready furnished, is forty francs the month! The grand piano, which is from "Brizzi e Nicolai," costs twelve francs the month which expense I, of course, share with the apartments. Our flat is really most delightful and suits my romantic tastes exactly. Our whole suite of rooms once formed the banquetting chamber of a palace of the Vechetti. Over our doorway is a huge coat-of-arms, five silver ermines on a background of blue, and the whole place betokens bygone greatness. Our rooms, which are twice as high as they are broad, are domed, and at odd places in the walls remains of columns, cornices and strange bits of architecture assert themselves.

I love the air of mystery which fills our little *terreno*, but I don't love the rats, nor the strange, unearthly noises to which I am occasionally treated in the night.

The other evening I was alone, and, as I was occupied with some mending, the hour of midnight struck before I thought of bed. I sprang up quickly to get into my room when I distinctly heard the grand piano vibrating in tones that resembled a series of sobs. My heart beat wildly. "It is one of the bygone Vechetti come to assert his wrongs," I thought; but, I have since come to the conclusion that it must have been either the effect of dampness, or a rat promenading the keys! Nevertheless at night-time this flat is certainly very uncanny!

Our kitchen is tiny, but most picturesque, and very characteristic of the abodes of the Tuscan peasantry. There are several bright copper kettles and saucepans hung upon the walls, the pavement is tiled with red, and the stove, quite unlike anything I have seen before, possesses three square holes on top in which one puts the charcoal for the cooking purposes. Making up a fire on these stoves is a mere pastime. First you insert a piece of lighted brown paper in one of the grated holes over which you then put a shovel of "Brace" or charcoal, this is all vigorously blown up with a fan, and in three minutes a nice little red-hot fire is blazing.

We have no servant so I have to do the cleaning, cooking, and haggling all by myself, thus modifying my expenses to a wonderful degree. I say "haggling" instead of buying, advisedly, for that unwholesome art is one of great necessity in this "City of the Medici," where, being English, I am looked upon as the lawful prey of honest shop-keepers! However, having learnt the all-important usage of the small word *Ché!* I can now get on fairly well. *Ché* is a word expressive of contempt, and must be used on every occasion when doing business. To explain more clearly, after having demanded

the cost of anything, you must immediately say *Ché!* when, no matter how small the original price it will be reduced by the tradesmen for your benefit. It is only in the shops where *Presso Fisso* is written that this method will be found unsuccessful.

Everything is wonderfully cheap over here, especially fruit and vegetables, which can be procured for a mere song.

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I have made such a number of acquaintances since coming out here, and Mrs. D— has such a round of friends, that the other day we put our heads together and planned to give a musical soirée.

Our friends arrived at about nine and mostly consisted of musical and art students.

Tertzeigi and Asterite, two young Sicilians, played a charming duet on mandoline and guitar. An ardent young swain named Gaspar gave us a passionate rendering of that touching Neapolitan ditty "*Finestra che Lusciva*." Two young American girls, friends of Mrs. D— and pupils of Vanuccini, sang a duet together very sweetly, but with a lack of fire, and a young medical student named Luigi sang Tosti's "*Ideala*."

My contribution to the entertainment was that contralto song of Bohms. Do you remember it, and the refrain you liked so well—

"Still as the night
Deep as the sea,
Should love, thy love e'er be."

I got a very much warmer reception than I deserved, and everyone declared I could not be English and sing like that.

"Why?" I asked indignantly. "You surely would not dare to think my nationality against me in the art of producing sweet sounds?"

They shrugged their shoulders, had a thousand compliments at hand for the "*Belli Inglesi biondi*"; "but," said they, "you know they cannot sing!"

"And why not, pray?" I demanded.

"It is all '*gola*,'" they said, pointing expressively to their throats!

The evening passed swiftly and pleasantly. These young Italian students are an ardent, sensitive, and enthusiastic set; quite unlike the black sheep they are painted. Their minds seem full of music, poetry, idyllic longing and admiration for the beauties of their matchless city.

To-morrow night we are all going on a moonlight trip to Galileo's Watch Tower, and I anticipate a charming and romantic evening, but, for the present I must bid you dear, "*Adieu*." Yours—

is considered the best, as it does not split at the calyx so much as some other varieties. It will be of no use to try growing roses, except they were for local sale, because they do not travel well, and you are too far from London to ensure their being in the market early enough. To fetch the best price it is absolutely necessary that they should be cut the same morning, but the hardy flowers I have mentioned will all travel well. For the autumn, some of the new varieties of the Michaelmas daisies are most useful, they are very beautiful too. Then there are chrysanthemums, both early and late, of sorts too numerous to mention; they are now so largely grown by everybody that I doubt their being at all a profitable crop. The supply is far in excess of the demand, in London at any rate. Violets are a good paying crop, but I fear you would not do much with them without a frame. *Myosotis*, or forget-me-not on the other hand, will grow as a weed in your limestone district.

But the great secret of success in flower as well as in vegetable and fruit gardening, is to select one or two crops which are known to do well in your particular soil and climate and grow them to as great a degree as possible. Too many varieties will distract your attention

and prevent you from concentrating your energies upon the points most necessary to success.

The proper packing of cut flowers to be sent for sale is a very important point. If sent up by parcels post the boxes should be of light chip wood, bought by the gross flat, and folded when required for use. They are very cheap, costing from one penny to two-pence each, yet they are very strong. The flowers should be carefully cut, bunched and allowed to stand in water for an hour before they are packed, the boxes are lined with tissue paper and then well filled with the flowers. No room should be left for shaking about, and no fully blown flowers be sent; remember they will always open in water on arrival.

I remember some years ago a lady in Ireland writing to ask me to dispose of some snowdrops for her. Her estate was simply carpeted with them. I promised to do what I could, and she sent a large box of the snowdrops as a sample, containing at least a hundred bunches. They arrived in splendid condition and were the largest and whitest I have ever seen, but alas, the box chosen had previously held bloaters, or red herrings, and the poor flowers had so strongly imbibed that pungent odour that no one would buy them,

and the whole boxful of lovely bunches had to be thrown away! In this market, as in every other, competition is so keen that one cannot be too particular over every detail.

I am so glad that your father is now better and able to return to his business again. He has told me of the great pleasure it has been to him and to your dear mother during these warm summer days to watch you at work amongst the garden plots, gathering here and planting there, with tireless energy; and if you have sometimes felt life to be monotonous and tame, you must remember how much they love you, and how much they would miss you if you were to leave the garden for the city, which would not really yield you more profit in the end if you had yourself to keep out of your earnings, and I know that you would quickly droop and pine for the freedom and the sweet pure air of the country.

Presently, when the autumn work is well off hand, I shall be glad to have you spend a few weeks with me before you settle down to the quiet routine of the winter, but this is a matter I must arrange more particularly with your mother, so good-bye for the present, and believe me,

Ever your loving Aunt Amy.
(To be continued.)

STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

Letter IV.

Via Seraglio,
Florence.

June 1896.

MY DEAR L.,—Your letter came like a delightful and refreshing breeze from the Fatherland. When I hear you speaking of the Thames, and the boat-houses, the regattas, and the cool evenings spent on its waters, it makes me homesick. However beautiful the scenery here, however blue the skies, we have no trees like yours, we have no river like good old Father Thames; the green, and rather stagnant Arno is a poor substitute indeed.

Oh, by-the-bye I had the most charming surprise a short time back. I was getting through a tiresome morning's cleaning when I heard a strange rat-rat at the door. It was such a distinctly English knock that I hastened quickly to find out whom it might be.

Imagine my transport, my delight to see beaming upon me the dear, kind face of Mrs. H—. She had not told me anything about coming here, nor did I in the least expect her. My surprise was only equalled by my joy. After the first exchanges of happiness at the *rencontre*, and, after I had asked her a thousand questions concerning home, and home news, we planned together a series of the most delightful excursions, including Fiesole, Vallombrosa, and Pisa.

* * *

I have been to all the places mentioned above, and a great many others besides. Oh, the intense, the radiant loveliness of Florence and its environs, who can worthily describe them, who adequately sing their praise?

Fiesole is, as you know, one of the largest and the most important of the villa-dotted hills surrounding "Fair Firenze." Oftentimes from afar I had admired its undulating beauty, with the purple clouds throwing their shadows on the sweet green fields, and olive groves, and tender, clinging vineyards, and now, in company with Mrs. H—, I had the happiness of a closer investigation. As our carriage wound in and out the zig-zag roadway I could note with beating heart the banks of wild flowers, tulips, and anemones; the villas bright in luxury encased in terraced gardens; the graceful grouping of the farms and cottages, the grey extent of mountain ground,

the ilex and the olive. It was at Fiesole where Giotto spent the first years of his life tending his flocks of sheep amongst its verdant fields. Cimabue also, and the angel painter Fra Angelico abode here. What inspirations they must have gained from such surroundings, and how their hearts must have beat with joyful pride on viewing through the network of the trees the distant spires and gables, the domes and villas of their lily city.

On the top of Fiesole is found a cathedral with a slender tower. It is dedicated to San Romulo, and has played an important part in the history of Florence. There is also a little church in the piazza beyond, which contains a tabernacle by Robbia. A number of important Etruscan fortifications on the brow of the hill are well worth seeing—these are the remains of a Roman amphitheatre half buried in flowers, and a sort of vault called *Le Buche delle Fate*, or "Den of the Fairies;" there is also an ancient Gothic archway.

On our return home we visited a villa in which Mrs. H— had formerly lived, called "Villa Querci," one of those ideal Florentine abodes so oft described, so often sung about; a house white, and fair, as though built by the fairies surrounded by a garden, or rather bower of roses, so wildly beautiful, so extravagant, and so bewildering, that one's very mind got puzzled, and one's eyesight dazzled by the glowing, perfumed mass.

We dined together in the evening at Doney *à Nipote*; an excellent meal at five francs a head including ice, and music.

For Vallombrosa, that far-famed mountain, supposed by some to be the loveliest spot on earth, we started at six o'clock in the morning. The journey thither was most interesting, especially the mountain path, up which we climbed in a curious sort of car with heavy cogs to the wheels.

You know it was at Vallombrosa that Milton wrote his *Paradise Lost*, amidst its forests, waterfalls, and mountains bare. We went reverently to pay tribute to his memory and to Paradisino, where his house once stood. It is being pulled down now to give way to a large hotel. Doesn't this sound like desecration?

To attempt to describe the varied beauties of this fairest spot on earth would be a crime,

and my feeble language is indeed inadequate to such a task; for Vallombrosa is everything, and has everything, from foaming cataracts, to gentle streams, from flowery meadow-land to hoary forest. Let me content myself with a short quotation concerning it by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning. Speaking of Milton she says—

"He sang of Adam's Paradise and smiled,
Remembering Vallombrosa."

Returning from Vallombrosa we were caught in a most terrific storm, and the sight of the sheet lightning piercing through the clouds, giving lurid glimpses of the craggy rocks and precipices was most appalling.

Pisa took another delightful day, and I cannot describe to you the thousand thoughts which assailed me whilst gazing at that noble pile of buildings massed together including the cathedral, the baptistery, the leaning tower, and Campo Santo.

Pisa is a quiet, sweet, mediæval town, with a breath of bygone times accompanying you at every step. The people look sleepy, business seems slack, but the Arno flows just as brightly, just as peacefully as elsewhere, and the dear hills like a chain around the town show up their soft and undulating forms.

I am not going to describe to you the interior of the cathedral. It is too severe a task for a short treatise, so I will only say that the very beautiful wrought-iron lamp, under whose form the great Galileo worked, is there, and throws its deep, decided shadows on the marble pavement.

The frescoes in the Campo Santo are most interesting, but the spirits so vividly depicted frightened me not a little, and I carried away such a vivid recollection of them, that they even haunted me in my sleep.

To-morrow I am going to play the part of cicerone, and take Mrs. H— over some of my beloved galleries and statuary.

She leaves to-morrow evening, and I shall miss her dear, kind face, her sympathy, her thoughtful goodness. I shall miss everything, but it will only be an *au revoir*, *à riverderci*, for am I not myself destined to return sooner or later to the dear land of my birth, my fatherland, my England?

Yours,

but paid little heed to the boys, who sat perfectly still and contemplated him and their surroundings in awe-struck silence. A large, old-fashioned landau awaited them at the station where they alighted, and in this they were conveyed along country roads to Hartleigh Court.

By the time they arrived there Mirabel was far too dazed and tired to receive any clear impression of the home to which she had come. With the boys clinging to her she entered the house and was led into a warm, lighted room. There, standing on the hearth-rug, tall, stately, and elegantly attired, was the lady whom she knew to be Bruce Collier's godmother.

Mirabel quailed as their eyes met,

and the lady started and looked greatly surprised. But, quickly recovering herself, she was far too tactful to allude to their having met before. She welcomed the girl in a kindly, but rather patronising fashion, made her sit by the fire and herself removed her wraps. Then she slipped away to express her astonishment to her husband.

"Oh, Francis," she cried, following him into his room. "This is beyond everything! To think that the lovely model, who turned poor Bruce's head should prove to be your grand-daughter. Novels are nothing to this. She really is a beauty. Those odd little boys are dreadful; but she is quite presentable now she is well dressed. Wait till I

have taken her in hand and given her a few lessons and then see! Why, I should not wonder if she became the rage."

"Now, Clémentine," said her husband, "be careful what you do with her. I don't want my grand-daughter made into a frivolous, hard-hearted woman."

"Like me, you mean," said his wife gaily, not in the least offended.

"As you please," said Mr. Armitage carelessly; "but it does not matter. I do not believe you can spoil Mirabel. She is a girl with a heart, and not at all the stuff of which fashionable, fine ladies are made."

(To be continued.)

STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

By A STUDENT.

Fifth Letter.

Livorno.



MY DEAR L.,—You ask me in your letter what are the particular advantages to be gained by coming over here to study music, and, whether the masters and the system of instruction are better than in London. No, indeed. London boasts of masters whose names are world renowned; and what code of instruction could be better than that carried on at our great institutes and musical academies?

It is not, then, either master or method that fascinates the young student, and calls him to this foreign land. It is the life, the atmosphere around him. The beautiful city of Florence is a veritable centre of learning. You breathe it in the air, you live amongst it, you become a part of it. Your life, your thoughts, your pleasures are all co-mingled and mixed up with it. You are not alone in your artistic aspirations and ambitions; you are fighting amongst a crowd to obtain a mastership, you are spurred onward by those around you; your aims become higher, your ideas more broad: the example of greater minds than yours stirs all the latent blood within your veins. You find, to your astonishment, that yours is a genius tainted with the stain of mediocrity; you are no longer puffed up with your self-content, you desire to do better, and excel.

The teaching in Florence is of the Rossini School; nearly all its masters having been students, or having followed up the traditions of that great man.

The system in miniature is one of ease *versus* force, to give quality rather than quantity. But, though it is a system of ease, that very same ease is difficult of attainment. When one has been accustomed to talk all one's life in one's throat, and to sing in guttural tones, those brilliant, flute-like notes which echo and vibrate round the room are shy in making their appearance.

A great singer should scarcely know, or feel, that she is singing; she should, as they say over here, "feel no parts." The throat, larynx, and uvula all have their work to do, certainly, but the less you think of them the better. Muddling your brain over anatomical details creates a distressing consciousness which is most destructive to fine, free singing. What you must think of in practising are the lips, the teeth, and the front of the palate. Throw your tones forward so that the notes, like little gems of sound, seem to lie between the lips and teeth. This is something new, is it not? But you must know that the lips and nose have an immense deal to do in giving resonance. When you begin to get in the habit of these front, forward tones, you will feel your lips vibrate, and there will also be a slight sensation in the nose, and the front part of the cheeks; the throat will no longer worry you, for you will have no trouble there whatever. That this system of training tone production is the right one there can be no doubt whatever; by it, all force, all hardness, and all uneven bumping is of necessity dispensed with and a fluid, easy, brilliant voice is, in time, the certain result.

At first this system is very disheartening, for the voice seems to lose all its former power and heaviness, in fact it becomes so poor and weak that all your courage well-nigh forsakes you. Have patience! Little by little you will get back your former strength, and this strength allied to the rightly directed tone, will make a thing of beauty and sweetness, from what was before a torment to listen to.

Singing single notes, and long sustained tones seems to be a practice little resorted to here; scales, arpeggios, and octaves are more in vogue, and when once you can sing a scale evenly you may then begin to breathe and hope. Those veiled notes, those weak tones, those downright breaks in the changing of the registers are all combated with by the forward direction of tone, and an even, clear voice is the result.

Do not be alarmed at the extremely low prices of the singing lessons over here. You must remember that money goes farther in Florence than in almost any other country of Europe, and, remember also that nearly all the great masters in America and England who are charging 15s. and a guinea for a lesson, were themselves, nearly every man of them, students under the very same masters with which you are studying in Florence.

It was rather an interesting discovery for me to make the other day, that the expenses of my housekeeping, food, lodging, clothes and lessons all combined in Florence came to rather less than my singing lessons alone in England. But then, you must remember that I gave 10s. for every lesson I took in England, whereas, here I only pay a little over two francs.

Yesterday I saw the King and Queen. There was a grand display of flags, floral decorations, and fireworks to welcome their arrival.

There can be no doubt as to the popularity of these two gracious sovereigns; the multitude crowded round their carriage with utmost enthusiasm, and King Humbert would lean forward every now and then to clasp their hands.

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." And never was the saying more applicable than to King Humbert. I have seldom seen such a pathetic face, nor one in which intense worry and fatigue were more plainly visible.

But how charming is Queen Margherita? What a sweet smile she has for everyone, and what a mobile face! Sufficient to make whole nations mad with love and enthusiasm! Well does she deserve to live in the hearts of her people, for she sacrifices herself entirely for their benefit—organising charities, visiting hospitals, and tending the poor with her own hands. Her life is one of beautiful heroism and devotion, and as she drives along so full of gracious sweetness the hearts of the hardest warm with love and patriotism!

Scarcely had the King and Queen passed by, than my attention was attracted to another procession. A strange and beautiful sight. A procession of death.

On the shoulders of six men—brothers of the Misericordie, a coffin was borne. Before the coffin a band was playing a solemn dead march—behind were cars of flowers.

How can I paint to you in words the strange beauty, the mystery divine which seems to shroud this final chapter of the mute story of human suffering in Italy. If the music in the churches is disgraceful, the music at these funerals is awe-inspiring.

Only to see that mournful procession wending its way silently among the narrow streets—only to hear the soft strains of that music—only to witness the grave solemnity of this last sad pilgrimage to the tomb, is to raise one's spirit upwards from this busy world of strife to the rest that is eternal.

Yours, ELLEN AUBERT.



MENTAL MELODIES.

OME strains melodious—floods of pregnant sound—
 For ever in my surging mind abound ;
 Sometimes I know not whence they come nor how,
 If from the birds or great composer's brow ;
 Or from the wind-blown vales or sea-waves' moan,
 Or from the viol's soul-enthraling tone ;
 But when the music stirs me most of all,
 Then know I well it from one throat did fall—
 Maybe in years ago, maybe last night—
 For then sweet Mary's face comes to my sight ;
 Her song is my companion—surest sign
 That an embodied melody is mine !

C. P.



STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

By A STUDENT.

Letter VI.

Via Seraglio,
Florence.

July, 1896.

MY DEAR L.,—The weather has become hot here, almost unbearable. Mrs. D—in connection with a friend has decided to leave Florence without more ado, and has already engaged a flat at Leghorn for the months of July, August, and September. She has invited me to join and share expenses, but my heart fails me at the idea of quitting Florence, and I vacillate strangely.

I know I greatly need a whiff of pure sea air, and that a perfect rest from gallery-seeing and from study would be beneficial ; but Florence is the city of my dreams, and even its dusty streets bathed in the heat of glaring sunshine are to me objects of grace and beauty. Besides I should have to leave my fellow-students behind me, for they are mostly poor and consequently unable to afford a change of air.

I cannot understand, by-the-bye, how it is that Ruskin came to give the Florentines a bad name. When he did so his mind must have been on the loungers of the Via Tornabuoni, a class of men who seem to pass their lives in sipping sweet drinks and staring. The students are a different set altogether, and are thoroughly earnest and sincere, although their estimate of the English is anything but correct. To them we are a stiff-backed people devoid of sentiment, devoid of fancy, poetry, or enthusiasm ; automatic figures, men of wood ; our aspirations steeped in plum pudding and beef-steak ; our whole minds taken up with money-making and athleticism.

Our trip with the students to Galileo's Watch Tower by the moonlight was one of those delightful experiences never to be forgotten in a lifetime. The evening was fresh and clear, the nightingales in full song, the scenery around unreal, bewildering. As we walked along the students produced their sweet-toned mandolines and guitars, and sung soft ditties till our minds were wrapped in cloudland, and all the earth and sky seemed music.

Oh, by-the-bye, I have been "talked over" at last and am starting for Livorno to-morrow.

The prospect of being left alone in my uncanny little flat appalled me. I never knew myself to be superstitious before, but truly those dead Vechetti, or Medici, or Soldinari, or whoever they may be, have been most persistent in their sighs and groans the last few nights. Of course I am still open to the conviction that they may be rats, but I never knew rats to be so mysterious before. My packing up was a most dismal proceeding. To begin with I am an atrocious packer, and, after having locked and corded my box, I found that I had left out a pink silk blouse, a pair of white kid gloves, my oil stove, clothes brush and two saucepans. There was nothing to do but make an impromptu bag, and bundle them all in precipitately. This I did, but with very sad misgivings as to the close proximity of my pink blouse to the greasy oil-stove.

We have just arrived here. Leghorn or Livorno, as it is called in Italy, is indeed hideous when compared with my beloved Firenze. I shall never forget my parting sight of that beautiful city. The first rosy tinge of dawn was in the skies and bathed the Duomo with the fairy light, showing up to distinctness its myriad statues, and its gleaming marbles. Giotto's Campanile and the rugged Signoria seemed intensified in their beauty as our train steamed slowly from the station and I gazed enraptured.

My American friend was with me and asked me in laughter if I ever intended taking my eyes off Florence.

"Oh !" I exclaimed, "it is a fairy city. It is glorious. Its narrow streets, its dusky passages, its frescoes, and its churches—all appeal to me so strongly. The happiest moments of my life, the most intense, the sweetest have been spent there, and I am loth to leave it, for who knows if I ever shall return, and if I do return will it be with the same glad feelings, the same light, youthful heart ?"

In the broiling sunshine Livorno looked hot, unsympathetic, and glaring. The wide, open piazzas have no shade whatever, the tall straight houses are utterly bereft of beauty—even the great cathedral is exteriorly hideous ; but the sea is grand, and my first view of the

Mediterranean made me utter an exclamation of bewildered admiration. The blue of the water is very vivid and intense, and there is a wide, broad growth of feathery palm-trees fringing the beach ; between the trees are beds of glowing oleanders, trailing rose bushes, and clumps of rhododendrons reminding one somehow of the artistic hot-houses at Kew.

We arrived at our Villino at mid-day very tired and dusty, but we regaled ourselves with a good soup plate of "broda" and "minestra" and a well-cooked beef-steak, after which we rested for about an hour.

Another day has passed and I haven't posted my letter. I see in reading it through that I have forgotten to relate to you about the great curse of existence down here, the mosquitoes. They are terrible, and wherever you go you hear the word "zinzari" brandished on every lip, whilst arms, hands and foreheads are immediately bared to show the full extent of the mischief these venomous little insects have caused.

For my part I seem to be their special prey, and have thirty-three bites on one arm alone.

And now let me describe to you the method of their attack.

In the middle of the night, without any warning, I am awakened by hearing a buzzing sound close to my face. It is the "zinzari" saying grace before meals ! At this unwelcome noise I immediately bare my arms, and cover up my face with them. The insects must be fed, and I prefer that they take their meals off arms than face. As soon as they begin to bite I slap my hand violently down upon them and manage in this way to destroy quite a number. In the morning I apply arnica to the bites, which are like little red hillocks and very uncomfortable.

They tell me there is an invention for smoking these little strangers out of the room. It is called "zampironi." I shall buy some at once.

So much for my first impressions of this rather flat Italian watering-place.

Write to me soon all news about the dear Home Land.

Yours,

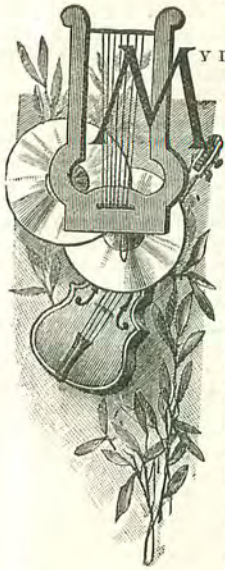
ELLEN.

STUDENT-LIFE IN FLORENCE.

By A STUDENT.

Letter VII.

Via Seraglio,
Florence,
October 1896.



MY DEAR L.,—This will be my last letter to you, as I read, with beating heart, that you have decided to come and join me here. How can I tell you the delight I feel in having a congenial companion to study with me, work with me, and live!

You ask me to give you some practical hints as to your luggage, journey, money-changing, etc.

Let me then hasten to tell you that the less luggage you bring the better. Luggage is charged for very heavily, and you not only have to pay for it at Victoria but also at Modane, the Italian frontier. Bring then as little as possible, and remember that dress material, underwear, and tailoring is infinitely cheaper than in England. You might, however provide yourself with boots and shoes, as the leather is poor and expensive here.

The Italian money is nearly all paper, or copper. I have not seen a single gold or silver piece since coming out. The paper lira is equal to a franc, and the copper soldo, equal to a halfpenny, is the chief money used. The exchange on English gold and bank-

notes is twenty-seven liras to the pound, which is better than in France.

Do not be alarmed about your ignorance of the language; I will soon put you in the way of getting yourself understood, so much can be done here by signs and gesticulations. Do not invest in a grammar, or phrase book as you intended. To learn a language grammatically takes five years, and phrase books are always filled to repletion with complicated sentences of no use whatever. Buy a dictionary, though, and look out such words as meat, bread, etc. Foreigners make a great mistake in learning up polite phrases in a language; it is much better to be curt, and to the point, for you are thus saved endless annoyance and are much more readily understood.

Your journey through the Mont Cenis route should not cost you much over five pounds. It takes about forty-eight hours, and is wondrously beautiful, especially when you reach the mountainous Savoy, where the sombre grandeur of the scenery is sure to strike you. The northern part of Italy too, with the smiling peaceful beauty of blue sky, and verdant hillside, is also very pleasing. At the station of Florence, this fairest of all fair cities, you will find me waiting for you, ready with open arms to conduct you through its zigzag narrow streets, to show you all its churches, its palaces, its sites, to make you feel as I have felt the fascination of its every step, to take you to the heights of Alle Croce and Fiesole, and let you hear the nightingales that sing at morn and eve, to enter with me in the solemn stillness of the churches, to see the moonlight shining on the marbles of the Duomo.

If you intend to join us you must be prepared for a few deprivations. Do not be alarmed at the idea of cooking, catering, and cleaning for yourself, do not be disheartened at the fact that you will sometimes have to

exist on poor fare, and have but little money to spend on dress. These little sacrifices seem inseparable from the life of work, study, and ambition; the life of Bohemia, the most entrancing and delightful of all lives—the "Student's Life!"

Welcome then, dearest. You have the ardent spirit, the sincere perseverance, the powerful capacity necessary for the accomplishment of your aim in life; you cannot enter into falsities nor fritter away your time with insincere ideals. Come to this city where so many of the great, great dead have lived, and left behind them footprints never to be effaced, and where their works and thoughts seem to live and breathe again, especially for the benefit of us who in our humble way stand apart and admire.

You tell me that your friends condemn your rash step in coming here; that it will bring you unhappiness, that you will have no more afternoon teas, no more society. Bah! what do you care. Life is made for aims more serious, more sublime. You will gain something ten times more satisfying than all you lose; your loss itself will be a gain.

Do not then allow yourself to be discouraged in your scheme, but come to me, dear, and let us try in the future to pass together a noble, and artistic life, let us search the truth, and try to see in everything the grandeur of our destiny. Let us be ardent and sincere in the accomplishment of our duty so that we may be uplifted from the petty trials of life, that we may reach the summit of our ambition, and so that the hours may pass us by and drop silently one by one into eternity without our feeling their sad passage.

Welcome then to fairy-land, to Florence, and welcome to that most fruitful and most delightful life, the life of study.

Yours,

ELLEN AUBERT.

[THE END.]



VARIETIES

FOR ALL IN SITUATIONS.—Nothing commends a girl so much to her employers as accuracy and punctuality in the conduct of business. And no wonder. On each person's exactitude depends the comfortable and easy-going of the machine. If the clock goes fitfully, nobody knows the time of day; and if your task is a link in the chain of another person's work, you are his or her clock, and he or she ought to be able to rely on you.

FLYING FAST.

"We bud, we bloom, we blossom, and we blast

Ere we can count our days, our days they flee so fast."—*Sun-dial Motto.*

BEWARE OF FLATTERERS.—Beware of those who flatter you and commend you to your face. Remember the fable of the fox praising the singing of the crow who had something in her mouth which the fox wanted.

LIVE WISELY.

"The meal unshared is food unblest,

Thou hoard'st in vain what love would spend;

Self-ease is pain, thine only rest

Is labour for a noble end"—*Whittier.*

MANNERS AND MORALS.—Good manners are a part of good morals; and it is as much your duty as your interest to practise both.

SHAKE OFF MELANCHOLY.—It is only very selfish people who contrive to be always happy and placid whatever happens. They are so thoroughly unsympathetic, so unmoved by the joys and sorrows of others, that so long as they live in comfort they are perfectly content. But a great many well-meaning people contrive to be unhappy when they might well be the reverse. They have made up their minds that this world is a sad and weary one, and they will not grasp and benefit by the few joys that come in their way. They may fully understand the divine dictum, "weep with those that weep," but they fail to realise the equally binding obligation to "rejoice with those that do rejoice."