

Florence, Italy.

In the two days spent here in Florence we have received a very keen insight into the spirit of the Renaissance. With its superb pictures, galleries, beautiful statues, churches, towers and gardens, there is no need to ask the cause of Florence's artistic supremacy, and here, as nowhere else, the spirit of the true craftsman still lives in the little jewelry shops on and near the Ponte Vecchio.

What we did in Florence matters little for the spirit of Florence is in the air, to be absorbed as naturally as the air. There is a grace and polish to everything the Florentines do---they even beg gracefully---and do very little of that. Small wonder that the artistic activity of the Renaissance centered here for the people themselves are beautiful, especially the children. But you will want to know what we did. Saturday morning we secured a large touring car and drove about the city, through narrow streets, across the river Arno over old bridges, past the old city walls, past the cathedral and the famous campanile, near old watch towers, and finally to the old Etruscan town of Fiesole, several miles away on the top of a high hill. Here the Etruscans had built temples and walls hundreds of years before the Roman era. Over the ruins of this old civilization the Romans built their theatre, and nearby stands the cathedral built in the 11th century and about it clusters the town and the modern villas, and the drive is worth while for the excellent views of Florence from the winding road, if for no other reason. On our way back we drove through the "Cascine", a large wooded park, about three miles long. The trees were wonderful---seemed to be virgin timber.

After lunch at the hotel (for a notice on the door of our room informed us that if we ate our meals elsewhere the price of the room would be increased) we walked to the Uffizi Gallery, one of the two most famous picture galleries in the world, both of which are here in Florence. We had had some difficulty about keeping together in going thru museums, so this time we separated and each went his own way---a very happy arrangement. There were hundreds of pictures by the early Italian masters---in which group the Uffizi Gallery excels. Then there were later pictures by Da Vinci, Michel Angelo, Raphael, Correggio, Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt. Michel Angelo's "Holy Family" impressed me more than any of the others, I believe, although one Raphael Madonna was superb. But Michel Angelo's work is so strong and masterful, while Raphael has more grace and tenderness.

Having stayed in the gallery until closing time we spent the rest of the afternoon browsing around through the little shops on the Ponte Vecchio, and in the neighborhood. Such exquisite rings, chains, cameos, pendants, bracelets, mosaic and pearls! After dinner we took a short walk into town, window shopping as we went.

Sunday morning we spent in the Pitti gallery where I at last saw the original of the picture I have loved so long---The Madonna della Seggiola, by Raphael. I could easily have spent the whole morning before it. There were nine Raphael masterpieces, besides others by Murillo, Rubens, Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Velazquez, and Van Dyck. I cannot describe my feelings in the presence of those exquisite masterpieces. To me the Pitti collection embodies the supreme expression of visual beauty. I know I shall return to it again and again.

Florence II.

We rested a while after lunch, and then I started off by myself armed with Hector's Baedeker guidebook, in search of adventure. I reached the famous Baptistry just in time to see several infants baptized in orthodox fashion, by the pouring on of water, spent a few minutes before the beautiful bronze doors, and then spent some time in the huge cathedral and examining the statuary and realiefs on the campanile, designed by Giotto. Then to Or San Michele, a historic old church and municipal store house.

A walk of about fifteen minutes brought me to the "Spedale degli Innocenti" or Foundling Hospital decorated with the familiar medallions by della Robbia, known as the "Bambini" to us, round plaques---a child in swaddling clothes against a blue back ground. A few minutes before the frescoes in the fore court of the church of the Holy Annunciation, the work of Andrea del Sarto, were very enjoyable. Here I talked with a young Canadian who is doing Europe on a bicycle on his way to Rome to study in the American Academy. I gave the church of Saint Mark, the enormous church of San Lorenzo, and the Palazzo Ricardi momentary glances, for the most interesting things in them were not open on Sunday afternoon.

Returning to the hotel, I found myself opposite the huge church of Santa Maria Novella, erected in 1279-1350. In the chapels to the right and left of the altar were famous paintings by early Italian masters and in the choir behind the altar were old choir stalls, but most interesting of all to me was the fountain by della Robbia. After dinner Uncle Dudley and I started out to find a Mr. Valloresi whom we had met on the "Patria" and whose home is in Florence, and after a wild goose chase, due to a wrong turn which I took, finally found the place, with the assistance of some very cordial Italians of whom we made inquiry. However Mr. Valloresi was out of town so we returned to the hotel none the wiser except for a new appreciation of Florentine courtesy and an added respect for winding streets and unexpected turns. We leave tomorrow morning for Venice. I don't see how I could like it any better than Florence.

Lots of love,

Dan.