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LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Twelve.]

Bird's-Eye View of Naples---A Charming Picture---Not so Charming in Detail---Sharp Social Contrasts---Work and Wages---A Wonderful Cave---The Poisoned Grotto---A Dogged Experiment.

NAPLES, August, 1867.

Ascent of Vesuvius--Continued.

"See Naples and die." Well, I don't know that one would necessarily die after merely seeing it, but to start in to try to live there might turn out a little differently. To see Naples as we saw it in the early dawn from far up on the side of Vesuvius, is to see a picture of wonderful beauty. At that distance its dingy buildings looked white--and so, rank on rank of balconies, windows and roofs, they piled themselves up from the blue ocean till the colossal castle of St. Elmo topped the grand white pyramid and gave the picture symmetry, emphasis and completeness. And when its lilies turned to roses--when it blushed under the sun's first kiss--it was beautiful beyond all description. One might well say, then, "See Naples and die." The frame of the picture was charming itself. In front, the smooth sea--a vast mosaic of many colors; the lofty islands swimming in a dreamy haze in the distance; at our end of the city the stately double peak of Vesuvius, and its strong black ribs and seams of lava stretching down to the limitless level campagna--a green carpet that enchants the eye and leads it on and on, past clusters of trees, and isolated houses, and snowy villages, until it shreds out in a fringe of mist and general vagueness far away. It is from the Hermitage, there on the side of Vesuvius, that one should "see Naples and die."

But don't go within the walls and look at it in detail. That takes away some of the romance of the thing. You see, the people are filthy in their habits, and this makes filthy streets and breeds disagreeable sights and smells. [N. B.--You never saw a community so prejudiced against the cholera as these Neapolitans are. But they have good reason to be. The cholera generally fetches a Neapolitan when it gets hold of him, because, you understand, before the doctor can dig through the dirt and get at the disease the man dies. The upper classes take a sea bath every day, and are pretty decent.]

The streets are generally about wide enough for one wagon, and how they do swarm with people! It is Broadway repeated in every street, in every court, in every alley! Such masses, such throngs, such multitudes of hurrying, bustling, struggling humanity! I never saw the like of it, hardly even in New, I think. There are seldom any sidewalks, and when there are, they are not often wide enough to pass a man on without caroming on him. So everybody walks in the street--and where the street is wide enough, carriages are forever dashing along. Why a thousand people are not run over and crippled every day is a mystery that no man can solve.

But if there is a ninth wonder in the world, it must be the dwelling-houses of Naples. I honestly believe a good square majority of them are a hundred feet high! And the solid brick walls are seven feet thick. You go up nine flights of stairs before you get to the "first" floor. No, not nine, but there or thereabouts. There is a little birdcage of an iron railing in front of every window clear away up, up, up, among the eternal clouds, where the roof is, and there is always somebody looking out from the first floor, people of ordinary size looking out from the second, people that look a little smaller yet from the third--and from thence upward they grow smaller and smaller by a regularly graduated diminution, till the folks in the topmost windows seem more like birds in an uncommonly tall marten-box than anything else! The perspective of one of these narrow cracks of streets, with its rows of tall houses stretching away till they come together in the distance; its clothes-lines crossing over at all altitudes and waving their bannered raggedness over the swarms of people below; and the white-dressed women perched in balcony railings all the way from the pavement up to the heavens--a perspective like that is really worth going into Neapolitan details to see.

Ascent of Vesuvius--Continued.

Naples, with its immediate suburbs, contains 625,000 inhabitants, but I am satisfied it covers no more ground than San Francisco. It reaches up into the air infinitely higher than three San Franciscos, though, and there is where the secret of it lies. I will observe here, in passing, that the contrasts between opulence and poverty, and magnificence and misery, are more frequent and more striking in Naples than in Paris even. You must go to the Bois de Boulogne to see fashionable dressing, splendid equipages and stunning liveries, and to the Faubourg St. Antoine to see vice, misery, hunger, rags, dirt--but in the thoroughfares of Naples these things are all mixed together. Naked boys of nine years and the pampered children of luxury; shreds and tatters, and brilliant uniforms; jackass carts and jostle-carriages; beggars, Princes and Bishops, jostle each other in every street. At 6 o'clock every evening, all Naples turns out to drive on the *Riviera di Chiaja*, (whatever that may mean;) and for two hours one may stand there and see the motliest and the worst mixed procession go by that ever eyes beheld. Princes (there are more Princes than policemen in Naples--the city is infested with them)--Princes who live up seven flights of stairs and don't own any principalities, will keep a carriage and go hungry; and clerks, mechanics, milliners and strumpets will go without their dinners and squander the money on a hack-ride in the Chiaja; the rag-tag and bob-tail of the city stack themselves up, to the number of twenty or thirty, on a rickety little go-cart hauled by a donkey not much bigger than a tom-cat, and they drive in the Chiaja; Dukes and bankers, in sumptuous carriages and with gorgeous drivers and footmen, turn out, also, and so the furious procession goes. For two hours rank and wealth, and obscurity and poverty clatter along side by side in the wild procession, and then go home serene, happy, covered with glory!

I was looking at a magnificent marble staircase in the King's palace, the other day, which, it was said, cost five million francs, and I suppose it did cost half a million, maybe. I felt as if it must be a fine thing to live in a country where there was such comfort and such luxury as this. And then I stepped out musing, and almost walked over a rusty-looking wretch who was eating his dinner on the curbstone--a piece of bread and a bunch of grapes. When I found that this fellow was clerking in a fruit establishment (he had the establishment along with him in a basket), at two cents a day, and that he had no palace at home where he lived, I lost some of my enthusiasm concerning the happiness of living in Italy.

This naturally suggests to me a thought about wages here. Lieutenants in the army get about a dollar a day, and common soldiers a couple of cents. I only know one clerk--he gets four dollars a month. Printers get six dollars and a half a month, but I have heard of a foreman who gets thirteen. To be growing suddenly and violently rich, as this man is, naturally makes him a bloated aristocrat. The air he puts on are insufferable.

And, speaking of wages, reminds me of prices of merchandise. In Paris you pay twelve dollars a dozen for Jouvin's best kid gloves; gloves of about as good quality sell here at three or four dollars a dozen. You pay five and six dollars apiece for fine linen shirts in Paris; here and in Leghorn you pay two and a half. In Marseilles you pay forty dollars for a first class dress coat, made by a good tailor, but in Leghorn you can get a full dress suit for the same money. Here you get handsome business suits at from ten to twenty dollars, and in Leghorn you can get an overcoat for fifteen dollars that would cost you seventy in New York. Fine kid boots are worth eight dollars in Marseilles and four dollars here. Lyons velvets rank higher in America than those of Genoa. Yet the bulk of Lyons velvets you buy in the States are made in Genoa and imported into Lyons, where they receive the Lyons stamp and are then exported to America. You can buy enough velvet in Genoa for \$25 to make a five hundred dollar cloak in New York. Of course these things bring me back, by a natural and easy transition, to the

Ascent of Vesuvius--Continued.

And the wonderful Blue Grotto is thus suggested to me. It is situated on the Island of Capri, 22 miles from Naples. We chartered a little steamer and went out there. Of course, the police boarded us and put us through a health examination, and inquired into our politics before they would let us land. The frills these little one-horse Governments put on are in the last degree ridiculous. They even put a policeman on board of our boat to keep an eye on us as long as we were in the Capri dominions. They thought we wanted to steal that grotto, I suppose. Well, it was worth stealing. The entrance to the cave is four feet high and four feet wide, and is in the face of a lofty perpendicular cliff--the sea-wall. You enter in small boats--and a tight squeeze it is, too. You cannot go in at all when the tide is up. Once within, you find yourself in an arched cavern about one hundred and sixty feet long, one hundred and twenty wide, and about seventy high. How deep it is no man knows. It goes down to the bottom of the ocean. The waters of this placid subterranean lake are the brightest, loveliest blue that can be imagined. They are as transparent as plate glass, and their coloring would shame the richest sky that ever bent over Italy. No tint could be more ravishing, no lustre more superb. Throw a stone into the water, and the myriad of tiny bubbles that are created flash out a brilliant glare like blue theatrical fires. Slip an oar, and its blade turns to splendid frosted silver, tinted with blue. Let a man jump in, and instantly he is cased in an armor more gorgeous than ever a kingly Crusader wore.

Then we went to Ischia, but I had already been to that island and tired myself to death "resting" a couple of days and studying human villainy, with the landlord of the Gauda Sentinelle for a model. So we went to Procida, and from thence to Pozzuoli, where Saint Paul landed after he sailed from Samos. I landed at precisely the same spot where Paul landed, and so did Dan and the others. It was a remarkable coincidence. St. Paul preached to these people seven days before he started to Rome. Nero's Baths, the ruins of Baia, the Temple of Serapis; Cumae, where the Cumaean Sybil interpreted the oracles, the Lake Agnano, with its ancient submerged city still visible far down in its depths--these and a hundred other points of interest we poked around and examined with critical imbecility, but the Grotto of the Dog claimed my chief attention, because I had heard and read so much about it. Everybody has written about the Grotto del Cane and its poisonous vapors, from Pliny down to Smith, and every tourist has held a dog over its floor by the legs to test the capabilities of the place. The dog dies in a minute and a half--a chicken instantly. As a general thing, strangers who crawl in there to sleep do not get up until they are called. And then they don't either. The stranger that ventures to sleep there takes a permanent contract. I wanted to see this grotto. I resolved to take a dog and hold him myself; suffocate him a little, and time him; suffocate him some more and then finish him. We reached the grotto at about three in the afternoon, and proceeded at once to make the experiments. But now, an important difficulty presented itself. After I had taken off my coat and bathed a handkerchief with cologne, and tied it over my face, and got all ready, and was wrought up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, I recollected that we hadn't any dog. This toned me down some. Well, I thought the matter over, and concluded to go back to a house, about half a mile away, where I had seen a dog, and see if I could borrow it. Brown grumbled a good deal, for the day was hot, but my interest was hot, too, and we started. And so we walked, tramped, tramped, till I thought we had tramped ten miles, and at last we reached the house, almost fagged out. We sat there and chatted awhile, and dropped gently into the subject of the dog, and found that the woman who owned him was prejudiced against poisoning him. It was singular, but we had no time to discuss the foolish prejudices of "them pheasants," as Brown calls the peasantry, and so we just bought the dog, out and out, and started back. It was a long pull, and a weary one. Pull is the correct word, because the dog didn't want to come, and so we had to haul him, turn about, by a long rope he had around his neck. Sometimes that dog would sit down and brace his fore-paws, and it took both of us to start him; and when he did come he would come with a leap, a skip and a jump, and then he would prance twenty steps to the right and twenty to the left with his paws in the air and his collar

half over his ears, and cavort around and carry on like a lunatic. And Brown would "rair back" on the rope and sweat and swear. He swore at me, too, for wanting to take so much trouble just to try some foolish experiments. This person has no appreciation of science.

Well, toward sunset we got the dog to the place, and I took off my coat in a fever of excitement, and rolled up my sleeves, and saturated my handkerchief again and tied it over my nose. And then--just then, after all my trouble and vexation, the dog went up and smelt Brown's breath and laid down and died.

Ascent of Vesuvius--Continued.

This subject will keep till my next, I suppose. MARK TWAIN.