

# LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Six.]

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GENOA, ITALY, July 16th, 1867.  
Loveliness.

EDITORS ALTA: I want to camp here. I had rather not go any further. There may be prettier women elsewhere, but I doubt it. They certainly cannot be so plenty anywhere else. The population of Genoa is 120,000; two-thirds of these are women, I think, and at least two-thirds of the women are beautiful. They are as dressy, and as tasteful and as graceful as they could possibly be without being angels. However, angels are not very dressy, I believe. At least the angels in pictures are not—they wear nothing but wings. But these Genoese women do look so charming. Most of the young demoi-selles are robed in a cloud of white from head to foot, though many trick themselves out more elaborately. Nine-tenths of them wear nothing on their heads but a filmy sort of veil, which falls down their backs like a white mist. They are very fair, and many of them have blue eyes, but black and dreamy dark brown ones are met with oftenest.

The ladies and gentlemen of Genoa have a pleasant fashion of prowling around a large Park on the top of a hill in the centre of the city, from six till nine in the evening, and then eating ices in a neighboring garden an hour or two longer. We went to the Park on Sunday evening. Two thousand persons were present, chiefly young ladies and gentlemen. The gentlemen were dressed in the very latest Paris fashions, and the robes of the ladies glinted among the trees like so many snow-flakes. The multitude moved round and round the Park in a great procession. The bands played, and so did the fountains; the moon and the gas lamps lit up the scene, and altogether it was a brilliant and an animated picture. I scanned every female face that passed, and it seemed to me that all were beautiful. I never saw such a perfect freshet of loveliness before. To be a belle in Genoa, a lady would have to be superhumanly beautiful. I do not see how a man of only ordinary decision of character could marry here, because, you know, before he could get his mind made up he would fall in love with somebody else. I fell in love with a hundred and eighty women myself, on Sunday evening, and yet I am not of a susceptible nature. Still, I would like to camp here. Brigham ought to come to Genoa. If he could only come here for one day, he would discharge those eighty-five miraculously ugly women who vegetate in his harem now. One of those girls I saw in the Park I can never forget. She was very beautiful, and she had a cold in the head. She blew her nose continually, and the more she blew it the more lovely she seemed to me. I would ask no other happiness on this earth could I always be with that girl and see her blow her nose. I followed her about the Park for an hour, trying to summon courage enough, but I could not do it. I wanted to ask her to let me blow her nose for her once. Only just once. If I could have blown her nose only just one time, I could have been contented and cheerful all the days of my life. But I was too modest. Modesty has always kept me down in the world, and always will, I suppose.

But speaking of fashion reminds me that one can see more real fashion, among gentlemen and ladies both, in one day in Genoa, than he can in three in Paris. I suppose there are fashionable people in Paris, but if they ever come on the street it must be in close carriages.

### Stub-Hunters.

Never smoke any Italian tobacco. Never do it on any account. It makes me shudder to think what it must be made of. You cannot throw an old cigar "stub" down anywhere, but some seedy rascal will pounce upon it on the instant. I like to smoke a good deal, but it wounds my sensibilities to see one of these stub-hunters watching me out of the corners of his hungry eyes and calculating how long my cigar is going to last. It reminded me, too, painfully of that San Francisco undertaker who used to go to sickbeds with his watch in his hand and time the corpse. One of these infamous stub-hunters followed us all over the Park last night, and we never got a smoke that was worth a cent. We were always moved to appease him with the stub before the cigar was half gone, because he looked so viciously anxious. He regarded us as his own legitimate prey, by right of discovery, I think, because he drove off several other professionals who wanted to take stock in us.

Now, they must chew up those old stubs, and dry and sell them for smoking tobacco. Therefore, give your custom to other than Italian brands of the article.

### Genoa, "The Superb."

"The Superb" and the "City of Palaces" are names which Genoa has held for centuries. She is full of palaces, certainly, and the palaces are sumptuous inside, but they are very rusty without, and make no pretensions to architectural magnificence. "Genoa, the Superb," must surely refer to the women.

We have visited several of the palaces—immense thick-walled piles, with great stone staircases, tessellated marble pavements on the floors, (sometimes they make a mosaic work, of intricate designs, wrought in pebbles, or little fragments of marble laid in cement), and grand saloons, hung with pictures by Rubens, Guido, Titian, Paul Veronese, and so on, and portraits of heads of the family, in plumed helmets and gallant coats of mail, and patrician ladies, in stunning costumes of centuries ago. But, of course, the folks were all out in the country for the summer, and might not have known enough to ask us to dinner if they had been at home, and so all the grand empty saloons, with their resounding pavements, their grim pictures of dead ancestors, and tattered banners with the dust of bygone centuries upon them, seemed to brood solemnly of death and the grave, and our spirits ebbed away, and our cheerfulness passed from us. We never went up to the eleventh story. We always began to suspect ghosts. There was always an undertaker-looking villain of a servant along, too, who handed us a programme, pointed to the picture that began the list of the saloon he was in, and then stood stiff and stark and unsmiling in his petrified livery till we were ready to move on to the next chamber, and then he marched sadly ahead and took up another malignantly respectful position as before. I took up so much time praying that the roof would fall in on these dispiriting flunkies that I never had any left to bestow upon palace and pictures.

And besides, as in Paris, we had a guide. Perdition catch all the guides. This scoundrel said he was the most gifted linguist in Genoa, as far as English was concerned, and that only two persons in the city beside himself could talk the language at all. He showed us the birth-place of Christopher Columbus, and after we had reflected in silent awe before this inspiring shrine for fifteen minutes, he said it was not the birth-place of Columbus, but of Columbus's grandmother! When we demanded an explanation of his wretched conduct he only shrugged his shoulders and answered in barbarous Italian. He showed us three manuscript letters written by Columbus (they are kept in a marble pillar in the municipal palace under triple lock), and when I asked him if Columbus wrote them himself, he said "Oh, no." I said, "Then who the devil did write them?" and he said he didn't know.

I began to suspect that this fellow's English was shaky, and I thought I would test the matter. He showed us a fine bust of Columbus on a pedestal, and I said, "Is this the first time this person, this Columbus, was ever on a bust?" and he innocently answered, "Oh, no." I began to think, then, that when he didn't understand a question, he just answered, "Oh, no," at a risk and took the chances. So I said, "This Columbus you talk so much about—is he dead?" And the villain said quietly, "Oh, no!" I tested him further. I said, "This palace of the Dorias which you say is so old—is it fifty years old?" "Oh, no." "Is it five hundred?" "Oh, no." "It's a thousand, though, ain't it?" "Oh, yes." So his plan was to answer, "Oh, no," twice, always, and then, "Oh, yes," by way of a change. All the information we got out of that guide we shall be able to carry along with us, I think.

### Church Magnificence.

I haven't been to church so often in a century as I have in the last few weeks. The people in the old lands seem to make churches their best hold. Especially does this seem to be the case with the citizens of Genoa. I think there is a church every fifty yards all over town. The streets are sprinkled from end to end with shovel-hatted, long-robed, well-fed old priests, and the church bells by dozens are pealing all the day long, nearly. Every now and then one comes across a friar of orders gray, with shaven head, long, coarse robe, rope girdle and beads, and in sandals or entirely barefoot. These fellows suffer in the flesh, and do penance all their lives I suppose, but they look like consummate famine-breeders. They are all fat and greasy. They would try out well. The generality of them would yield oil like a whale.

The old Cathedral of San Lorenzo was about as notable a building as we have found to-day. It is vast, and has colonnades of noble pillars, and a great organ, and the customary pomp of gilded mouldings, pictures, frescoed ceilings, and so forth. I cannot describe it, of course—it would require a good many pages to do that. But it is a curious place. They said that half of it—from the front door half way down to the altar—was a Jewish Synagogue before the Savior was born, and that no alteration had been made in it since that time. I coppered the statement, but I did it reluctantly. I mentioned to the old church-guide that I doubted what he seemed so fully to believe, only because I couldn't help it—not because I wanted to. The place looked in too perfect repair to be so ancient. The main point of interest about the Cathedral is the little Chapel of St. John the Baptist. They only allow women to enter it on one day in the year, on account of the animosity they still cherish against the sex because of the murder of the Saint by Herodias. In this Chapel is a marble chest, in which, they told us, were the ashes of St. John; and around it was wound a chain, which, they said, had confined him when he was in prison. I did not desire to copper these statements, and yet I could not feel certain that they were correct—partly because I could have broken that chain, and so could St. John, and partly because I had seen St. John's ashes before, in another Church. I don't think St. John had two sets of ashes.

They also showed us a portrait of the Madonna which was painted by St. Luke, and it did not look half as old and rusty as some of the pictures by Rubens. I could not help admiring Luke's modesty in never once mentioning in his writings that he could paint. But isn't this relic business a little absurd? I find a piece of the true cross in every old church I go into, and some of the nails that held it together. I would not like to be positive, but I think I have seen as much as a keg of these nails. Then there is the crown of thorns: they have got one in Sainte Chapelle, in Paris, and I think they keep a couple in Notre Dame. And I have seen stacks of bones of St. Denis, enough to make four St. Denis's, and have a bone or two to spare.

I started to write about the churches, but I keep shirking the subject. I could say that the Church of the Annunciation is a wilderness of beautiful columns, of statues, gilded mouldings, and pictures almost countless, but that would give no one an entirely perfect idea of the thing, and so where is the use? One family built the whole affair, and have got money left. There is where the mystery lies. I had an idea at first that a mint could not stand the expense.

### Now They Live.

These people here live in the heaviest, highest, broadest, darkest, solidest houses one can imagine. Each one might "laugh a siege to scorn." Fifty feet front and a hundred high is about the style, and you go up three flights of stairs before you begin to come upon signs of occupancy. Everything is stone, and stone of the heaviest—floors, stairways, mantels, benches—everything. The walls are four to five feet thick. The streets generally are four or five to eight feet wide and as crooked as a corkscrew. You go along one of these gloomy cracks, and look up and behold the sky like a mere ribbon of light, far above your head, where the tops of the tall houses on either side of the street bend almost together. You feel as if you were at the bottom of some tremendous abyss, with all the world a mile above you. You wind in and out and here and there, in the most mysterious way, and have no more idea of the points of the compass than if you were a blind man. You can never persuade yourself that these are actually

streets, and the frowning, dingy, monstrous houses dwellings, till you see one of these beautiful, exquisitely dressed women emerge from them—see her emerge from a dark, dreary-looking den that looks dunceon all over, from the ground away half-way up to heaven. And then you wonder that such a charming moth could come from such a forbidding shell as that. The streets are wisely made narrow and the houses heavy and thick and stony, in order that the people may be cool in this roasting climate. And they are cool, and stay so. And while I think of it—the men wear hats and have very dark complexions, but the women wear no head-gear but a flimsy veil like a gossamer's web, and yet are exceedingly fair as a general thing. Singular, isn't it?

The wonderful Pallavicini Garden is—but the mail is closing.

MARK TWAIN.