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[Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1867, by Fred'k MacCullish & Co., in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the District of California.]

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Seven.]

The Wonderful Cathedral at Milan---Saintly Side Shows---Condensed Biography of St. Borromeo---The Splendors of a Saint's Sepulchre---Ecclesiastical Extravagance---Some Dry Figures---How the Great Cathedral is Built.

MILAN, Italy, July, 1867.

The Great Cathedral.

What a wonder it is! So grand, so solemn, so vast! And yet so delicate, so airy, so graceful! A very world of solid weight, and yet it seems in the soft moonlight only a fairy delusion of frost-work that might vanish with a breath! How sharply its pinnacled angles and its wilderness of spires were cut against the sky, and how richly their shadows fell upon its snowy roof! It was a vision!—a miracle!—an anthem sung in stone, a poem wrought in marble!

Howsoever you look at the great Cathedral, it is noble, it is beautiful! Wherever you stand in Milan, or within seven miles of Milan, it is visible—and when it is visible, no other object can chain your whole attention. Leave your eyes unfettered by your will but a single instant and they will surely turn to seek it. It is the first thing you look for when you rise in the morning, and the last your lingering gaze rests upon at night. Surely, it must be the princeliest creation that ever brain of man conceived.

This morning at 9 o'clock we went and stood before this marble colossus. The central one of its five great doors is bordered with a bas-relief of birds and fruits and beasts and insects, which have been so exquisitely carved out of the marble that they seem like living creatures—and the figures are so numerous and the design so complex, that one might study it a week without exhausting its interest. On the great steeple—surmounting the myriad of spires—inside of the spires—over the doors, the windows—everywhere that a nook or a corner can be found about the enormous building, from roof to base, there is a marble statue, and every statue is a study in itself! Raphael, Angelo, Canova—giants like these gave birth to the designs, and their own pupils carved them. Every face is eloquent with expression, and every attitude is full of grace. Away above, on the lofty roof, rank on rank of carved and fretted spires spring high in the air, and through their rich tracery one sees the sky beyond. In their midst the central steeple towers proudly up like the mainmast of some great Indianaman among a fleet of coasters.

Within the church, long rows of fluted columns, like huge monuments, divided the building into broad aisles, and on the figured pavement fell many a soft blush from the painted windows above. I knew the church was very large, but I could not perceive its great size until I noticed that the men standing far down by the altar looked like half-grown boys, and seemed to glide, rather than walk. We wanted to go aloft. The Sacristan showed us a marble stairway (of course it was marble, and of the purest and whitest—there is no other stone, and no brick, no wood, and no iron, among its building materials), and told us to go up 182 steps and stop till he came. It was not necessary to say stop—we should have done that anyhow. We were tired by the time we got there. This was the roof. Here, springing from its broad marble flagstones, were the long files of spires, looking very tall close at hand, but diminishing in the distance like the pipes of an organ. We could see, now, that the statue on the top of each was the size of a large man, though they all looked like dolls from the street. We could see, also, that from the inside of these hollow spires, from sixteen to thirty-one beautiful marble statues looked out upon the world below.

From the eaves to the comb of the roof stretched an endless succession great curved marble beams, like the fore and aft braces of a steamship, and along each beam from end to end stood up a row of richly carved flowers and fruits—each separate and distinct, and over 15,000 species represented. At a little distance these rows seem to close together like the ties of a railroad track, and then the mingling together of the buds and blossoms of this marble garden forms a picture that is exquisitely beautiful.

We climbed about two hundred and fifty steps higher, and stood not far below the gilded Madonna that keeps eternal watch and ward on the central steeple, and all Italy lay spread out before us! As far as the eye could reach were groves and gardens, highways and villages, and tiny white specks that stood for houses—and far below clustered the forest of pinnacles; and yet further down pigmy men and women moved busily about the streets, like processions of creeping insects. We were filled with the sublimity of the scene.

The Side-Shows.

We then took a drink. The Sacristan—I think that is what they call him, though maybe it was Christian, for he had excellent beer—the Sacristan got out his bottles, and when we found we were not just quite exactly full of sublimity, we went to work and filled up with beer. And we kept on, you know, until the beer had rather the advantage of the sublimity. I did not mind that, though, because you can get sublimity at any great altitude, but you can't always get beer above the snow belt. But mixed liquors are bad, and mixed magnificence is worse. When you come to mix beer and sublimity it is bound to fetch you. It would have been too many for us but for a most fortunate circumstance. Some people came up into that steeple, and we judged it best to assist them down. Each one of us got between two of these parties and let them take hold of our arms, and then we helped them down. This kept our minds employed, and so the beer had no chance to affect us.

I did intend to write about some other wonders connected with the Cathedral, but I have overheard Brown describing them to the chambermaid, (who does not understand English,) and have taken down his words in shorthand. I can give his account, and that will save trouble. I am only sorry his language is not more refined. He said: "You understand, Susan, that this church used to be bossed by a gorgeous old brick that was an Archbishop—San Carlo Borromeo—he had rich parents, and they made him a saint. He has been dead nearly three hundred years, but they've dried him, and stowed him away in the hold of the church, and one of them priests took us down to see him for five francs. It's not part of the regular circus, you know, and so you have to pay extra, like it is when you go to see the foreigner swallow butcher knives outside the menagerie. Well, this rooster lit a tall candle, like a broomstick, and conveyed us through the cellar till he got to a place the size of a single bed-room for a student that don't keep a trunk, which had a solid silver coffin in it as large as a bath-tub, and had a fresco all around the upper part of the walls made of solid silver, worth 2,000,000 francs, by weight, and representing deceased when he was born, and when he borrowed money and gave it to the poor, and when a highwayman tried to shoot him, but a miracle made the pistol hang fire, because the powder was wet, and how he was Marshal of the Day in a procession to stop the plague, but it didn't work—and I don't remember the others. And then this old sport lit some more candles and began to grind a spark in the end of the coffin like a hand-organ, and it all sunk away from the lid, and went down out of sight, and showed a pure crystal coffin, clearer than any glass, with the defendant inside of it. He was wrapped up, from his chin to his heels, in cloth made of gold, and covered all over with diamonds and such things, and you couldn't see anything of him but his head—and when I saw that, I just antied up and left."

A Few Details.

I like to revel in the driest details of the great cathedral. The building is 500 feet long by 180 wide, and the principal steeple is in the neighborhood of 400 feet high. It has 7,148 marble statues, and will have upwards of 3,000 more when it is finished. In addition, it has 1,500 bas-reliefs. It has 136 spires—21 more are to be added. Each spire is surmounted by a statue six and a half feet high. Everything about the church is marble, and all from the same quarry; it was bequeathed to the Archbishopric for this purpose centuries ago. So nothing but the mere workmanship costs; still that is expensive—the bill foots up six hundred and eighty-four millions of francs, thus far (considerably over a hundred millions of dollars), and it is estimated that it will take a hundred and twenty years yet to finish the cathedral. It looks complete, but is far from being so. We saw a new statue put in its niche yesterday alongside of one which had been standing there four hundred years. There are four staircases leading up to the main steeple, each of which cost a hundred thousand dollars, with the 408 statues which adorn them. Marco Comptoni was the architect who designed the wonderful structure more than five hundred years ago, and it took him forty-sixty years to work out the plan and get it ready to hand over to the builders. He is dead now. The building was begun a little less than five hundred years ago, and the third generation hence will not see it completed. That is all I wished to say, I believe, except that the vast windows which I called "painted," are not painted at all, but every one of the beautiful pictures is a mosaic, formed of countless fragments patiently and laboriously pieced together, and with such exquisite art that no oil painting could be more soft, or rich, or more delicately shaded or more beautiful. In some of the windows there are sixty-four of these pictures, and each of them is capable of feasting your eyes with pleasure for many a day. They say this Cathedral is second to St. Peter's at Rome. I cannot understand how it can be second to anything made by human hands.

MARK TWAIN.

AN AMBROUS WARDROBE.—We saw at the rooms

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