

THE MEDITERRANEAN EXCURSION.

CIVITA VECCHIA THE FORLORN.

From Our Special Correspondent.

AT LARGE IN ITALY, July, 1867.

This is the vilest nest of dirt, vermin, and ignorance we have got into yet, except that African perdition they call Tangier, which is just like it. The people here live in alleys two yards wide. It is lucky the alleys are not wide, because they hold as much smell now as a person can stand, and of course, if they were wider, they would hold more, and then the people would die. These alleys are paved with stone, and carpeted with slush, and decayed rags, and decomposed vegetable tops, and remnants of old boots, all soaked with dishwater, and the people sit around on stools and enjoy it. They are indolent, as a general thing, and yet have few pastimes. They work two or three hours at a time, but not hard, and then they knock off and catch fleas. This does not require talent, because they only have to grab—if they don't get the one they are after, they get another. It is all the same to them. They are not particular. They have no partialities. Whichever one they get is the one they want. They have other kinds of insects, but it does not make them arrogant. They are very quiet, unpretending people. They have more of this kind of things than other communities, but they do not brag.

They are very uncleanly, these people, in face, in person, and dress. When they see anybody with a clean shirt on, it arouses their scorn. The women wash clothes half the day at the public fountains, but they are probably somebody else's; or, may be, they keep one suit to wear and another to wash, because they never wear any that have ever been washed. When they get done washing, they sit in the alleys and nurse their cubs. All the women in Civita Vecchia have large families. They nurse one at a time, and the others scratch their backs against the door-posts and are happy. All the people scratch. It is their delight. There is a rusty shrine here and there along the streets, where the people can watch and pray; but they don't do that; they scratch and pray. They like it better.

All this country is presided over by the Pope. They do not appear to have any schools here, and only one billiard table. Their education is at a very low stage. One portion of the men go into the military, another into the priesthood, a third into the shoemaking business, and the balance "lay around."

They keep up the passport system here yet, but so they do in Turkey. This shows that Turkey is not a whit more enlightened than the Papacy, whatever malignant villains may say to the contrary. I had to get my passport viséd in Florence, and then they would not let me come ashore here from Leghorn till a degraded policeman had examined it on the wharf and sent me a permit. They did not even dare to let me take my passport in my hands for 12 hours, I looked so formidable. They judged it best to let me cool down. They thought I wanted to take the town; likely. But such was not my desire—not if I had a chance to swap off and take the small-pox, any how. They examined my baggage at the depot a while ago. They passed my shirts, but they held on to my tooth-brush, so as to lay it before the Board of Commissioners and let them find out what it is for, and whether there is any harm in it or not. This was unfortunate, because I borrowed it from my shipmate, who is particular about his teeth to an extent which is ridiculous. And they took one of my blindest jokes (it was one of those extraordinary conundrums which I get up sometimes), and read it over carefully, and then read it again; and finally turned it around, and read it the wrong way. But it was too deep for them. They handed it around, and everybody ciphered at it a while, but it was no use. They all had to pass. It was no common joke. At last one of the oldest of the officers, apparently, and certainly one of the most abandoned and ignorant men I have ever looked upon, spelled it over very slowly and laboriously, and then shook his head three or four times, and said that in his opinion it was seditious. That was the first time I was alarmed. I immediately said I would explain the document, and they crowded around. And so in that sweltering place I explained, and perspired and perspired, and explained, with my coat off, and they took notes of all I said, but the more I explained the more they couldn't understand, and when they desisted at last, and summed up their notes, I couldn't understand it myself. They said they believed it was an incendiary document, leveled at the Government. I declared it was not, but they only shook their heads, and would not be satisfied. And then they consulted, and consulted, and consulted, a good while, and finally they confiscated it. I cannot tell how much I was grieved; because I had worked a long time on that joke, and took a good deal of pride in it, and now I shall never see it any more. I suppose it will be sent up and stowed away among the criminal archives of Rome, and will always be regarded as a mysterious infernal machine which would have blown up like a mine, and scattered the good Pope all around, but for a miraculous Providential interference. And I suppose that all the time I am in Rome the police will dog me about from place to place because they think I am a dangerous character.

It is fearfully hot in Civita Vecchia. The streets are made very narrow, and the houses built very solid, and heavy, and high, as a protection against the heat. This is the first Italian town I have seen, which does not seem to have a patron saint. I suppose no saint but the one that went up in the fiery chariot could stand the climate. This is a miserable town. They haven't any wonders here at all to exhibit to strangers. They haven't even a cathedral, with eleven tons of solid silver archbishops in the back-room, and a petrified saint in the cellar; and they don't show you any rusty buildings that are seven thousand years old, nor any ratty, smoke-dried, old fire-screens, which are splendid *chef d'œuvre* of Titian, or Simpson, or Keubens, or Ferguson, or any of those parties. I am going to Rome—there's nothing to see here. This town is the worst swindle yet.

MARK TWAIN.