

a score of children, doing the best he could for the reputation of San Giuseppe. There is a scouring drive to be done — circle after circle of road at an angle of forty-five — before you recover the plain of Empoli. A fat Samminiatese passed me on this declivity, swaying in his tax-cart as his horse galloped down with a loose rein. Good, easy man, he had his spectacles on his nose and read the *Corriere della Sera*. Neither the terrors of the steep nor the purple and grey stretches of the great valley, half revealed in the gathering dusk, had any interest for him.

Empoli seemed a hiving, unaired place after that empty mountain town. Its one long street was thronged with Sunday passengers, and every window had its elbow-cushion, and pair, or two pair, of shoulders thrust out. There you have a pastime of which the Tuscan woman never tires. When she has passed the age of being looked at, she will look — from a window. Men go to the café: the woman's café is the street, and the window-sill her little table. As for the promenade, it is a solemn ritual in which the following points are observed. The girls walk together in mid street, the young men on either side of them. The girls go one way, the young men meet them going the other; meet and pass; but there are no recognitions,

greetings, salutations, sidelong looks. Conversation is in undertones, no one laughs, and no one stops walking. You never saw such a mummery, so devoutly done. A few steps aside there is a piazza set with trees, a public garden well kept —



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and empty. Beyond that, again, you find a bridge over a long reach of river, an embanked way, a parapet upon which not to sit is an absurdity. No one sits there. Yet there are fishermen to be seen setting their lines aslant the flood, singing plaintive songs as they work; there are the skew-sails of barges urging slowly home in the twilight

— all the romantic riverine business is here. But no! The drift of fashion has left this spacious theatre bare; the Empolitani shuffle in procession up and down that very street where they are slaves every day of the week; and Nunziata, who will trundle a mop here to-morrow, must be unknown to Olinto, to whom to-morrow she may laugh her “*buon dì*.” Such are the Sunday diversions of a town which once held the fate of Florence within its walls. For it was in this very Empoli that they held a council —

After the havoc and the rout
Which tintured gules the Arbia's wave;

and here Farinata degli Uberti, exiled Florentine though he was, “with his face gravely perturbed,” says Villani, up and spoke his piece in her defence:

Alone I was, there in that place
Where every will saw Florence razed,
I on her side with open face.

This is the account he makes of it to Dante; and it seems to have been true. He shook his fist at Provenzano Salvani, the great Sieneſe captain, whose mind was that Florence should be laid level with the ground, and whose eloquence had nearly moved the council to agree with him. “If that beast,” says Farinata — and one can read the scorn



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of one city for the other trembling in his deep tones — “If that beast tread not out the fire he has kindled, I will build him a cage whence he will never get loose; and such a bonfire will I heap round about it that he will never live to quench it.” No doubt he meant what he said, and no doubt was able to have performed it. The upshot was that they made a peace at Castelfiorentino in Val d’ Elsa, which lasted just as long as such pacts usually did: to be exact, not six years. Benevento followed at just that interval of time, Tagliacozzo two years later. Farinata, who had enabled Florence to win those two battles and so recover what she had lost, was (as a consequence) further from her than he had ever been. *Tantæne animis!* So great a race and such little wars! I think one must be strongly enamoured of the drums and trumpets of history to care for such toy symphonies.

To those who love Wordsworth’s “pastoral melancholy,” and in low grey hills and willows about a sluggish grey brook can reap their quiet harvest, the long road by Elsa, from Empoli to Boccaccio’s town, will need no enhancing. To bolder spirits it will be redeemed by the sense of adventure which never fails the traveller when, by how slow degrees soever, he leaves the plain —

The Val
d’ Elsa:
Castelfioren-
tino.

and by two sights justificatory. Castelnuovo huddled on a cliff exactly big enough to hold it, is one, and the other is Capanaiole with a tall Pucci villa. Hereabouts, also, let me tell the humorous, they lead pigs by a string and collar round the neck — and do no better.



THE PIAZZA, EMPOLI.

Of Castelfiorentino, a precipitous town full of children, dust, and flies, there is nothing so comfortable to say. It is well-looking from without, but within cavernous and starved — like Dante's wolf —

Che di tutte brame
Semiava carica nella sua magrezza.¹

I think the people must have been veritably

¹ Whose gaunt ribs looked
A cage for all the lusts.