

FLORENCE.

As Marjorie went back to her school days to tell of the beginning of her love of bird watching, so do I return to St Mary's Hall where I was a boarder from 1919 to 21, and the subject of Foreign Travel which Mrs Fearnley taught and which was responsible for my love affair with Florence. Mrs Fearnley had spent holidays in her girlhood in Florence, at the time she told us when Princess May was there, that was old Queen Mary, the mother of the Duke of Windsor. So much she (Mrs Fearnley) loved the enchanted city of Florence that she excited all of us with a desire to see it at least once. I have been lucky enough to have visited and revisited it since 1924 and I am still entrigued and delighted with it and feel I have only scratched the surface in seeing and enjoying its works of art. The Uffizi Gallery, full of treasures and the Pitti Palace with a collection just as great are where the paintings collected over the centuries by the Medici family are housed. These were left to the city of Florence by the last of the Medicis with the understanding that they would never be dispersed. Anna Maria Lodovica was the generous donor and she has made it possible that not only Florentines but visitors to the city can be guests at this great feast of Art.

Florence is the most important city of central Italy north of Rome and was at one time the capitol of Italy. It is situated on the Arno river forty miles from the sea. It looks as if it were set in the bottom of a tea cup for it is at the foot of the Appenines in a valley surrounded with sloping hills covered with olive-groves, orchards and vineyards interspersed with pines. Florence means the city of flowers and in the Spring it is particularly so as the countryside is full of wild flowers. A doctor said he didnt see how anyone could die here in the summer or live in the winter as the weather is then very severe. The cold winds sweep down the river and from the mountains. We were there ~~in~~ January before last and stayed at the Berciele Hotel on the Arno and in spite of central heating, we were very uncomfortable. The dampness from the river makes it seem much colder. The famous Cianti wine is made in Florence and the last time we were there was in October, the month for harvesting the grapes. Twice we went out with groups in a bus to the surrounding villas to see the grapes brought in, in oxen carts drawn by teams of white oxen. We were then shown the presses in action and finally were shown the cellars full of bottles of different vintages. After a comprehensive tour we were given a peecnic of wine and ham sandwiches and in no time everyone became very friendly. *By all means to be*

The greatest period in Florentine history is from about 1200-1500 under the Medici rule. The Medici were first of all a family of doctors and later on as they obtained more wealth they became the best known family in Italy and eventually the best known in Europe. They became the money-lenders of Europe, lending not to individuals but to countries. The Medici were great men and great painters, sculptors and architects grew up around them in Florence. The only other age that can be compared to this prosperous time of Florence is the Golden age of Pericles.

In the center of the city is the cathedral with its baptistry and bell tower. The cathedral is St Maria del Fiori and is built of black and white marble but age has changed it for the white is now yellow and the black, brown. The beautiful Dome was the last thing done by

whereas the religious center is in the Piazza of the Duomo. The Piazza della Signoria is dominated by the imposing Palazzo Vecchio and the Loggia di Lanzi of which I spoke. The Palazzo Vecchio is the seat of the Civil Magistracy and the government. It was started probably in 1298 and from 1540 for ten years Cosimo I had his court there before transferring it to the Palazzo Pitti. In the courtyard of this building is a fountain with the charming statue of the boy and the dolphin by Verrochio.

Next to this building is the Uffizi Gallery which was built by the Medici and houses their wonderful collection of painting and statuary. The Tribuna Room is supposed to contain the best pictures and statuary. Here is the Venus de Medici. It is a copy of some pupil of Praxiteles. Byron praised it and someone said of it that they would like to marry it to Appollo Belvedere but the pose is rather artificial. To the left of this statue is the Wrestlers and to the right the knife grinder which is supposed to be the fellow who was to flay a criminal.

Among the many beautiful pictures there is the Madonna of the gold finch done by Raphael. The purity and sweetness of the Virgin's face the baby foot of the infant Christ on that of his mother and the dear little John the Baptist are delightful. John the Baptist has the customary shell around his waist with which he baptised Christ later. The delicate little flowers too that are scattered over the grass must be taken from the florentine springtime.

The Botticelli Room is our next stop. Botticelli means Little Barrel and this painter was the son of a barrel maker and so got his name. The Allegory of Spring painted in 1477 for the villa of Castello and was to glorify the Medici family. On the right Zephyr follows and holds onto Chloris approaching Flora who is scattering flowers. In the centre Venus and Cupid above blindfolded and shooting an arrow. on the left dance the Graces while Mercury disperses the clouds with caduceus. incidentally the face of Mercury is supposed to be a portrait of Giuliano de Medici, the handsome young man who was assassinated when only in his twenties and the middle Grace who is looking toward him is supposed to be a portrait of La Bella Simonetta with whom he was in love.

The Birth of Venus is the other large allegorical painting in this room also by Botticelli and is said to be the painting of the first nude. The model was supposed to have been la bella simonetta. There are two beautiful Madonnas in this room The Madonna of the Pomgranate in which the Infant holds the fruit in his hand and blesses with other hand and the Madonna holds a lily. The children around her are portraits of the Medici family. and the Madonna of the Magnificat showing Mary reading My soul doth magnify the Lord. The last picture we look at here is the visit of the Magi which is a lovely work. The three wise men are portraits of the Medici the old one in front, kneeling before the infant Christ is old Cosimo and the young man in white kneeling is Lorenzo the Magnificent. The figure of Joseph is especially good and a peacock on the broken wall adds a brilliant touch of color to the scene.

We now go across the famous Ponte Vecchio which in olden times connected the Uffizi and Pitti Palaces. There is work going on now restoring the old gallery which they hope will open in a year or two, housing a portrait collection but the bridge is so old and fragile that the work proves costly and slow. This bridge was first mentioned in 996 and was rebuilt in 1345. During the World war 2 By common agreement between the Germans and Allies this Bridge was spared from demolition although the other Bridges were knocked out and the approaches to the old

old bridge. It is lined with fascinating jewelry shops on both sides with an open space in the middle where you can look up and down the river. Here is a bust of Benvenuto Cellini, the Master Jeweller himself And the greatest Goldsmith and this is the bridge of the Goldsmiths.

On the other side of the Arno we are going to the Pitti Palace where more of the works of Art collected by the Medicis are. The Pitti Palace was built by Brunelleschi for the Pitti family who were rivals of the Medici. Later when the Pitti lost their money it was bought by the Medici. Raphaels Madonna of the Granduc is here. It was lost for many years and was sold to one of the grandukes by a book seller who had bought it for \$12 The Granduc was so fond of his picture that he carried it with him every where he went, therefore its name. Here too is Raphael's Madonna of the chair. It is said that one day Raphael was walking in the forest and saw ~~xxxxxxx~~ a peasant mother with her baby. He was so struck with the picture they made that he sketched and painted them on the top of a barrel.

There are many churches in Florence and all of them have something noteworthy in art. At St Maria Novella, the church of the Dominicans. There is a picture here by Cimabue, one of the earliest painters, and one by Giotto and in the church of Santa Maddalena dei Pazzi there is a famous fresco by Perugino of the Crucifixion. In the church of Or San Michele is a picture that is supposed to have mystic healing power. In the church of Santa Croce is the tomb of Michael Angelo and a cenotaph to Dante. Paintings of Giotto are also here. And so it goes, It is practically impossible to see everything that Florence has to offer in a short visit.

Modern Florence has a lot to offer. Besides the art treasures there are good places to eat, Sabitini's was one of our favorites and at Harry's Bar you can get good Italian or American food at reasonable prices. A good concert is put on nightly in the Piazza della Repubblica where for the price of a drink or two you can hear operatic excerpts sung by a tenor with a very good voice or music Hall numbers such as "Cha Cha" or Domani by a soprano. The local market has many and varied purchases at reasonable prices. Leather of course is parpmount but the carved gilded Frames and handwoven baskets make lovely presents. There is also hand made furniture that is beautiful and reasonable. Elaine has a friend who lives in Florida who furnished her whole house with it.

I don't care whether I go to Rome, Venice or Naples again but Florence calls me back. Go there, you'll love it, but don't travel on a Sunday, all Italians do.