

MARK TWAIN AND ITALY

Mark Twain first saw Italy in 1867 during his Quaker City tour and his impressions are recorded, with ample humorous license, in *The Innocents Abroad*. Italy was the major part of his introduction to Europe as he spent more time here than in France, the only other European country visited on this journey. His Italian experiences were the occasion for his extended reflection and judgment on European civilization in comparison to American. His preference for Nevada's Lake Tahoe over Lake Como, his unflattering pictures of Florence, Rome, and Naples, and his dismissal of many admired masterpieces as animable frauds or worse—in short his brash indifference or hostility to Italy's—and Europe's—claims became, with some magnification in the process, notorious as examples of American vulgarity.

In 1878 Twain made another brief tour through Italy, which is described in *A Tramp Abroad*. The chapters on Italy in this book are more mellow and judicious than similar chapters in *Innocents Abroad*. A tramp has a different outlook than an innocent travelling on a luxury tour, and there is less aggressive upholding of American superiority. Twain revisited Italy, he said, to give the country and himself a second chance. He did modify his prejudice for copies of noted paintings rather than the originals, and he discovered that there was more to aesthetic judgment than he had suspected, though he was never to know exactly what it was. His chief reason for returning was to see if he had learned anything in twelve years, and he was pleased to discover that he had. He always thought of himself as willing and ready to learn from Europe, but in fact there never was an American literary man of comparable stature to whom Europe imparted less.

In April, 1892, he made an excursion into Italy with his family that was intended as only a pleasant interval in their stay in Germany. But the Italian spring and Florence were so enticing that the

Twains decided to winter here, and they rented the Villa Viviani near Settignano. By September they were established in their new home, and Twain was describing in his notebook the gorgeous vistas, the attractive independence and good nature of the contadini, and the excessive charges made to him for the transportation of his trunks from the station. That winter was an immensely productive one for him. He finished *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, wrote the « £ 1,000,000 Bank-Note », started to convert « Those Extraordinary Twins » to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and began *Joan of Arc*. Perhaps the romantic surroundings, the air of antiquity and elegance that lingered about the villa helped spur Twain to begin his long-contemplated work on *Joan*. But his delight in the villa, where he said « the seclusion from the world and its worries[was] as satisfactory as a dream »¹ was soon interrupted by the nightmare of reality. The collapse of his business enterprises drove him back to New York in March of 1893, and he returned to Italy only to close the villa and move his family to Germany in June. A new return to Florence in November, 1903, was on doctor's orders, a last desperate search for a healthful climate for his wife, and a tribute to the happiness his family had found there before. Living in the Villa Reale di Quarto on the road to Sesto about four kilometers northwest of Florence, plagued by bad weather, an American landlady, and fears for his wife, Twain was at first miserable. But by January, 1904, he could write: « this secluded and silent solitude, this clean, soft air, and this enchanting view of Florence... are the right conditions for work. They are a persistent inspiration ».² Though he finished a few articles and did some work on his autobiography, little of any significance was written before the death of his wife on June 5, 1904, ended his stay and his association with Italy.

Twain, then, spent nearly two years in Italy as traveler or resident. But his experience here meant little to him and left few marks on his mind or work. Though he could read Italian with some facility, he never learned to speak it, as he did German, declaring himself

¹ A. B. PAINE, *Mark Twain, A Biography* (New York, 1912), II, 957.

² PAINE, *Mark Twain*, III, 1210.

too old or busy or indolent. His amusing articles, « Italian Without a Master » and « Italian With Grammar », reveal no great interest in or knowledge of the language. « A Whisper to the Reader », the preface to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, in its sprawling syntax, is evidently intended as a parody of Italian prose style, but is not very successful. The only Italian characters in his fiction are, I believe, the twins in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and their nationality is not significant to their characters or to the story. They are Italian only because the story's original idea was suggested by some Italian Siamese twins who toured America. The only short story with an Italian setting is « The Capitoline Venus ». But the story's origin was in an American hoax, and the setting is incidental to the development of Twain's familiar theme that since old art imposes upon us simply by its age, the value of new works can be increased by contribution to the stock of ideas or characters upon which Twain drew for his fiction. And there are few references to Italian personages or events in his fiction, speeches, articles, or letters.

His two travel books which include sections on Italy confirm the impression that he learned little about or from it. If we look to them for insight into Italian life and culture, we are disappointed. But we do learn from them something about Twain and a certain type of American mind. They raise the interesting problem of why the Missourian imbibed so little from a country that has traditionally been an inspiration and a revelation to Anglo-Saxons. In considering this problem, Twain's response to Italy can be treated as if it were a single impression, instead of a series of experiences stretching over almost four decades. It is all of a piece, even though there were modifications and reversals in his judgments which must be noted. His attitude towards Italy remained essentially the same throughout the years. And his knowledge of the country never deepened far beyond what he acquired on his first trip. He knew only the usual tourist circuit of Venice, Florence, and Rome, and knew it little better than the average tourist. Even his residence close to Florence did not lead to an intimate knowledge of its treasures. He once wrote that the Rome the tourist saw had as much interest for him as « East Hart-

ford... and no more», though adding that «there are other things here which stir me enough...»³.

Twain lacked any deep curiosity about Italy and Europe in general. He was more indifferent than irreverent. Europe seems to have no special attraction for him, and one feels that as a young man he would have set out as cheerfully for Borneo as for Italy, if the chance had offered. The destination of the first trip out of the United States that he ever contemplated was the Amazon, not the Tiber or the Rhine. When he did come to Europe, he jocularly claimed that he came simply because everyone was going. His first venture was in a group undertaking and there is a kernel of history truth in his joke. He was part of the beginning of the mass movement of Americans surging abroad. While earlier Americans had gone to pay homage, to admire, study, absorb, Twain went frankly, like the bulk of visitors that followed him, to enjoy himself—and to complain when he didn't. He was off, as he said, «on a picnic»⁴, and he grumbled when the picnic grounds were not suitable or the ground-keepers seemed obnoxious.

He returned on later visits in search of an inexpensive and healthy place to live. Though he spent some thirteen years of his life, including most of the last decade of the nineteenth century, outside of America, curiosity about Europe was the least of the motives for his sojourns. A recurring theme of his letters is his hatred of travel. By 1891, he could say, «I have seen all the foreign countries I want to see»⁵. Never, it seems, was he drawn to Italy by any of the motives connected with a sense of the cultural heritage it possessed. Nor did he experience in Italy the exhilaration and sense of discovery Anglo-Saxon artists have usually felt. With rare exceptions, his impressions of Italy give no sense of the spontaneous overflowing of a mind and heart deeply touched by a powerful experience. Twain was closer to an American bourgeois for whom Italy was an inexpensive home or pleasant interlude than to the typical American artist who reveled in its sensuous wealth. He came, like the millionaires who

³ PAINE, *Mark Twain*, II, 634.

⁴ MARK TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York, 1911), I, 45.

⁵ A. B. PAINE, *The Letters of Mark Twain* (New York, 1917), II, 548.

followed him, to loot Italy of its material, not its spiritual treasures. One of the strangest associations between Twain and Italy was the fact that the massive, regal bed, with its carvings and serpentine columns, in which he did much of his writing as well as his sleeping during many decades of his life, was purchased in Venice. In this relic of Italian elegance Twain liked to loll and compose.

Twain was never a passionate pilgrim. In *Innocents Abroad* the discomforts of travel loom almost as large as its thrills. No landscape or fabled ruin can compensate more than momentarily for the absence of creature comforts. Twain had neither the curiosity or the opportunity on this trip to develop an intimate acquaintance with Italian culture. Then and later he implicitly conceded in his account of his experiences that he lacked either the profound knowledge or the intuition that permits the acute and sympathetic observer to illuminate the spirit of a culture. Recent attempts to vindicate the Twain of *Innocents Abroad* as a perceptive observer of foreign life have not been convincing⁶. Twain's own opinion that it, like the universe, had « a trifle too much water », seems sounder⁷. He attempted to chronicle only the externals of what he observed, believing that only years of unconscious absorption of an atmosphere could permit an authentic description of it. He confined himself to making an honest report of his own impressions. His audience's demands and his own inclinations led him to focus on dramatic or comic episodes that were ends in themselves rather than representative scenes. Pledged to amuse, he sometimes exaggerated his feelings, especially his indignation, for comic purposes. He came to investigate not to reject Europe. But on his first trip he seemed less concerned to see it than to see through it.

Twain's frame of reference was inevitably formed by his earlier experience in western America. It was this that caused such anomalies as his watching and admiring the gondolier's skill in Venice

⁶ JOHN C. McCLOSKEY, « Mark Twain as Critic in *The Innocents Abroad* », *American Literature*, XXV (May 1953), 139-151. ARTHUR L. SCOTT, « The Innocents Abroad Re-evaluated », *Western Humanities Review*, III (Summer), 215-223.

⁷ In a letter in BERNARD DeVOTO ed., *The Portable Mark Twain* (New York, 1946), p. 746.

rather than the scenery, or his appreciation of Italy's turnpikes and railroad depots at the expense of its art treasures. He was aware that the objects of his spontaneous admiration were hardly what one came to Italy for, but he humbly submitted that his training equipped him to value these and not Italy's cultural objects. If Florence has never been more cavalierly dismissed than it was in *Innocents Abroad* and Rome and Naples have never suffered greater indignities than they did at the hands of Twain, still it was candidness not irreverence that was responsible. Twain never argued that his way was the way one should see Italy, only that it was his way. He knew that he, not Italy, was likely to suffer from his reporting. But the pose of an honest man is a dangerous one, and Twain was sized by hubris as his stay here lengthened. His modesty evaporated and he developed an inflated opinion of his own judgment on that first trip, tending to condemn other's that put a higher evaluation on paintings, for example, as hypocritical or preposterous.

Twain viewed Italy through eyes that had looked upon fairer spots. Few westerners would have found anything unreasonable in Twain's preference for Lake Tahoe to Como, and might have admired his restraint in not pointing out the superiority of San Francisco bay to the bay of Naples. Twain's comments on Como are representative of his attitude toward Italy's picturesque landscape. There was no lack of generosity in it, nor did he underestimate its attractiveness, calling it «the most voluptuous scene we have yet looked upon», and paying ample tribute to its striking views⁸. Yet it was, after all, only about one-fourth to two-thirds as wide as the Mississippi and lacked the impressiveness of Tahoe, that vast basin ringed by sheer mountains. Italy often seemed small and cramped by western standards, save for its buildings, which Twain in *A Tramp Abroad* said were «dark and chilly vast tombs, costly enough, maybe, but without conveniences»⁹.

Twain had a feeling for Tahoe and the West which he never developed for any spot in Italy save perhaps his Florentine villas.

⁸ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 261.

⁹ MARK TWAIN, *A Tramp Abroad* (London, 1881), p. 518.

He had visited the West on *his* grand tour and had had there a careless, gay, exuberant life. This joy and pleasure imbued its scenes in retrospect with a mythical beauty. No European scene, no matter how hallowed by time or favored by nature of man could hope to compete with this. Twain had been, as they say in the West, «to see the elephant», and no wonderful «animal» the Old World could exhibit could equal its dimensions, which in his mind were considerably larger than life.

Twain tries on occasion to rise to the proper pitch of expected enthusiasm for European landmarks, but he rarely gives a description of this sort which is not either overwritten or sentimental. His glowing passages of appreciation are strained¹⁰. The best descriptions in *Innocents Abroad* are of American scenes that Twain was reminded of by something in Europe. Later while living in Florence he drew more effective pictures of the Italian landscape than anything found in his travel books. He is especially good in his repeated attempts to capture something of the delicious beauty and mysterious charm of a Florentine sunset. But even these passages in his letters and notebooks cannot compare with the radiant glory of his descriptions of a Mississippi sunrise or life in Hannibal. Italian landscape never made such a vivid impression on his sensibility as that of America.

One of the features of the Italian landscape, even then, was the American tourist, and Twain was as scathing about these gnats as anything else he found abroad. He was annoyed by either their excess of nationality, their pitiful attempts at a cosmopolitan air, consisting of a few stock French phrases and their gross and false adulations of European art. Resolving never to be like them, he let them influence his own impressions. His evaluation of painting was conditioned by their praise and he exaggerated his displeasure in disgust at their ravings. But he did not blame America for these tourists; there is a significant difference in his attitude toward Ame-

¹⁰ But SCOTT, *op. cit.* p. 219, says that *Innocents Abroad* is «distinguished for its vivid descriptions of the natural beauties of the old world».

ricans and Europeans. He criticizes Americans rather than America, and Europe rather than Europeans.

He may at times vent his disgust with the mercenary spirit of the Italian serving class and «their lickspittle smirks»¹¹; his gallantry can be affronted by Neapolitans jeering an old opera singer, and he can call down curses upon their heads. But he made a handsome retraction of his primary criticism of Italians when, in *A Tramp Abroad*, he repeatedly emphasized the honesty of Italians in refutation of the usual tourist slanders. His chief criticisms of Italians, their abysmal ignorance, superstition, and dirtiness, were directed not so much at them as at their institutions, the monarchy and established church, which were responsible, Twain thought, for their degradation. Twain leaped at once from the concrete event to the force which had shaped it. He was obsessed with the idea of civilization Italy represented.

His chief complaint is that Italy lacks lux, in both the American and Latin sense. His diatribes against the populace's ignorance are matched only by those against their dirtiness. He called the absence of soap in hotels, «a haunting atrocity that has embittered our lives in so many cities and villages of Italy and France»¹². He was personally insulted when forced to submit to fumigation against cholera in Bellagio. He directed his ire at the people at large: «They must either wash themselves or fumigate other people. Some of the lower classes had rather die than wash... They need no fumigation themselves. Their habits make it unnecessary; they sweat and fumigate all the way long»¹³. In Florence he gave the soldiers who searched him the piece of soap they found, «seeing that they regarded it as a curiosity»¹⁴. The Italians, however, were not a special target on this score. Only the English according to Twain valued soap; «other foreigners do not use the article»¹⁵. Twain's indignation about soap is, of course, significant because soap is symbolic for him.

¹¹ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, II, 23.

¹² TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 243.

¹³ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 257.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

« You see Englishmen, here in Italy, to a particularly good advantage. In the midst of these false and beautiful Italians they glow with the light of the great fact, that after all they love a bathtub and they hate a lie » — the writer is Henry James, touring Italy in the year *Innocents Abroad* was published¹⁶. We see that Twain's feelings about soap are sturdily American rather than personal, infecting even the most cosmopolitan of the New World's sons, and we perceive that the identification between physical and spiritual cleanliness latent in Twain's abuse of Italian dirtiness was part of his American heritage. Even James, who wrote that the vulgarity of Americans abroad consisted of a « stingy, defiant, grudging attitude towards everything European [and] reference of all things to some American standard... », was not exempt from the American abhorrence of less than antiseptic bodies and morals¹⁷.

Twain devoted a disproportionately large space of *Innocents Abroad* to the stupidity and dishonesty of guides. His preoccupation with them is not only because of the comic episodes they provide but also because they are for him representatives of European attempts to impose on trusting Americans and of Europe's demand for admiration for what to the untutored eye seems a peeling or faded picture or a mouldy ruin. The West with its zest for playing upon the gullibility of the newcomer had something to do with Twain's suspicions that Europe was trying to take him in. Having already been initiated, with the painful results to pride and pelt that western hazing involved, Twain was wary of new attempts on his credulity. Because guides claimed too much for their wares, Twain, in turn, undervalued them.

There is something adolescently stupid in Twain's practice of withholding any expression of admiration of what he saw lest he should give any satisfaction to the expectant guides, and by proxy all Europeans. However funny his criticism of the quality of Columbus' handwriting might be, similar jokes soon pale. His party left in their wake a long series of bewildered guides, reduced to

¹⁶ *The Portable Henry James*, ed. MORTON ZABEL (New York, 1951), p. 641.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 640-641.

shaking silence by its perpetual question before every statue and every monument, « Is—is he dead? » Conceived only as a joke, the question is deeply resonant. It was the question Twain put to European civilization. What use was it to the present? And what, in human terms, had it cost and was it costing?

The standard by which he assessed European culture is found in his description, for the benefit of Roman « sloth... superstition... and boundlessness of ignorance », of the United States, a land where education was widespread, poverty was almost banished, and one might « fall from a third-story window three several times, and not mash either a soldier or a priest »¹⁸. In this land of efficiency, comfort and justice, people know more than their grandfathers and are not burdened by an excessive reverence for their ancestor's ways. By Twain's standard Italy had no civilization, and, as he argued later, the only true civilizations found anywhere in Europe « were all begotten by the seed of the American Revolution »¹⁹.

Twain, then, set up, in familiar American fashion, as a teacher not a pupil to Europe. *Innocents Abroad* is one expression of the American spirit, so irritating and amusing to the rest of the world, which conceives of its mission as one of making precedents, not following them. Melville, for example, at about Twain's age on his first tour of Italy, wrote « The Past is, in many things, the foe of mankind... In the Past is no hope... The Past is the text-book of tyrants... Let us be a teacher to posterity instead of being the pupil of by-gone generations »²⁰. One reason Twain learned so little abroad was that he was too occupied with the present and the future. To one living upon the manna of today and tomorrow, the past seemed to offer only stale crusts.

Twain, the democrat and humanitarian who judged a civilization by the material and moral welfare of the average man, was rarely able to enjoy the abundant grandeur of Italy because of the human suffering that surrounded it. He called Italy « one vast

¹⁸ TWAIN, *Innocents Abroad*, I, 339.

¹⁹ TWAIN, « On Foreign Critics », in *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York, 1923) p. 151.

²⁰ HERMAN MELVILLE, *White Jacket* (Boston, 1950), pp. 143-144.

museum of magnificence and misery... the wretchedest, princeliest land on earth »²¹. With his voluptuous nature, he might have been expected to have reveled in the spectacle the Italian church and aristocracy provided. Another man with his strong dramatic and sensuous traits might have felt his democratic faith insidiously threatened by the pageants and trappings of the church and the monarchy. But the only sign of this is in «The \$ 30,000 Bequest», written in Italy, when Sally in her dream life of wealth abandons her Presbyterianism for first the Episcopal and then the Roman Catholic Church, because of the latter's candles, shows, and cardinals. Twain himself was unable to relish the splendor of porphyry and gold because of the thought of the human agony from which the money for it had been wrung. The riches of the cathedrals were overshadowed for him by the beggars at their doors. After like all other men being overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Duomo of Florence, he was moved by the swarm of beggars surrounding it to mutter, «Curse your indolent worthlessness, why don't you rob your church?»²². He was willing to sacrifice its treasures for the general welfare the more readily because he felt that the general welfare had been sacrificed to make them possible.

Twain did not blame Italy for the Roman Catholic Church, but he did blame the church for Italy's plight and for the low state of European civilization. The church, Twain argued in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, introduced heritable ranks and centralized power and thus most of mankind's social ills. Conceding the merit of individual priests, he still feared the church's power. His encounters with the papal power were ominous. His party was searched at Civitavecchia and underwent surveillance at Livorno. These experiences did nothing to alleviate his ingrained Southern protestant fear of the Papacy. The Catholic Church for Twain was largely the embodiment and the support of tyranny.

Italian art also impressed him disfavorably because it displayed the «groveling spirit»²³ of the «old masters», which enabled them

²¹ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 269.

²² TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 330.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

to shamefully glorify their wicked patrons. More importantly, he lacked both the sensibility and training which might have enabled him to appreciate Italian painting. He began without any pretensions to judge art, writing of it only because «it is impossible to travel through Italy without speaking of pictures»²⁴. He asked only the undeniable right to mock the usual prefabricated insincere admiration tourists lavished on Italian masterpieces. He cried that the Emperor had no clothes when he found others applauding the fading remains of The Last Supper as a miracle of art. But his independence from stereotyped responses soon became mere truculence and he criticized Italian art for not meeting his expectations of a representational, historical art. He came close to bragging of his ignorance. Later he grew more tolerant of others' pleasure in art, but he never understood it. His own criticism of art, as Mr. R. Gilkey has noted, «implies a fundamental confusion of art and morality, which is due almost entirely to a lack of the culture that one needs in order to feel even an elementary appreciation of aesthetic values»²⁵.

Twain's lack of culture also hampered him in comprehending the past and understanding history. He was sentimental and skeptical by terms. Though Mr. Arthur Scott finds that Twain could imaginatively recreate the past, I would agree with majority opinion that his recreations ring hollow²⁶. Twain had basically only two ways of coming to grips with the past. The first involved what can only be called a «gee, isn't it old» attitude. The apostrophes in *Innocents Abroad* have the recurrent theme of mere antiquity; some venerable relic has been present, as Twain says of a tear-jug, «when even the Pyramids of Egypt were young... and ancient Troy not yet dreamt of...»²⁷ and so on in the strain of a monotonous and rather simple-minded insistence on the length of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁵ R. GILKEY, «Mark Twain and the Fine Arts», in *Atti del Quinto Congresso di Lingue e Letterature Moderne* (Florence, 1950), p. 492.

²⁶ SCOTT, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

²⁷ TWAIN, *Innocents Abroad*, I, 321.

time. Though he makes some effort to clothe the past with its proper flesh, we never feel it as a living presence.

His second technique for approaching the past reduced it to the dimensions and form of the American present. It is typified by his version of a Roman drama critic's account of an afternoon at the Colosseum which described the events in the manner of a writer for an American provincial newspaper. Twain was joking, but he was also in earnest. He believed that human nature was everywhere the same and consequently the life of the past could be appropriately expressed in the forms of the life he had known in Hannibal. Thus, in Venice of the present, he imagined conversation among the young ladies and courtship to be identical to their Missouri equivalents. He had a minimum of feeling for varying styles and manners. He seemed unaware that life might not be so uncomplicated, so direct and straightforward, so primitive and barren as that he had always known. By reducing everything new to him to the terms of his previous experience, he distorted it and stripped it of its uniqueness and value.

If Twain was largely insensible to the appeal of Italy's past and art, he was alive to its spirit of repose and peacefulness. In Milan (of all places) he was first struck by the relaxed air of the people, and he contrasted this with the American constant hurry and obsession with business. In one mood, he envied Europeans their quiet orderly life and yearned to export it to «restless, driving, vitality-consuming America»²⁸. He noted the change that came over his own party as they absorbed some of Italian tranquility: «We grow wise apace. We begin to comprehend what life is for»²⁹. He seemed on the verge of what is the classical discovery Americans have made in Italy, the discovery of a life richer and more dignified and meaningful than that of the bustling, materialistic New World. In these human terms he could appreciate the dignity and measure of what the past had to teach the present. But he never fully succumbed to the attraction he felt, even though his residence in the

²⁸ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 241.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

Villa Viviani enhanced his sense of the ease and elegance a traditional way of life could afford.

Twain delighted in describing in letters and in his notebooks the Villa Viviani, dwelling upon the plaster-relief portraits over its doors of Florentine senators and judges, former owners of the estate. His longing to be identified with the tradition of which they formed a part expressed itself in his comment that the busts are «all Cerretanis—or Cerretani-Twains, as I may say, for I have adopted myself into their family on account of its antiquity—my origin having been heretofore too recent to suit me»³⁰. This is private fun and Twain elsewhere, in the proper democratic spirit, mocked ancestor-worship. Still the thought had a residue of real desire for long-established roots.

Villa Viviani afforded other pleasures of an aristocratic nature. In his rapt descriptions of tranquil days and the late afternoons with their tea-drining and gossip with friends and silent observation of the breath-taking sunsets, he was almost as lyrical as Henry James about the atmosphere of English country homes. He experienced something of the grace of a mellow golden life that one could find where tradition with its ivy had softened the angles of both the buildings and manners. He was content to enjoy life instead of worrying the facts that his beloved villa had been built by a despot and the sun set over Florentine misery. But the villa and Italy were not the real world, but a refuge from it. The real world for him was formed by American enterprise.

In other moods, he found the extent of Italians' happiness to be the measure of their «ignorance, superstition, degradation, indolence, and everlasting unaspiring worthlessness», and asked «how can men, calling themselves men, consent to be so degraded and happy»³¹. He once wrote his wife, «But for the shame of it, the indignity to my pride I would like to be a priest's slave, glide into church and duck my head and crook my knee at a painted image,

³⁰ PAINE, *Mark Twain*, II, 956. Cf. also «A Whisper to the Reader», in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

³¹ TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, I, 329.

and glide out again with my immortal part refreshed and strengthened for my day's burdens »³². But he was entirely unwilling to pay the high price of the complete submission of one's personality that he thought was the price required to purchase the peace the church and Italian life offered.

Despite the warmth of his feeling for some aspects of Italy, he was immune to the allure of most of its glory. Refusing to be solemn about Italy, he made the mistake of rarely taking seriously what it said so deafingly to the receptive spirit. Persisting in seeing for himself, he saw pitifully little. One might say of him what he said of James Fenimore Cooper, he saw through a glass eye darkly. To adopt a remark of Chesterton's made in another connection, Twain was so alert to the danger of being «taken in», of being duped, that he was never «taken in», welcomed into the heart of European experience. After all allowances are made and all exceptions noted, there is an inescapable shallowness about Twain's lack of sensibility to the magnificence of the past. Few ghosts stirred for him in Italy and the air was not thick with the voices of the past. He was too little the artist in anything unconnected with his own art to be fired by the treasures found here, and so he received no sense of «the world raised to the richest and noblest expression», which art and Italy can give³³. Consideration of Twain's Italian experiences creates the melancholy awareness of the opportunities he missed or declined. In Italy, Mark Twain, the nineteenth-century American, met the past; but he cannot be said to have made its acquaintance and, therefore, there were few results from the encounter.

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³² *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, ed. DIXON WECTER (New York, 1949), p. 205.

³³ HENRY JAMES, *A Small Boy and Others*, in *The Portable Henry James* (New York, 1951), p. 561.

