WIGGIN KATE SMITH

PENELOPE'S POSTSCRIPTS

Kate Wiggin
Penelope's Postscripts

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36323412
Penelope's Postscripts:

Содержание

Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin
Penelope's Postscripts

I
PENELOPE IN SWITZERLAND

A DAY IN PESTALOZZI-TOWN

Salemina and I were in Geneva. If you had ever travelled through Europe with a charming spinster who never sat down at a Continental *table d'hôte* without being asked by an American *vis-à-vis* whether she were one of the P.'s of Salem, Massachusetts, you would understand why I call my friend Salemina. She doesn't mind it. She knows that I am simply jealous because I came from a vulgarly large tribe that never had any coat-of-arms, and whose ancestors always sealed their letters with their thumb nails.

Whenever Francesca and I call her "Salemina," she knows, and we know that she knows, that we are seeing a group of noble ancestors in a sort of halo over her serene and dignified head, so she remains unruffled under her *petit nom*, inasmuch as the casual public comprehends nothing of its spurious origin and thinks it was given her by her sponsors in baptism.

Francesca, Salemina, and I have very different backgrounds. The first-named is an extremely pretty person of large income who is travelling with us simply because her relatives think that she will "see Europe" more advantageously under our chaperonage than if she were accompanied by persons of her own age or "set."

Salemina is a philanthropist and educator of the first rank, and is collecting all sorts of valuable material to put at the service of her own country when she returns to it, which will not be a moment before her letter of credit is exhausted.

I, too, am quasi-educational, for I had a few years of experience in mothering and teaching little waifs and strays of the streets before I began to paint pictures. Never shall I regret those nerve-racking, back-breaking, heart-warming, weary, and beautiful years, when, all unconsciously, I was learning to paint children by living with them. Even now the spell still works and it is the curly head, the "shining morning face," the ready tear, the glancing smile of childhood that enchains me and gives my brush whatever skill it possesses.

We had not been especially high-minded or educational in Switzerland, Salemina and I. The worm will turn; and there is a point where the improvement of one's mind seems a farce, and the service of humanity, for the moment, a duty only born of a diseased imagination.

How can one sit on a vine-embowered balcony facing lovely Lake Geneva and think about modern problems,—Improved

Tenements, Child Labour, Single Tax, Sweat Shops, and the Right Training of the Rising Civilization? Blue Lake Geneva!—blue as a woman's eye, blue as the vault of heaven, dropped into the lap of the green earth like a great sparkling sapphire! Mont Blanc you know to be just behind the clouds on the other side, and that presently, after hours or days of patient waiting, he may condescend to unveil himself to your worshipful gaze.

"He is wise in his dignity and reserve," mused Salemina as we sat on the veranda. "He is all the more sublime because he withdraws himself from time to time. In fact, if he didn't see fit to cover himself occasionally, one could neither eat nor sleep, nor do anything but adore and magnify."

The day before this interview we had sailed to the end of the sapphire lake and visited the "snow-white battlements" of the Castle of Chillon; seen its "seven pillars of Gothic mould," and its dungeons deep and old, where poor Bonnivard, Byron's famous "Prisoner of Chillon," lay captive for so many years, and where Rousseau fixes the catastrophe of his Héloïse.

We had just been to Coppet too; Coppet where the Neckers lived and Madame de Staël was born and lived during many years of her life. We had wandered through the shaded walks of the magnificent château garden, and strolled along the terrace where the eloquent Corinne had walked with the Schlegels and other famous *habitués* of her salon. We had visited Calvin's house at 11 Rue des Chanoines, Rousseau's at No. 40 on the Grande Rue, and Voltaire's at Ferney.

And so we had been living the past, Salemina and I. But

> "Early one morning,
> Just as the day was dawning."

my slumbering conscience rose in Puritan strength and asserted its rights to a hearing.

"Salemina," said I, as I walked into her room, "this life that we are leading will not do for me any longer. I have been too much immersed in ruins. Last night in writing to a friend in New York I uttered the most disloyal and incendiary statements. I said that I would rather die than live without ruins of some kind; that America was so new, and crude, and spick and span, that it was obnoxious to any æsthetic soul; that our tendency to erect hideous public buildings and then keep them in repair afterwards would make us the butt of ridicule among future generations.

I even proposed the founding of an American Ruin Company, Limited,—in which the stockholders should purchase favourably situated bits of land and erect picturesque ruins thereon. To be sure, I said, these ruins wouldn't have any associations at first, but what of that? We have plenty of poets and romancers; we could manufacture suitable associations and fit them to the premises.

At first, it is true, they might not fire the imagination; but after a few hundred years, in being crooned by mother to infant and handed down by father to son, they would mellow with age, as all legends do, and they would end by being hallowed by rising

generations. I do not say they would be absolutely satisfactory from every standpoint, but I do say that they would be better than nothing.

"However," I continued, "all this was last night, and I have had a change of heart this morning. Just on the borderland between sleeping and waking, I had a vision. I remembered that to-day would be Monday the 1st of September; that all over our beloved land schools would be opening and that your sister pedagogues would be doing your work for you in your absence. Also I remembered that I am the dishonourable but Honorary President of a Froebel Society of four hundred members, that it meets to-morrow, and that I can't afford to send them a cable."

"It is all true," said Salemina. "It might have been said more briefly, but it is quite true."

"Now, my dear, I am only a painter with an occasional excursion into educational fields, but you ought to be gathering stories of knowledge to lay at the feet of the masculine members of your School Board."

"I ought, indeed!" sighed Salemina.

"Then let us begin!" I urged. "I want to be good to-day and you must be good with me. I never can be good alone and neither can you, and you know it. We will give up the lovely drive in the diligence; the luncheon at the French restaurant and those heavenly little Swiss cakes" (here Salemina was almost unmanned); "the concert on the great organ and all the other frivolous things we had intended; and we will make an

educational pilgrimage to Yverdon. You may not remember, my dear,"—this was said severely because I saw that she meditated rebellion and was going to refuse any programme which didn't include the Swiss cakes,—"you may not remember that Jean Henri Pestalozzi lived and taught in Yverdon. Your soul is so steeped in illusions; so submerged in the Lethean waters of the past; so emasculated by thrilling legends, paltry titles, and ruined castles, that you forget that Pestalozzi was the father of popular education and the sometime teacher of Froebel, our patron saint. When you return to your adored Boston, your faithful constituents in that and other suburbs of Salem, Massachusetts, will not ask you if you have seen the Castle of Chillon and the terrace of Corinne, but whether you went to Yverdon."

Salemina gave one last fond look at the lake and picked up her Baedeker. She searched languidly in the Y's and presently read in a monotonous, guide-book voice. "Um—um—um—yes, here it is, 'Yverdon is sixty-one miles from Geneva, three hours forty minutes, on the way to Neuchâtel and Bâle.' (Neuchâtel is the cheese place; I'd rather go there and we could take a bag of those Swiss cakes.) 'It is on the southern bank of Lake Neuchâtel at the influx of the Orbe or Thiele. It occupies the site of the Roman town of Ebrodunum. The castle dates from the twelfth century and was occupied by Pestalozzi as a college.'"

This was at eight, and at nine, leaving Francesca in bed, we were in the station at Geneva. Finding that we had time to spare, we went across the street and bargained for an *in-transit* luncheon

with one of those dull native shopkeepers who has no idea of American-French.

Your American-French, by the way, succeeds well enough so long as you practise, in the seclusion of your apartment, certain assorted sentences which the phrase-book tells you are likely to be needed. But so far as my experience goes, it is always the unexpected that happens, and one is eternally falling into difficulties never encountered by any previous traveller.

For instance, after purchasing a cold chicken, some French bread, and a bit of cheese, we added two bottles of lemonade. We managed to ask for a glass, from which to drink it, but the man named two francs as the price. This was more than Salemina could bear. Her spirit was never dismayed at any extravagance, but it reared its crested head in the presence of extortion. She waxed wroth. The man stood his ground. After much crimination and recrimination I threw myself into the breach.

"Salemina," said I, "I wish to remark, first: That we have three minutes to catch the train. Second: That, occupying the position we do in America,—you the member of a School Board and I the Honorary President of a Froebel Society,—we cannot be seen drinking lemonade from a bottle, in a public railway carriage; it would be too convivial. Third: You do not understand this gentleman. You have studied the language longer than I, but I have studied it more lately than you, and I am fresher, much fresher than you." (Here Salemina bridled obviously.) "The man

is not saying that two francs is the price of the glass. He says that we can pay him two francs now, and if we will return the glass to-night when we come home he will give us back one franc fifty centimes. That is fifty centimes for the rent of the glass, as I understand it."

Salemina's right hand, with the glass in it, dropped nervelessly at her side. "If he uttered one single syllable of all that rigmarole, then Ollendorf is a myth, that's all I have to say."

"The gift of tongues is not vouchsafed to all," I responded with dignity. "I happen to possess a talent for languages, and I apprehend when I do not comprehend."

Salemina was crushed by the weight of my self-respect, and we took the tumbler, and the train.

It was a cloudless day and a beautiful journey, along the side of the sapphire lake for miles, and always in full view of the glorious mountains. We arrived at Yverdon about noon, and had eaten our luncheon on the train, so that we should have a long, unbroken afternoon. We left our books and heavy wraps in the station with the porter, with whom we had another slight misunderstanding as to general intentions and terms; then we started, Salemina carrying the lemonade glass in her hand, with her guide-book, her red parasol, and her Astrakhan cape. The tumbler was a good deal of trouble, but her heart was set on returning it safely to the Geneva pirate; not so much to reclaim the one franc fifty centimes as to decide conclusively whether he had ever proposed such restitution. I knew her mental processes, so I refused to

carry any of her properties; besides, the pirate had used a good many irregular verbs in his conversation, and upon due reflection I was a trifle nervous about the true nature of the bargain.

The Yverdon station fronted on a great open common dotted with a few trees. There were a good many mothers and children sitting on the benches, and a number of young lads playing ball.

The town itself is one of the quaintest, quietest, and sleepiest in Switzerland. From 1803 to 1810 it was a place of pilgrimage for philanthropists from all parts of Europe; for at that time Pestalozzi was at the zenith of his fame, having under him one hundred and sixty-five pupils from Europe and America, and thirty-two adult teachers, who were learning his method.

But Yverdon has lost its former greatness now! Scarcely any English travellers go there and still fewer Americans. We fancied that there was nothing extraordinary in our appearance; nevertheless a small crowd of children followed at our heels, and the shopkeepers stood at their open doors and regarded us with intense interest.

"No English spoken here, that is evident," said Salemina ruefully; "but you have such a gift for languages you can take the command to-day and make the blunders and bear the jeers of the public. You must find out where the new Pestalozzi Monument is,—where the Château is,—where the schools are, and whether visitors are admitted,—whether there is a respectable hotel where we can get dinner,—whether we can get back to Geneva to-night, whether it's a fast or a slow train, and what time it gets

there,—whether the methods of Pestalozzi are still maintained, —whether they know anything about Froebel,—whether they know what a kindergarten is, and whether they have one in the village. Some of these questions will be quite difficult even for you."

Well, the monument was not difficult to find, at all events. We accosted two or three small boys and demanded boldly of one of them, "*Où est le monument de Pestalozzi, s'il vous plaît*?"

He shrugged his shoulders like an American small boy and said vacantly, "*Je ne sais pas*."

"Of course he does know," said Salemina; "he means to be disagreeable; or else 'monument' isn't monument."

"Well," I answered, "there is a monument in the distance, and there cannot be two in this village."

Sure enough it was the very one we sought. It stands in a little open place quite "in the business heart of the city,"—as we should say in America, and is an exceedingly fine and impressive bit of sculpture. The group of three figures is in bronze and was done by M. Gruet of Paris.

The modelling is strong, the expression of Pestalozzi benign and sweet, and the trusting upturned faces of the children equally genuine and attractive.

One side of the pedestal bears the inscription:—

À

Pestalozzi

1746–1827

Monument érigé

par souscription populaire

MDCCCXC

On a second side these words are carved in the stone:—

Sauveur des Pauvres à Neuhof

Père des Orphelins à Stanz

Fondateur de l'école

populaire à Burgdorf

Éducateur de l'humanité

à Yverdon

Tout pour les autres, pour lui,—rien!

An older monument erected in 1846 by the Canton of Argovia bears this same inscription, save that it adds, "Preacher to the people in 'Leonard and Gertrude.' Man. Christian. Citizen.

Blessed be his name!"

On the third side of the Yverdon Monument is Pestalozzi's noble speech, fine enough indeed, to be cut in stone:—

"J'ai vécu moi-même

comme un mendiant,

pour apprendre à des

mendiants à vivre comme

des hommes."

We sat a long time on the great marble pedestal, gazing into the benevolent face, and reviewing the simple, self-sacrificing life of the great educator, and then started on a tour of inspection.

After wandering through most of the shops, buying photographs and mementoes, Salemina discovered that she had left the expensive tumbler in one of them. After a long discussion as to whether tumbler was masculine or feminine, and as to whether

"*Ai-je laissé un verre ici*?" or "*Est-ce que j'ai laissé un verre ici*?" was the proper query, we retraced our steps, Salemina asking in one shop, "*Excusez-moi*, *je vous prie*, *mais ai-je laissé un verre ici*?",—and I in the next, "*Je demands pardon*, *Madame*, *est-ce que j'ai laissé un verre dans ce magasin-ci*?—*J'en ai perdu un*, somewhere." Finally we found it, and in response not to mine but to Salemina's question, so that she was superior and obnoxious for several minutes.

Our next point of interest was the old castle, which is still a public school. Finding the caretaker, we visited first the museum and library—a small collection of curiosities, books, and mementoes, various portraits of Pestalozzi and his wife, manuscripts and so forth. The simple-hearted woman who did the honours was quite overcome by our knowledge of and interest in her pedagogical hero, but she did not return the compliment.

I asked her if the townspeople knew about Friedrich Froebel, but she looked blank.

"Froebel? Froebel?" she asked; "*qui est-ce*?"

"*Mais*, *Madame*," I said eloquently, "*c'était un grand homme*! *Un héros*! *Le plus grand élève de Pestalozzi*! *Aussi grand que Pestalozzi soi-même*!"

("Plus grand! Why don't you say *plus grand*?" murmured Salemina loyally.)

"*Je ne sais*!" she returned, with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders. "*Je ne sais*! *Il y a des autres*, *je crois*; *mais moi*, *je connais Pestalozzi*, *c'est assez*!"

All the younger children had gone home, but she took us through the empty schoolrooms, which were anything but attractive. We found an unhappy small boy locked in one of them. I slipped behind the concierge to chat with him, for he was so exactly like all other small boys in disgrace that he made me homesick.

"*Tu étais méchant, n'est ce-pas*?" I whispered consolingly; "*mais tu seras sage demain, j'en suis sûre*!"

I thought this very pretty, but he wriggled from under my benevolent hand, saying "*Va*!" (which I took to be, "Go 'long, you!") "*je n'étais méchant aujourd'hui et je ne serai pas sage demain*!"

I asked the concierge if the general methods of Pestalozzi were still used in the schools of Yverdon, "*Mais certainement*!" she replied as we went into a room where twenty to thirty girls of ten years were studying. There were three pleasant windows looking out into the street; the ordinary platform and ordinary teacher's table, with the ordinary teacher (in an extraordinary state of coma) behind it; and rather rude desks and seats for the children, but not a single ornament, picture, map, or case of objects and specimens around the room. The children were nice, clean, pleasant, stolid little things with braided hair and pinafores. The sole decoration of the apartment was a highly-coloured chart that we had noticed on the walls of all the other schoolrooms. Feeling that this must be a sacred relic, and that it probably illustrated some of the Pestalozzian foundation principles, I walked up to

it reverently,

"*Qu'est-ce-que c'est cela*, *Madame*?" I inquired, rather puzzled by its appearance.

"*C'est la méthode de Pestalozzi*," the teacher replied absently.

I wished that we kindergarten people could get Froebel's educational idea in such a snug, portable shape, and drew nearer to gaze at it. I can give you a very complete description of the pictures from memory, as I copied the titles *verbatim et literatim*.

The whole chart was a powerful moral object-lesson on the dangers of incendiarism and the evils of reckless disobedience. It was printed appropriately in the most lurid colours, and divided into nine tableaux.

These were named as follows:—

I—La Vraie Gaîté

Twelve or fifteen boys and girls are playing together so happily and innocently that their good angels sing for joy.

II—Une Proposition Fatale!

Suddenly "*le petit* Charles" says to his comrades, "Come! let us build a fire!" *Le petit* Charles is a typical infant villain and is surrounded at once by other incendiary spirits all in accord with his insidious plans.

III—La Protestation

The Good Little Marie, a Sunday-school heroine of the true type, approaches the group and, gazing heavenward, remarks that it is wicked to play with matches. The G. L. M. is of saintly presence,—so clean and well groomed that you feel inclined to push her into a puddle. Her hands are not full of vulgar toys and sweetmeats, like those of the other children, but are extended graciously as if she were in the habit of pronouncing benedictions.

IV—Insouciance!

Le petit Charles puts his evil little paw in his dangerous pockets and draws out a wicked lucifer match, saying with abominable indifference, "Bah! what do we care? We're going to build a fire, whatever you say. Come on, boys!"

V—Un Plaisir Dangereux!

The boys "come on." Led by "*le petit vilain* Charles" they light a dangerous little fire in a dangerous little spot. Their faces shine with unbridled glee. The G. L. M. retires to a distance with a few saintly followers, meditating whether she shall run and tell

her mother. "*Le petit* Paul," an infant of three summers, draws near the fire, attracted by the cheerful blaze.

VI—Malheur et Inexpérience

Le petit Paul somehow or other tumbles into the fire. Nothing but a desire to influence posterity as an awful example could have induced him to take this unnecessary step, but having walked in he stays in, like an infant John Rogers. The bad boys are so horror-stricken it does not occur to them to pull him out, and the G. L. M. is weeping over the sin of the world.

VII—Trop Tard!!

The male parent of *le petit* Paul is seen rushing down an adjacent Alp. He leads a flock of frightened villagers who have seen the smoke and heard the wails of their offspring. As the last shred of *le petit* Paul has vanished in said smoke, the observer notes that the poor father is indeed "too late."

VIII—Desespoir!!

The despair of all concerned would draw tears from the dryest eye. Only one person wears a serene expression, and that is the G. L. M., who is evidently thinking: "Perhaps they will listen to

me the next time."

IX—La Fin!

The charred remains of *le petit* Paul are being carried to the cemetery. The G. L. M. heads the procession in a white veil. In a prominent place among the mourners is "*le pauvre petit* Charles," so bowed with grief and remorse that he can scarcely be recognized.

It was a telling sermon! If I had been a child I should never have looked at a match again; and old as I was, I could not, for days afterwards, regard a box of them without a shudder. I thought that probably Yverdon had been visited in the olden time by a series of disastrous holocausts, all set by small boys, and that this was the powerful antidote presented; so I asked the teacher whether incendiarism was a popular failing in that vicinity and whether the chart was one of a series inculcating various moral lessons. I don't know whether she understood me or not, but she said no, it was "*la méthode de Pestalozzi*."

Just at this juncture she left the room, apparently to give the pupils a brief study-period, and simultaneously the concierge was called downstairs by a crying baby. A bright idea occurred to me and I went hurriedly into the corridor where my friend was taking notes.

"Salemina," said I, "here is an opportunity of a lifetime! We ought to address these children in their native tongue. It will

be something to talk about in educational pow-wows. They do not know that we are distinguished visitors, but we know it. A female member of a School Board and the Honorary President of a Froebel Society owe a duty to their constituents. You go in and tell them who and what I am and make a speech in French. Then I'll tell them who and what you are and make another speech."

Salemina assumed a modest violet attitude, declined the honour absolutely, and intimated that there were persons who would prefer talking in a language they didn't know rather than to remain sensibly silent.

However the plan struck me as being so fascinating that I went back alone, looked all ways to see if any one were coming, mounted the platform, cleared my throat, and addressed the awe-struck youngsters in the following words. I will spare you the French, but you will perceive by the construction of the sentences, that I uttered only those sentiments possible in an early stage of language-study.

"My dear children," I began, "I live many thousand miles across the ocean in America. You do not know me and I do not know you, but I do know all about your good Pestalozzi and I love him."

"*Il est mort*!" interpolated one offensive little girl in the front row.

Salemina tittered audibly in the corridor, and I crossed the room and closed the door. I think the children expected me to put the key in my pocket and then murder them and stuff them

into the stove.

"I know perfectly well that he is dead, my child," I replied winningly,—"it is his life, his memory that I love.—And once upon a time, long ago, a great man named Friedrich Froebel came here to Yverdon and studied with your great Pestalozzi. It was he who made kindergartens for little children, *jardins des enfants*, you know. Some of your grand-mothers remember Froebel, I think?"

Hereupon two of the smaller chits shouted some sort of a negation which I did not in the least comprehend, but which from large American experience I took to be, "My grandmother doesn't!" "My grandmother doesn't!"

Seeing that the others regarded me favourably, I continued, "It is because I love Pestalozzi and Froebel, that I came here to day to see your beautiful new monument. I have just bought a photograph taken on that day last year when it was first uncovered. It shows the flags and the decorations, the flowers and garlands, and ever so many children standing in the sunshine, dressed in white and singing hymns of praise. You are all in the picture, I am sure!"

This was a happy stroke. The children crowded about me and showed me where they were standing in the photograph, what they wore on the august occasion, how the bright sun made them squint, how a certain *malheureuse* Henriette couldn't go to the festival because she was ill.

I could understand very little of their magpie chatter, but it was

a proud moment. Alone, unaided, a stranger in a strange land, I had gained the attention of children while speaking in a foreign tongue. Oh, if I had only left the door open that Salemina might have witnessed this triumph! But hearing steps in the distance, I said hastily, "*Asseyez-vous*, *mes enfants*, *tout-de-suite*!" My tone was so authoritative that they obeyed instantly, and when the teacher entered it was as calm as the millennium.

We rambled through the village for another hour, dined at a quaint little inn, gave a last look at the monument, and left for Geneva at seven o'clock in the pleasant September twilight. Arriving a trifle after ten, somewhat weary in body and slightly anxious in mind, I followed Salemina into the tiny cake-shop across the street from the station. She returned the tumbler, and the man, who seemed to consider it an unexpected courtesy, thanked us volubly. I held out my hand and reminded him timidly of the one franc fifty centimes.

He inquired what I meant. I explained. He laughed scornfully. I remonstrated. He asked me if I thought him an imbecile. I answered no, and wished that I knew the French for several other terms nearer the truth, but equally offensive. Then we retired, having done our part, as good Americans, to swell the French revenues, and that was the end of our day in Pestalozzi-town; not the end, however, of the lemonade glass episode, which was always a favourite story in Salemina's repertory.

II
PENELOPE IN VENICE

This noble citie doth in a manner chalenge this at my hands, that I should describe her also as well as the other cities I saw in my journey, partly because she gave me most louing and kinde entertainment for the sweetest time (I must needes confesse) that euer I spent in my life; and partly for that she ministered vnto me more variety of remarkable and delicious objects than mine eyes euer suruayed in any citie before, or euer shall . . . the fairest Lady, yet the richest Paragon and Queene of Christendome.

Coryat's Crudities: 1611

I

Venice, May 12
Hotel Paolo Anafesto.

I have always wished that I might have discovered Venice for myself. In the midst of our mad acquisition and frenzied dissemination of knowledge, these latter days, we miss how many fresh and exquisite sensations! Had I a daughter, I should like to inform her mind on every other possible point and keep her in absolute ignorance of Venice. Well do I realize that it would be impracticable, although no more so, after all, than Rousseau's plan of educating Émile, which certainly obtained a wide hearing and considerable support in its time. No, tempting as it would be, it would be difficult to carry out such a theory in these days of logic and common sense, and in some moment of weakness I might possibly succumb and tell her all about it, for fear that some stranger, whom she might meet at a ball, would have the pleasure of doing it first.

The next best woman-person in the world with whom to see Venice, barring the lovely non-existent daughter, is Salemina.

It is our first visit, but, alas! we are, nevertheless, much better informed than I could wish. Salemina's mind is particularly well furnished, but, luckily she cannot always remember the point wished for at the precise moment of need; so that, taking her all in all, she is nearly as agreeable as if she were ignorant. Her

knowledge never bulks heavily and insistently in the foreground or middle-distance, like that of Miss Celia Van Tyck, but remains as it should, in the haze of a melting and delicious perspective.

She has plenty of enthusiasms, too, and Miss Van Tyck has none. Imagine our plight at being accidentally linked to that encyclopædic lady in Italy! She is an old acquaintance of Salemina's and joined us in Florence, where she had been staying for a month, waiting for her niece Kitty Schuyler,—Kitty Copley now,—who is in Spain with her husband.

Miss Van Tyck would be endurable in Sheffield, Glasgow, Lyons, Genoa, Kansas City, Pompeii, or Pittsburg, but she should never have blighted Venice with her presence. She insisted, however, on accompanying us, and I can only hope that the climate and associations will have a relaxing effect on her habits of thought and speech. When she was in Florence, she was so busy in "reading up" Verona and Padua that she had no time for the Uffizi Gallery. In Verona and Padua she was absorbed in Hare's "Venice," vaccinating herself, so to speak, with information, that it might not steal upon, and infect her, unawares. If there is anything that Miss Van abhors, it is knowing a thing without knowing that she knows it; while for me, the most charming knowledge is the sort that comes by unconscious absorption, like the free grace of God.

We intended to enter Venice in orthodox fashion, by moonlight, and began to consult about trains when we were in Milan. The porter said that there was only one train between

the eight and the twelve, and gave me a pamphlet on the subject, but Salemina objects to an early start, and Miss Van refuses to arrive anywhere after dusk, so it is fortunate that the distances are not great.

They have a curious way of reckoning time in Italy, for I found that the train leaving Milan at eight-thirty was scheduled to arrive at ten minutes past eighteen.

"You could never sit up until then, Miss Van," I said; "but, on the other hand, if we leave later, to please Salemina, say at ten in the morning, we do not arrive until eight minutes before twenty-one! I haven't the faintest idea what time that will really be, but it sounds too late for three defenceless women—all of them unmarried—to be prowling about in a strange city."

It proved on investigation, however, that twenty-one o'clock is only nine in Christian language (that is, one's mother tongue), so we united in choosing that hour as being the most romantic possible, and there was a full yellow moon as we arrived in the railway station. My heart beat high with joy and excitement, for I succeeded in establishing Miss Van with Salemina in one gondola, while I took all the luggage in another, ridding myself thus cleverly of the disenchanting influence of Miss Van's company.

"Do come with us, Penelope," she said, as we issued from the portico of the station and heard, instead of the usual cab-drivers' pandemonium, only the soft lapping of waves against the marble steps—"Do come with us, Penelope, and let us enter 'dangerous

and sweet-charmed Venice' together. It does, indeed, look a 'veritable sea-bird's nest.'"

She had informed me before, in Milan, that Cassiodorus, Theodoric's secretary, had thus styled Venice, but somehow her slightest remark is out of key. I can always see it printed in small type in a footnote at the bottom of the page, and I always wish to skip it, as I do other footnotes, and annotations, and marginal notes and addenda. If Miss Van's mother had only thought of it, Addenda would have been a delightful Christian name for her, and much more appropriate than Celia.

If I should be asked on bended knees, if I should be reminded that every intelligent and sympathetic creature brings a pair of fresh eyes to the study of the beautiful, if it should be affirmed that the new note is as likely to be struck by the 'prentice as by the master hand, if I should be assured that my diary would never be read, I should still refuse to write my first impressions of Venice. My best successes in life have been achieved by knowing what not to do, and I consider it the finest common sense to step modestly along in beaten paths, not stirring up, even there, any more dust than is necessary. If my friends and acquaintances ever go to Venice, let them read their Ruskin, their Goethe, their Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth, their Rogers, Gautier, Michelet, their Symonds and Howells, not forgetting old "Coryat's Crudities," and be thankful I spared them mine.

It was the eve of Ascension Day, and a yellow May moon was hanging in the blue. I wished with all my heart that it

were a little matter of seven or eight hundred years earlier in the world's history, for then the people would have been keeping vigil and making ready for that nuptial ceremony of Ascension-tide when the Doge married Venice to the sea. Why can we not make pictures nowadays, as well as paint them? We are banishing colour as fast as we can, clothing our buildings, our ships, ourselves, in black and white and sober hues, and if it were not for dear, gaudy Mother Nature, who never puts her palette away, but goes on painting her reds and greens and blues and yellows with the same lavish hand, we should have a sad and discreet universe indeed.

But so long as we have more or less stopped making pictures, is it not fortunate that the great ones of the olden time have been eternally fixed on the pages of the world's history, there to glow and charm and burn for ever and a day? To be able to recall those scenes of marvellous beauty so vividly that one lives through them again in fancy, and reflect, that since we have stopped being picturesque and fascinating, we have learned, on the whole, to behave much better, is as delightful a trend of thought as I can imagine, and it was mine as I floated toward the Piazza of San Marco in my gondola.

I could see the Doge descend the Giant's Stairs, and issue from the gate of the Ducal Palace. I could picture the great Bucentaur as it reached the open beyond the line of the tide. I could see the white-mitred Patriarch walking from his convent on the now deserted isle of Sant' Elena to the shore where his barge lay

waiting to join the glittering procession.

And then there floated before my entranced vision the princely figure of the Doge taking the Pope-blessed ring, and, advancing to the little gallery behind his throne on the Bucentaur, raising it high, and dropping it into the sea. I could almost hear the faint splash as it sank in the golden waves, and hear, too, the sonorous words of the old wedding ceremony: "*Desponsamus te*, *Mare*, *in signum veri perpetuique dominii*!"

Then when the shouts of mirth and music had died away and the Bucentaur and its train had drifted back into the lagoon, the blue sea, new-wedded, slept through the night with the May moon on her breast and the silent stars for sentinels.

II

La Giudecca, May 15,
Casa Rosa.

Not for a moment have we regretted leaving our crowded, conventional hotel in Venice proper, for these rooms in a house on the Giudecca. The very vision of Miss Celia Van Tyck sitting on a balcony surrounded by a group of friends from the various Boston suburbs, the vision of Miss Celia Van Tyck melting into delicious distance with every movement of our gondola, even this was sufficient for Salemina's happiness and mine, had it been accompanied by no more tangible joys.

This island, hardly ten minutes by gondola from the Piazza of San Marco, was the summer resort of the Doges, you will remember, and there they built their pleasure-houses, with charming gardens at the back—gardens the confines of which stretched to the Laguna Viva. Our Casa Rosa is one of the few old *palazzi* left, for many of them have been turned into granaries.

We should never have found this romantic dwelling by ourselves; the Little Genius brought us here. The Little Genius is Miss Ecks, who draws, and paints, and carves, and models in clay, preaching and practising the brotherhood of man and the sisterhood of woman in the intervals; Miss Ecks, who is the custodian of all the talents and most of the virtues,

and the invincible foe of sordid common sense and financial prosperity. Miss Ecks met us by chance in the Piazza and breathlessly explained that she was searching for paying guests to be domiciled under the roof of Numero Sessanta, Giudecca.

She thought we should enjoy living there, or at least she did very much, and she had tried it for two years; but our enjoyment was not the special point in question. The real reason and desire for our immediate removal was that the padrona might pay off a vexatious and encumbering mortgage which gave great anxiety to everybody concerned, besides interfering seriously with her own creative work.

"You must come this very day," exclaimed Miss Ecks. "The Madonna knows that we do not desire boarders, but you are amiable and considerate, as well as financially sound and kind, and will do admirably. Padrona Angela is very unhappy, and I cannot model satisfactorily until the house is on a good paying basis and she is putting money in the bank toward the payment of the mortgage. You can order your own meals, entertain as you like, and live precisely as if you were in your own home."

The Little Genius is small, but powerful, with a style of oratory somewhat illogical, but always convincing at the moment. There were a good many trifling objections to our leaving Miss Van Tyck and the hotel, but we scarcely remembered them until we and our luggage were skimming across the space of water that divides Venice from our own island.

We explored the cool, wide, fragrant spaces of the old *casa*,

with its outer walls of faded, broken stucco, all harmonized to a pinkish yellow by the suns and winds of the bygone centuries.

We admired its lofty ceilings, its lovely carvings and frescoes, its decrepit but beautiful furniture, and then we mounted to the top, where the Little Genius has a sort of eagle's eyrie, a floor to herself under the eaves, from the windows of which she sees the sunlight glimmering on the blue water by day, and the lights of her adored Venice glittering by night. The walls are hung with fragments of marble and wax and stucco and clay; here a beautiful foot, or hand, or dimple-cleft chin; there an exquisitely ornate façade, a miniature campanile, or a model of some ancient *palazzo* or *chiesa*.

The little bedroom off at one side is draped in coarse white cotton, and is simple enough for a nun. Not a suggestion there of the fripperies of a fine lady's toilet, but, in their stead, heads of cherubs, wings of angels, slender bell-towers, friezes of acanthus leaves,—beauty of line and form everywhere, and not a hint of colour save in the riotous bunches of poppies and oleanders that lie on the broad window-seats or stand upright in great blue jars.

Here the Little Genius lives, like the hermit crab that she calls herself; here she dwells apart from kith and kin, her mind and heart and miracle-working hands taken captive by the charms of the siren city of the world.

When we had explored Casa Rosa from turret to foundation stone we went into the garden at the rear of the house—a garden of flowers and grape-vines, of vegetables and fruit-trees, of birds

and bee-hives, a full acre of sweet summer sounds and odours, stretching to the lagoon, which sparkled and shimmered under the blue Italian skies. The garden completed our subjugation, and here we stay until we are removed by force, or until the padrona's mortgage is paid unto the last penny, when I feel that the Little Genius will hang a banner on the outer ramparts, a banner bearing the relentless inscription: "No paying guests allowed on these premises until further notice."

Our domestics are unique and interesting. Rosalia, the cook, is a graceful person with brown eyes, wavy hair, and long lashes, and when she is coaxing her charcoal fire with a primitive fan of cock's feathers, her cheeks as pink as oleanders, the Little Genius leads us to the kitchen door and bids us gaze at her beauty. We are suitably enthralled at the moment, but we suffer an inevitable reaction when the meal is served, and sometimes long for a plain cook.

Peppina is the second maid, and as arrant a coquette as lives in all Italy. Her picture has been painted on more than one fisherman's sail, for it is rumoured that she has been six times betrothed and she is still under twenty. The unscrupulous little flirt rids herself of her suitors, after they become a weariness to her, by any means, fair or foul, and her capricious affections are seldom good for more than three months. Her own loves have no deep roots, but she seems to have the power of arousing in others furious jealousy and rage and a very delirium of pleasure.

She remains light, gay, joyous, unconcerned, but she shakes

her lovers as the Venetian thunderstorms shake the lagoons. Not long ago she tired of her chosen swain, Beppo the gardener, and one morning the padrona's ducks were found dead. Peppina, her eyes dewy with crocodile tears, told the padrona that although the suspicion almost rent her faithful heart in twain, she must needs think Beppo the culprit. The local detective, or police officer, came and searched the unfortunate Beppo's humble room, and found no incriminating poison, but did discover a pound or two of contraband tobacco, whereupon he was marched off to court, fined eighty francs, and jilted by his perfidious lady-love, who speedily transferred her affections. If she had been born in the right class and the right century, Peppina would have made an admirable and brilliant Borgia.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.