

A Drive Out From Beautiful Naples To Dead Cities And Lakes Of Fire

By Mrs. JOHN C. WRENSHALL.
Naples, April 15.—There is perhaps no part of the marvelous story we know as Magna Grecia, more thickly populated with creatures of earth and sky than that soil rounding the two gulfs of Naples and Salerno.

Full the string of the curtain of the past, and what a company stalks forth upon into stage of myth, history and romance—emperors and kings, queens and sibyls, prophets, seers, sailors and shipmasters, with a goodly chorus of priests, priestesses and apostles of every religion, succeeding one another in holding the minds of men, beginning with the sacred flame and ending with that which we please ourselves in calling the broad tread of thought of our day.

But the curtain is up, the carriage is before the hotel door in Naples and the road to Baia is before us, smooth, level and beside the sea. For miles we roll through city and suburbs, till the belated of Vesuvius have merged into a cliff bare and rugged.

From its face fragments of masonry project with arches of foundations and masses of brickwork still held together by the almost indestructible mortar of over 2,000 years ago. The hill is but a mass of crumbling ruins of the villa of the pleasure-loving Greeks and Romans of the most luxurious time of the world's history.

Upon the headland beyond us, which projects into the bay, of whose beauty Horace sung, was ancient Baia, the culmination of the magnificence that once lined this royal road. Here came Nero, Augustus and the greatest Roman of them all, Hadrian, whose progressive mind anticipated the centuries. The Castle of Baia, which tourists seek for the wide view, is medieval, and we doubt if the modern restaurants of the village about it would have tempted the former Roman citizens.

A LAKE OF GLOOM.
Thus we turn and drive back along the road we came. The afternoon light is in the sky and there is much to see. The coachman halts at a cross road that runs inland at the base of a mountain where there are no ruins, only solemn pines, and these not lofty.

There is a restaurant here, and a waiter comes out. He wears a dress suit and bows with much grace. "Will we have coffee, tea, chocolate?" "Oh, no! At Baia we only wish oysters." He looks at us in dismay; his English fails, but not his countenance in expressing the opinion of mad Americans who wish oysters at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

We pass easily. How degenerate are the times! It is true we are neither emperors nor queens, but if they came to Baia to eat oysters, why not we?

We do not wish tea, and we turn from the sea and drive between the vineyards that border the narrow road. There are ruins along its side, but we hardly see them, intent upon the stretch of water straight before us, which when reached is black in the shadow of the mountains that partly enclose it.

It is Lake Avernus, the dread entrance through which Virgil sent Aeneas in the ship's care to Pluto's realm. There is no sound of bird or insect in the evening air, though we heard them as we came through the vineyards. Perhaps the old legend is true that "no living thing can fly over Lake Avernus."

A slight movement in the air wrinkles the lake and waves the tall reeds growing from its depth, bubbles appear upon the surface of the water. It is the gas escaping from volcanic vents below.

Continuing the drive back to Naples, we enter the little town of Pompeii, which is

THE ODD CORNERS OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

This is one of a short series of letters from Southern Europe by Mrs. John C. Wrenshall, president of the Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore, who has been spending the winter abroad. Mrs. Wrenshall will devote her descriptions chiefly to places seldom visited by the average tourist.

on the site of one of the first Greek settlements. Counting under Roman rule it was renamed Puteoli. Puteoli was a center for the large trade with Egypt. Thus the worship of the Egyptian god Serapis was introduced, and his temple protected and adorned by the Roman Emperors until about 300 years after Christ, when its story was lost.

Turning into a narrow lane of the village, we slip before a doorway—the modern entrance of a house that stands before the ruins of the temple, the ancient market hall and the hot baths of those and later times, going through a hallway we descend a flight of steps into a depressed space that is covered with water of varying depth and



ITALIAN PEASANT GIRLS

pass over the shallow pond on a wooden walk and platform built among and around the beautiful Corinthian columns that are standing in the water.

Twelve of these are thickly grouped in the center, closely around the altar for the sacrifice. Other columns surround this group, and outside of all are the baths with pipes and conduits that bring the hot water from the Solfatara, their fashion varying with the period of their construction.

The larger columns appear to be 60 feet in height and distinctly show the line of long submergence. Between this ancient water mark and the present level of the water the shafts are pitted with round deep holes just the size of one's little finger. These holes were made by a marine shell fish, one of whose large names is *Lithothamnium*, and are supposed to have been made during the long centuries when the columns were below the level of the sea.

ST. PAUL VISITED IT.

The Roman town of Puteoli possessed a vital interest in the recorded visit of St.

Paul in 62 A. D. In connection with which may be quoted a passage from the Apostolical Acts of St. Peter and St. Paul, written in the ninth century. This says that when St. Paul arrived at Puteoli the ship master landed, and, being like St. Paul—bald—was mistaken for him and promptly beheaded.

St. Paul being grieved with a great grief, turned to the vengeance of God upon the people of the city. The legend ends with these words, "Looking up with their eyes, they all saw that city of Puteoli sunk into the shore about a fathom."

Ruined as the temple is, it is a matter of surprise that so much still stands in view of the astonishing changes of level which volcanic action has produced in the vicinity.

Close to the rim of the crater there is a sanatorium, which had been closed for the winter on the very day of our visit. An avenue of trees had been planted from the bath to its entrance, for the use of the patients going to and fro. The branches were dead as we walked beneath them, and though they may yield shade in summer, it hardly seems probable that there can be luxuriant growth in such a lifeless soil.

ITS WEIRD LEGENDS.

But we went through the opening in the hillside we naturally turned to look at the little singular place. Its weirdness increased by the dusk in which we saw it. We stopped the man who had dug the ground passed with his pickax on his shoulder. There would be no more visitors that night.

It was a desolate scene. The little flames still flickered and danced over the ground, but they were blue in the light of the full moon which, falling directly on this fast-burning sort of bit of the world's crust, heightened the columns of the white ground and deepened the shadows. No wonder that such strange fancies and fables grew in the minds of men when they looked over these Phlegrean plains!

The day had been a full one. Its climax reached in the visit to the Solfatara, but an anti-climax was to follow later, when the modern epilogue was given in jest and song and dance at our hotel. Most of the guests assembled in the dining-room that evening had just landed from the long voyage, and were in happy mood for the reception of any novelty.

The room itself was unique, with its Pompeian scheme of decoration, blue hangings and flowers and fruits in perfection on the tables where the first few courses of the dinner had been served. A slight stir indicated that something unusual was coming.

A SCENE OF DESOLATION.

A mile or so farther on we look over a low-lying ground at the arches of the great arena, that rivaled Rome's. Here the work of slaves was sold, the most cruel of all sports, in which countless slaves met their death. We strain neck and eyes to see the ancient conduit, and do, for it is still in good condition, and could have supplied a much larger lake than that for which it was built.

The glow has faded from the west when we reach the entrance to Solfatara. "After hours" is the dismal answer, but negotiations are successful. And we enter a break in the round of low hillside surrounding the apparently extinct crater. The ground is money white, covered at intervals with a sparse undergrowth and sage grass. It is a ghastly looking place.

Our guide walks before us; our footsteps echo his, as if over hollow ground; the twilight is succumbing to the moon. One glorious star is on the crest of the smoking hills, but it alone below the fringe of stubby trees, and we feel chilly, and the place is uncanny.

Beneath our feet the earth is quite hot. The guide turns, picks up a large stone and strikes the ground. A long, low reverberation answers. Jets of smoke and steam are rising all around us. We walk quickly on, passing wet places with sedge grass growing through them. The center of the crater is quite marshy.

As our foothold grows firmer, there is no undergrowth, and a man is digging on the hillside, the ground about him white and crumbly. If we are to learn the value of our commercial transaction in the village, for "a good waste of sticks" is a great bank in the crater, digging

is broken, leaving free the raveled end of the rope torch. This he lights and passes to and fro above the earth the man has just turned over.

THE EARTH IS AFLAME.

Immense little jets of flame spring up, wriggling and twisting over the ground. The clay sparkles in the lighted gray. Under so many vents through the fully charged soil. The guide stoops, picks up little bunches of crystals, shakes them free from the clay and hands them as souvenirs to the members of the party.

They are pale yellow and possess a long geological name, but the tiny wriggling flames spread on, the fumes from the sulphuretted clay are not pleasant, and the smoke from the main fissures, where the guide holds the torch, does not invite delay.

Presently we find ourselves before an opening, partly natural and partly artificial, in a gravelly bank of tuff clay. These are the baths in daily use. We go into the first, a small cavern, but cannot remain, the heat being overpowering. The second bath, a little farther on, has a much higher temperature, and the entrance is very small and low.

Only one of the party goes through, the others retreating after going in a few feet. These baths are simply of hot air charged with sulphur and other medicinal things and are said to be very beneficial in cases of rheumatism.

Close to the rim of the crater there is a sanatorium, which had been closed for the winter on the very day of our visit. An avenue of trees had been planted from the bath to its entrance, for the use of the patients going to and fro. The branches were dead as we walked beneath them, and though they may yield shade in summer, it hardly seems probable that there can be luxuriant growth in such a lifeless soil.

ITS WEIRD LEGENDS.

But we went through the opening in the hillside we naturally turned to look at the little singular place. Its weirdness increased by the dusk in which we saw it. We stopped the man who had dug the ground passed with his pickax on his shoulder. There would be no more visitors that night.

It was a desolate scene. The little flames still flickered and danced over the ground, but they were blue in the light of the full moon which, falling directly on this fast-burning sort of bit of the world's crust, heightened the columns of the white ground and deepened the shadows. No wonder that such strange fancies and fables grew in the minds of men when they looked over these Phlegrean plains!

The day had been a full one. Its climax reached in the visit to the Solfatara, but an anti-climax was to follow later, when the modern epilogue was given in jest and song and dance at our hotel. Most of the guests assembled in the dining-room that evening had just landed from the long voyage, and were in happy mood for the reception of any novelty.

The room itself was unique, with its Pompeian scheme of decoration, blue hangings and flowers and fruits in perfection on the tables where the first few courses of the dinner had been served. A slight stir indicated that something unusual was coming.

A moment later a number of musicians grouped themselves around the doorway. The girls were dressed charmingly in soft white muslin tunics and sleeves, crimson velvet bodices, aprons and skirts in gay colors and wonderful creations of muslin and lace, trimmed with the delicate bows of crimson ribbons that passed for aprons. The men wore tailcoats, cravats (that had never been faded in), green velvet jackets, knee trousers, crimson or yellow waistcoats and the long cap with a point hanging over the shoulder.

THE DIZZY TARANTELLA.

The piece de resistance came after dinner, when four of the troupe danced the tarantella to the mad music of tambourines, guitars and castanets. Such a dance! To and fro, on and on, never stopping; what lungs and what muscles! Yet the tarantella is a dance pure and simple; no gymnastics, only persistent, unending continuation.

It is the rendering of the legend of its origin: "The woman whose passion for dancing led to marriage was turned into a spider with a guitar stamped on her back; its bite was forever ordained to cause her to dance until she fell in the exhaustion of death."

Our dancers did not feel exhausted, nor were they even breathless after their long twirling, bending and posturing. With smiles and pretty movements they turned themselves into the tableau which is the finale of the dance.

Our admiration was gratefully received and all parted happy and picked, the memory of the evening long to linger with us, and our first sight of the tarantella never to be forgotten.

ANS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION



C. M. DAY
President, Democratic National Convention.



CHARLES W. FRANKLIN
Chairman, Democratic Committee.

rests the burden of preparing for the reception of the democratic hosts who we had to sound an auditorium, seating 15,000 persons, to arrange for the banquet.

Clipped By:



jlc

Sun, Feb 25, 2018