

Pen and Pencil in Italy

THIS is a book* which, from its title and its whole appearance, leads the reader to expect that in its pages Edith Wharton and Maxfield Parrish are to explain and portray the beauties of the villa gardens of Italy,—that both of these artists are to use their art in restoring these gardens to our mind's eye.

To speak of the pictures first, Mr. Parrish has performed his part of the task in a delightful and satisfactory way. He has put the best of his art into the subject, and he has succeeded

in depicting the beauties of the Italian gardens as they have never been depicted before. His interest in architectural subjects, in color and form, has here found a field giving him ample scope. He has reproduced what he thought was beautiful,—the things that charmed him. The points of view selected have not always been most characteristic of the particular garden, but he has rather selected the point which offered the opportunity for the loveliest picture. In the Villa Lante, he shows us a cloud effect as it appears in a formal garden. In the theatre at La Palazzina, Siena, he has shown us the effect of brilliant sunlight on cypresses.

* "Italian Villas and Their Gardens." By Edith Wharton. With pictures by Maxfield Parrish. The Century Co. \$6.00.

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In the Villa Corsini, we see how the façade of an Italian villa looks on a wintry day, with a light fall of snow. The reservoir of the Villa Falconiere gives us some cypresses against a clear sky, and the fact that these cypresses surround an architectural reservoir is left to our imagination. These pictures, however, are all interesting, and, in the main, Mr. Parrish has selected points of view which are characteristic of the most remarkable features of the individual villas. Although with a limited number of pictures it would be naturally impossible to illustrate so intricate a subject, the impression left on one's mind by this series of pictures is worthy of the subject,—the greatest praise we could bestow on the artist.

When, however, we turn from the illustrations to Mrs. Wharton's text, we are met by a distinct disappointment. The impression, the atmosphere, created by the illustrations, is not sustained in the text. The preface, entitled "Italian Garden-Magic" is, indeed, admirable. It is a short, precise, and most discriminating introduction to the subject of design in the Italian gardens; and of course even a popular book such as this must explain what, from the technical point of view, the Italian gardens were, and the sort of art which created them. But the preface includes all that such a book need contain of this technical explanation, and in passing to the body of the book we not unnaturally expected that Mrs. Wharton would in her way restore the gardens to us as Mr. Parrish has done in his way. These gardens are not only consummate examples of landscape design, they are for us quite as much a historical memorial,—the remnant of another and highly interesting manner of living. The only way to make these gardens as vivid in a literary, as Mr. Parrish has made them in a pictorial sense, is to restore in some measure the lineaments of this way of living. Mr. Parrish has depicted the villas as they are to-day; but if they were created to-day, even supposing that contemporary architects were competent to create them, the form they would take would be widely different.

They would be suited to the life of the people who were to occupy them. Inasmuch as the richest of American millionaires does not attach to his domestic life a horde of retainers, the houses would probably be smaller in size, and their grounds possibly less extensive in scale. The machinery of modern life is elaborate enough, but it is installed in the cellar and in the walls. The habits of modern life are simpler in some respects, but more complicated in others. All the conditions thus vaguely indicated, to say nothing of climate, would have a direct bearing upon the form which the architectural layout of a country place would take; and in order to revive in pictures and words a historic type of villa and landscape architecture, such as the Italian gardens, some description is necessary of the life of the people who occupied the villas. They were nearly all of them built and used by the Princes of the Church; and we cannot understand them, unless we know how these men lived and what sort of a pageant was rehearsed in the magnificent scenery of their houses and gardens. That Mrs. Wharton is admirably qualified to restore the pageant of the domestic life of Italian prelates of the seventeenth century, is sufficiently proved by her "Valley of Decision," in which she performs, with delicate and resourceful art, a similar service for the intellectual and social life of the eighteenth century; but if that book contained perhaps more history than fiction, her "Italian Villas" does not contain enough history to afford an appropriate and illuminating background to the accompanying pictures.

The body of the book is made up simply of historical and descriptive notes, dealing with the several villas. She tells us for whom they were built, and who built them, and when they were built. All this matter is excellent of its kind. Were it accompanied by full technical illustrations in close connection with the text, the book would constitute a useful guide to the student of Italian villa architecture, but this is not intended to be a guide-book. Mr. Parrish's pictures could

not illustrate the details of such a text as this, and the text affords little assistance to the reader in completing the impression made by the pictures. There has been an attempt to supplement Mr. Parrish's pictures by the use of some photographs, but this was only a further mistake. It is an anachronism to use photographs in a book of which Mr. Parrish's illustrations are the pictorial feature, and the photographs themselves are insufficient for the purpose. The text must really remain unillustrated without the help of plans and sectional drawings.

If, however, the text and the illustrations of this book have been prepared from different points of view, there can be no doubt that Mr. Parrish's point of view is the more appropriate. When we look at his pictures, we get a feeling of pleasure and exhilaration, corresponding to the feeling which the gardens themselves give; and, as is

natural under the circumstances, we wish in reading the book to sustain our pleasure and exhilaration. But Mrs. Wharton will not let us. "It is because," she says, in her preface, "in the modern revival of gardening so little attention has been paid to these first principles of the art, that the garden lover should not content himself with a vague enjoyment of old Italian gardens, but should try to extract from them principles which may be applied at home." Thus she prefers to make her book a book of instruction in the facts and principles of Italian garden design, rather than to assist Mr. Parrish in reviving the "vague enjoyment" which is the first impression produced by the gardens on every sensitive person. That such instruction is needed, we would not for a moment deny; but Mrs. Wharton should have seen the propriety of finding another time and place for her lesson.