

ITALIAN GARDENS.

Pictorial, Photographic Records of
Millions Spent in Enhanc-
ing Nature.*

IN that rainy year of 1903 Mr. Charles Latham was engaged in taking a series of photographs of Italian gardens — an enterprise encouraged with generosity and grace by the owners of historical estates from his Majesty the King downward. The result is a two-volume folio work in which are reproduced half tones from his photographs emphasizing to the fullest extent the architectural features as well as the aesthetic beauties of the scenes and monuments depicted. Accompanying the pictures is a descriptive historico-narrative text furnished by Miss E. March Phillipps.

A year ago, Mrs. Wharton's "Italian Villas and Their Gardens," accompanied by a number of Maxfield Parrish's colored pictures, gave the foreigner an idea of how certain districts of Italy have been beautified by an excessive expenditure of artistic zeal, wealth, and human labor. Famous examples were given and described in Mrs. Wharton's best vein; but the natural limitations placed upon both author and artist seemed to imply that these examples were merely isolated, emphatic expressions. Although Mr. Latham's folio is necessarily poor, in its expression of color and atmosphere—present in Mrs. Wharton's volume through Mr. Parrish's art—it is, nevertheless, strong and abundant in its general aspect. No other work with which we are acquainted so expressively demonstrates the number and expanse of these villas and palaces and their gardens, the millions expended in their construction and elaboration, the human toil consumed and the human ambitions attained or brought to naught.

The famous Roman villas and their gardens first occupy the attention of author and artist-photographer—the Borghese, the Vatican, the Quirinal, the Albani, the Pamphili, and the Doria, to mention the most famous; then come the famous villas and gardens of Tivoli, Frascati, Florence, and other places, touched by that revival of villa building which owed its wealth and profusion to the great Papal houses of the Renaissance rather than to the princely houses of mediaeval Italy. The very elements—color and atmosphere—which are lacking, as we have said, in Mr. Latham's pictures, support their absence by dint of a cause which actually contributes to the reproduction of wonderful detail in sculptures and foliage with no marring or obscuring shadows. Hence, what the pictures lose from an artistic point of view through lack of the sunshine in that rainy year of 1903 is more than compensated for by their architectural, archaeological, and practical value. The eleven full-page with the seven half-page plates which are devoted to the Vatican gardens represent scenes in which the historical value is subordinated to the landscape and architectural. It is so with the others. Wherever he went, the historical importance of a site primarily appealed to Mr. Latham, but he pointed his camera at that portion of it which was most beautiful and suggestive of the general theme. And very often a second picture was required to bring out the sculptured beauties which, in the first picture, had been obscured by the foliage.

The freedom of shadow which we have noted will make these pictures of special value to the architect and landscape gardener; for the intelligent, untraveled observer they form a wealth of pictorial material concerning the outdoor works of an artistic people who have known how to improve on nature in a manner the gift of which is given to no others.

Miss Phillipps brings to her descriptive text those elements of knowledge which are most conducive toward a pleasant and worthy realization of her work—she knows the Italian people, their history and literature, is acquainted with the buildings and the grounds which Mr. Latham has so splendidly pictured, and she is measurably versed in the literature that Prince and prelate, with their architects and gardeners, have inspired in others. Her text, therefore, deals with the conditions which produced these palaces and gardens, the careers of their owners and constructors; moreover, there is sufficient criticism and connoisseurship in her work to show that neither historical fame nor superlative magnificence distorts her appreciation of comparative artistic values.

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