

*Earthwork out of Tuscany (Large Print Edition) [Maurice Hewlett] on www.enganchecubano.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. This is a pre historical reproduction that was curated for quality.*

In spite of my waiver of the title, you relish the notion of a Modern face to face with Botticelli and Mantegna and Perugino to say nothing of that Giotto who had so much to say! I am flattered and touched by such confidence in my powers of expression and your own of endurance. I look upon you as a late-in-time Maecenas, generously resolved to defray the uttermost charge of weariness that a young writer may be encouraged to unfold himself and splash in the pellucid Tuscan air. I cannot assert that you are performing an act of charity to mankind, but I can at least assure you that you are doing more for me than if you had settled my accounts with Messrs. Cook and Sons, or Signora Vedova Paolini, my esteemed landlady. A writer who is worth anything accumulates more than he gives off, and never lives up to his income. His difficulty is the old one of digestion, Italian Art being as crucial for the modern as Italian cookery. To one man the oil is a delight: To another it is abhorrent: Overweak for water, says one, who consumes a stout fiaschone and spends a stertorous afternoon in headache and cursing at the generous home-grown. Goethe went to Assisi. But he had no eyes for Gothic, being set on the Temple of Minerva. Goethe was urbane to Francia, "a very respectable artist"; he was astonished at Mantegna, "one of the older painters," but accepted him as leading up to Titian: And where now do you get the raptures over the Carracci and Domenichino and Guercino and the rest of them which the last century expended upon their unthrifty soil? Ruskin found Botticelli; yes, and Giotto. Roscoe never so much as mentions either. Why should he, honest man? Cookery is very like Art, as Socrates told Gorgias. Unfortunately, it is far easier to verify your impressions in the former case than in the latter. Yet that is the first and obvious duty of the criticâ€”that is, the writer whomsoever. In my degree it has been mine. Wherefore, if I unfold anything at all, it shall not be the Cicerone nor the veiled "Anonymous," nor the Wiederbelebung, nor I hope the Mornings in Florence, but that thing in which you place such touching reliance â€”myself and my poor sensations, Ecco! I have nothing else. You ask and you shall obtain. I proceed to expand under your benevolent eye. To me, Italy is not so much a place where pictures have been painted some of which remain to testify, as a place where pictures have been lived and built; I fail to see how Perugia is not a picture by, say, Astorre Baglione. Perhaps I should be nearer the mark if I said it was a frozen epic. What I mean is, that in Italy it is still impossible to separate the soul and body of the soil, to say, as you may say in London or Paris,â€”here behind this sordid grey mask of warehouses and suburban villas lurks the soul that once was Shakespere or once was Villon. You will not say that of Florence; you will hardly say it though the time is at hand of Milan and Rome. Do the gondoliers still sing snatches of Ariosto? Bourget assures me his vetturino quoted Dante to him between Monte Pulciano and Siena; and I believe him. At any rate, in Italy as I have found it, the inner secret of Italian life can be read, not in painting alone, nor poem alone, but in the swift sun, in the streets and shrouded lanes, in the golden pastures, in the plains and blue mountains; in flowery cloisters and carved church porchesâ€”out of doors as well as in. The story of Troy is immortalâ€”why not because the Trojans themselves live immortal in their fabled sons? That being so, I by no means promise you my sensations to be of the ear-measuring, nose-rubbing sort now so popular. I am bad at dates and soon tire of symbols. My theology may be to seek; you may catch me as much for the world as for Athanase. With world and doctor I shall, indeed, have little enough to do, for wherever I go I shall be only on the look-out for the soul of this bright-eyed people, whom, being no Goethe, I do not profess to understand or approve. Must the lover do more than love his mistress, and weave his sonnets about her white brows? I may see my mistress Italy embowered in a belfry, a fresco, the scope of a Piazza, the lilt of a Stornello, the fragrance of a legend. It shall be a legend fitted close to the soul of a fact, if I succeed: Go to Crowe and Cavalcaselle and be wise. For after you have pared off the husk of the restorer, or bled in your alembic the very juices the craftsman conjured withal, you come down to the seamy wood, and Art is gone. Nay, but your Morelli, your Crowe, ciphering as they went for want of thought, what did they do but screw Art into test-tubes, and serve you up the fruit of their litmus-paper assay with vivacity, may be,â€”but with what kinship to

the picture? I maintain that the peeling and gutting of fact must be done in the kitchen: The king is the artist, you are the guest, I am the abstractor of quintessences, the cook. Remember, the cook had not the ordering of the feast: Nor will I promise you that I shall not break into a more tripping stave than our prose can afford, here and there. The pilgrim, if he is young and his shoes or his belly pinch him not, sings as he goes, the very stones at his heels so music-steeped is this land setting him the key. Things I say will have been said before, and better; my tunes may be stale and my phrasing rough: I may be irrelevant, irreverent, what you please. I am in Italy,â€”the land of shrugs and laughing. Shrug me or my book away; but, pray Heaven, laugh! And, as the young are always very wise when they find their voice and have their confidence well put out to usury, laugh but in your cloak when I am sententious or apt to tears. I have found lacrimae rerum in Italy as elsewhere; and sometimes Life has seemed to me to sail as near to tragedy as Art can do. I suppose I must be a very bad Christian, for I remain sturdily an optimist, still convinced that it is good for us to be here, while the sun is up. Men and pictures, poems, cities, churches, comely deeds, grow like cabbages: And with the flowers grow the weeds. My first weed shall sprout by Arno, in a cranny of the Ponte Vecchio, or cling like a Dryad of the wood to some gnarly old olive on the hill-side of Arcetri. Take, then, my watered wine in the name of the Second Maccabaeus, for here, as he says, "will I make an end. And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: Has any city, save, perhaps, Cairo, been so written out as Florence? I hear you querulous; you raise your eyebrows; you sigh as you watch the tottering ash of your second cigar. Brown comes to tell you it is late. I agree with you quickly. Florence has often been sketched beforeâ€”putting Browning aside with his astounding fresco-musicâ€”by Ruskin and George Eliot and Mr. Henry James, to name only masters. But that is no reason why I should not try my prentice hand. Florence alters not at all. My picture, poor as you like, shall be my own. It is not their Florence or yoursâ€”and, remember, I would strike at Tuscany through Florence, and throughout Tuscany keep my eye in her beam,â€”but my own mellow kingcup of a town, the glowing heart of the whole Arno basin, whose suave and weather-warmed grace I shall try to catch and distil. Brown is right; it is late: My thanks are due to the Editor of Black and White for permission to reprint the substance of this essay. At present I only feel. No one should thinkâ€”few people canâ€”after dinner. Be patient therefore; suffer me thus far. I would spare you, if I might, the horrors of my night-long journey from Milan. There is little romance in a railway: That is, however, a part of my sum of perceptions which began, you may put it, at the dawn which saw Florence and me face to face. So I must in no wise omit it. I find, then, that Italian railway-carriages are constructed for the convenience of luggage, and that passengers are an afterthought, as dogs or grooms are with us, to be suffered only if there be room and on condition they look after the luggage. In my case we had our full complement of the staple; nevertheless every passenger assumed the god, keeping watch on his traps, and thinking to shake the spheres at every fresh arrival. There was jostling, there was asperity from those who could sleep and from those who would; there was more when two shock-head droversâ€”like First and Second Murderers in a tragedyâ€”insisted on taking off their boots. It was not that there was little room for boots; indeed I think they nursed them on their thin knees. It was at any rate too much even for an Italian passenger; forâ€”well, well! So the guard was summoned, and came with all the implicit powers of an uniform and, I believe, a sword. The boots were strained on sufficiently to preserve the amenities of the way: And through the long night we ached away an intolerable span of time with, for under-current, for sinister accompaniment to the pitiful strain, the muffled interminable plodding of the engine, and the rack of the wheels pulsing through space to the rhythm of some music-hall jingle heard in snatches at home. At intervals came shocks of contrast when we were brought suddenly face to face with a gaunt and bleached world. We had shrieked and clanked our way into some great naked station, shivering raw and cold under the electric lights, streaked with black shadows on its whitewash and patched with coarse advertisements. One or two cowed travellers slipped up responsive to the call, and we, the veterans who endured, set our teeth, shuddered, and smoked feverish cigarettes on the platform among the carriage-wheels and points; or, if we were new hands, watched awfully the advent of another sleeping train, as dingy as our ownâ€”yet a hero of romance! For it bore the hieratic and tremendous words "Roma, Firenze, Milano" It was privileged then; it ministered in the sanctuary. We glowed in our sordid skins, and could have kissed the foot-boards that bore the dust of Rome. I will swear I shall never see those three words

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printed on a carriage without a thrill, Roma, Firenze, Milano,â€” Lord! Or we held long purposeless rests at small wayside places where no station could be known, and the shrouded land stretched away on either side, not to be seen, but rather felt, in the cool airs that blew in, and the rustling of secret trees near by. No further sound was, save the muttered talking of the guards without and the simmering of the engine, on somewhere in front. We laboured on, and the dreams began where they had broken off. How I ached for the dawn! I awoke from what I believe to have been a panic of snoring to hear the train clattering over the sleepers and points, and to seeâ€”oh, human, brotherly sight! We were stealing into a city asleep.

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