

The air was full of the notes of preparation. The mountaineers from the Abruzzi, with pointed hats and scarfs of green and scarlet, were already on their annual rounds, playing their carols before the shrines of the Virgin. Long before we were up in the morning, and late at night, the shrill sound of their pipes was heard in the narrow *ricos* and courts, gladdening the hearts of the poor people whose houses they hal'owed by their entrance. Happy now is every possessor of a shrine of the Virgin—and who has not one in some dark recess of his windowless shop, or beside his door post, or at the head of his bed?—and doubly happy is he who has a taper to burn and a centesima to pay for song to the Santa Virgine. Often in a late walk we saw them through the open doors—the family grouped around, the father leaning against his counter, and the last purchaser lingering at the entrance. The minstrel in a kind of rapture sways from side to side, with his upturned eyes fixed on the Madonna's face, while the night wind shifts the flame and throws fantastic lights upon the countenances of the eager listeners.

Stalls and booths spring up as if by magic, decorated with laurel, and trailing vines, and the crimson-fruited *sorvae*, with flags, and tinsel, and flowers. The narrow and dark shops of the smaller streets empty out their stores, to be arranged outside, so as to produce bright and tempting effects, and to accommodate the greater number of customers, whom the shopman hopes the Santa Virgine will send him. Gipsy-looking groups, in gay costume, from the Campagna, bring the hoarded stores of the season—the fruits, the curd-like *muzzarella*, and the lettuces, or the fresh olive oil from Sorrento. Hand carts, loaded with oranges and lemons, shine like lesser suns in the street. Pomegranates, with cracked rinds showing their seeds like white teeth set in the pink pulp, and caked figs baked with nuts, tempt the passer-by.

At all corners the little fires are fanned brightly, where chestnuts and the fruit of the pine cone, which come in in loads, are roasted. The side-walks of Toledo, and other thoroughfares, become impassable from the trumpery wares that obstruct the way, so that the pedestrian has to turn out among the carriages.