

But the mist had not risen to the mountains, which deepened and glowed with the sunset light against the pale clear east.

I suppose that no lover of George Eliot could stand in that spot without recalling that passage from the introduction to "Romola," where she fancies some mediæval Florentine standing there looking down on those familiar outlines, and recalling the turmoils and triumphs, the loves and hatreds of the past.

Even George Eliot is not free, I think, from that common fault of over-much idealizing of that grim, vindictive, mediæval Florentine past, in which I always feel so sincerely thankful not to have lived.

But still this very spot reminds one of one of the deeds that shine out like gems from those dark mediæval pages. It was here, climbing the narrow pathway to San Miniato, one Good Friday, that the young Count Giovanni Gualberto met, unarmed and alone, the murderer of his only brother, against whom he had sworn vengeance.

The guilty man, seeing no hope of escape, fell on his knees, and, extending his arms crosswise, entreated mercy in the name of Him who had died upon the Cross that day.

Gualberto's sword was stayed as he remembered our Lord's prayer for His murderers, and after a moment of fearful inward struggle he reached out his hand, and raising the murderer from his knees, bade him go in peace. The tumult of his spirit unstilled, he went on his way into the church, and, kneeling before the crucifix on the altar, wept and prayed, supplicating mercy by the mercy that he had shown. To his excited fancy, the figure on the Cross bowed its head in gracious answer to his prayer, and from that moment his life was changed. He left the world, and, entering the Benedictine order, became a monk at San Miniato, but, being elected Prior by the brothers, he fled to the solitude of Vallombrosa.

There is a pleasure all its own in returning to a town where one has already seen the principal sights. One's conscience does not trouble one when inclined to take things easily and to loiter about a bit, and in those loiterings there is an added charm in an old favourite if one comes upon it casually. One is walking along in all the discomfort of the Via Calzaioli, noisiest and most crowded of Florentine ways, when above a foreground of peddler's carts, bright with red and blue and yellow woollen scarves, or with piles of golden oranges, one sees the gray sculptured niches of Or San Michele where stand in calm beauty and strength Donatello's St. George, and Ghiberti's St. Stephen, and one pauses and hesitates undecided whether to go in and look again on the wonders of Orcagna's shrine of the Madonna, and then decides to keep that pleasure for another morning with a clearer light. Or perhaps it is the many tinted marble walls of the cathedral that one catches a glimpse of down some street vista. The other evening I was coming down the Via dei Servi, narrow and gloomy with its great dark palaces, and there at the end hung overhead the vast bulk of Brunelleschi's dome, its great curve deeply red in the lurid light that shone through wild storm clouds, breaking after a day of rain. Every pinkish and orange time stain on the cathedral's marble sides was, in that light, deepened to its most intense tint, so that one could only stand and gaze as at some passing effect of sea or sky, and then going on one's way past the comparative whiteness of the new façade, there it was shining and vibrating with the fairy lights and shadows of an electric light.

It might be difficult, though I confess that I have never tried, to pass through that Piazza del Duomo without pausing for a fresh glance at some one of its beauties, the creamy-tinted bas-reliefs of Giotto's Campanile, or the wonderful details of the bronze gates of the baptistery, which Michel Angelo compared to the gates of Paradise, and which it took Ghiberti forty years of toil to finish. Whenever I stroll into that baptistery, I become fascinated by the spectacle of the making of Christians of new-born Florentines. Here, ever since the walls of the great Duomo rose opposite, and this first cathedral became the baptistery, every Florentine baby, high or low, has been brought for baptism, and here, on a short, dark winter afternoon that had already become too shadowy in the dark church to afford one, more than a glimpse of the mosaics up above, we loitered to watch one group after another approach the font, and one stiff swaddled little bundle after another held up to the sleepy-looking priest, who, after putting the salt in their mouths and pouring the water over their heads, dried and powdered them in such a grandmotherly fashion. Some groups were quite festive, with young girls to carry the long tapers, and a smart white silk coverlet to throw over the baby. But one consisted of one gaunt, bare-headed woman, and the little newly-made Christian, which she grasped with one hand, while she held the lighted candle with the other. The child kept up a shrill, feeble wail, as though foreseeing that the world would not welcome it over-rapturously. The lighted candles threw the figures of priest and acolyte into strong relief as they paused in the middle of one ceremony for an animated argument. We counted four separate parties before we turned away.

Then in one's visits to old friends there are the galleries which are so much pleasanter when you have lost your polite awe of them, even of one boasting so imposing a name as the Uffizzi.

One does not conscientiously go from picture to picture, guide-book in hand, but strolls along looking out for old favourites. The glories of the Tribuna seem to welcome one back; the eternal youth of the Venus de

Medici and of the Dancing Faun greet one; the tender pathos of Raphael's Madonna del Cardellino comes to one with fresh meaning; his portrait of Julius II. and Titian's of Beccadelli enthral one again with their absorbing personality. With all its grandeur the Uffizzi is a pleasant gallery, with none of the vault-like gloom of the statuary halls of the Vatican, and one of its pleasantest parts is that long gallery with its delightful ceiling so richly painted in sixteenth century arabesques.

How one enjoys strolling through it once more, past those delightfully naive, stiff, pathetic pre-Raphaelite Madonnas and Annunciations, and martyrdoms, with their faded colouring and gilt backgrounds. Here are those busts of the Roman emperors, Marcus Aurelius' calm features and Faustina's haughty beauty, and here is that lovely baby head of Nero, which I suppose few women pass without a sigh that he ever grew up to be a man, and which is fixed in one's memory by Browning's lines:—

One loves a baby face with violets there,  
Violets instead of laurels in the hair,  
As it were all those little locks could bear.

Then one has to pay a visit, of greeting to Fra Angelico's musical angels in their little side room, and at the same time perhaps reassure oneself that one is quite as unappreciative as ever of Botticelli's Birth of Venus, though one may never venture to acknowledge the fact to the art critics of the table d'hôte before one feels that one has really said "How do you do" again to the Uffizzi.

ALICE JONES.

### MY FRIEND BESIDE THE WESTERN SEA.

VILANELLE.

My friend beside the western sea,  
The land of flowers and palm, and vine,  
My white-winged message flies to thee.

Across the continent, from me,  
Where lips are ripe and rare as wine,  
My friend beside the western sea.

Where skies are soft, the melody  
Of winds and waters is divine,  
My white-winged message flies to thee.

Sweet dreamy, languorous days be thine  
My wish upon thy summers shrine,  
My friend beside the western sea.

The weary brains glad jubilee,  
Rest, beauty's banquet, all be thine,  
My white-winged message flies to thee.

Drink life's elixir, be care free,  
To waiting memory give no sign,  
My friend beside the western sea,  
My white winged message flies to thee.

EMMA PLAYTER SEABURY.

Dancer, Col.

### A MYSTERIOUS BUT TRUE STORY.

THE following facts were related to me by my elder brother and also by my grandmother. The latter was an authoress and gifted with great common-sense and a very sound judgment. Many years ago my parents occupied a set of chambers in the King's Bench Walk, Temple, London, one of the principal quarters of the London barristers. They had a maidservant who was the guilty or innocent cause of a great deal of trouble. She was said to have been a young woman of average intelligence and generally correct behaviour. A very short time after she was engaged, from some unexplained cause, utensils and occasionally articles of furniture would mysteriously move without anyone touching them, and it was impossible to find out the cause. The girl professed to be as puzzled as the rest. In one of the rooms there was a rather heavy wardrobe, and one day, no one being near, it suddenly fell forward on to the floor, greatly scaring my mother, for my brother had been playing in front of it only a minute beforehand. My father had not a grain of superstition in him, and firmly believed that there was some trickery about the whole business. There were no police in the Temple at that time, the gates being shut at nightfall and watchmen posted there in addition to others who patrolled around. He therefore looked out for and hired the strongest and bravest of the crowd to sit up one night and arrest the mysterious offender, for he was determined to find out who it was that was playing these tricks.

As a preliminary step he primed the watchmen with all the uncanny facts. The author of the "Chronicles of a Clay Farm," recounting an attempt to persuade an oracular and prejudiced farm-labourer to use a surveyor's level, illustrated the suspicious reluctance of the yokel by asking, "Have you ever observed the distrustful manner in which an experienced and wary old dog smells at a wasps' nest?" This pictures the frame of mind of the stalwart constable after my father had "poured the leprous distilment" of the uncanny tricks of possible demons into his ear. My father had a great sense of humour, and I have no doubt rubbed the watchman's nose well into the facts. It must also be borne in mind that that was the period of the dawning of cheap serials—

which largely consisted of warlock, witch, ghost, and cut-throat stories. If any of my readers have ever seen one of the old volumes of The Casket they will understand this. As the constable afterwards explained, he would cheerfully face one or even two burglars, but he would not undertake to tackle Old Nick; and by the time that all was ready he firmly believed that he was about to interview the latter personage and that he, Old Nick, "meant business." As most of the mysterious events had happened in the kitchen, the watchman was located there, and so placed that he could not be approached from behind; the fire was made up, and two candles placed on the kitchen table so as to make the place as cheerful as it could be under the uncanny circumstances of the case. My father sat up in an adjoining room so as to be able to rush to the man's assistance in case of need. My readers must picture to themselves the stalwart watchman in the old-fashioned great-coat—staff in hand, with the old rattle of that period, so as to be able to sound an alarm if necessary—listening to the beating of his heart, to the sombre ticking of the old-fashioned eight-day clock, and to the other watchmen slowly calling out as was their habit as they patrolled: "half-past-eleven-and-a-cloudy-night." In after years often when I have lain awake have I heard the Temple watchmen calling the hour and the weather.

To comfort the man during his uncanny watch, my father sent the girl for a pot (quart) of beer; it was brought in the ordinary public-house pewter-pot and placed upon the table in front of the watchman. She then retired, leaving him to watch over the beer and things in general. Dickens makes one of his characters say: "you cannot taste beer in a sip," but the watchman—still in his chair—was pondering that matter in a more generous spirit when, to his horror, the pewter pot suddenly jumped up a little and fell over upon the table. He had often heard tell of Old Nick, but now he had really come—so he rushed out of the house into King's Bench Walk, and recounted his awful experience to his horrified fellow-watchman; and no possible persuasion could induce him or any of the others to go back for his hat; he positively refused to face Old Nick any further; and my father had to take it out to him. The latter, after a strict search, could find no trace of any trick.

My parents came to the conclusion that it was some trickery on the part of the girl, and that she, in some mysterious manner, procured fulminating powder from medical students. But there was not the slightest evidence of the fact, or that she ever knew any student; and if she—an ignorant girl—had carried about such a dangerous compound for weeks together, she would certainly have come to grief. There never was any trace of smoke or sound, as of an explosion; in addition she would have had to proportion the dose in each case, or there would have been some dreadful accident. Besides this, she was very closely watched, and one cannot understand any sleight-of-hand trick, as she had left the room several minutes beforehand, and the watchman, as well as my father, kept their eyes upon her while she was there, for by that time she was suspected.

Being loth to discharge the girl without further evidence, my father sent her to my grandmother's, who lived in West Square, Southwark; and she undertook to keep a close watch over her. Directly the servant left my father's house all the trouble ceased. Soon after the girl went to West Square she was asked to place in order some flower-pots in a balcony, and while she was doing this my grandmother watched her very closely, but could not detect the slightest evidence of any trickery. But after the maid had left the balcony a very short time, one of the flower-pots jumped up a little, just like the pewter-pot had done, and fell over on its side. My grandmother then came to the same conclusion as my parents, that she must have put some fulminating powder under the flower-pot, although there was not the slightest evidence of the fact, but they could not otherwise account for the phenomena. She was thereupon discharged.

Personally, I disbelieve the fulminating powder theory, but confess that I am utterly unable to explain the facts beyond this, that evidence is slowly accumulating that there is some unknown power or faculty which only one in a myriad possesses—which, when verified and explained, will elucidate such as the above, as well as other mysterious phenomena. There is good reason to believe that there is a great and fruitful truth just below our mental horizon, which, when at an early date it is utilized, will bring about vast changes; greatly reducing the wealth of some who are now rich, and enriching numbers who are otherwise placed.

FAIRPLAY RADICAL.

"WHAT is the most difficult dental work?" repeated a dentist yesterday. "Bridge work, of course. Here is a sample," and he handed me a model of the mouth of a well-known man about town, who is rather noted for his good teeth. There were but three roots of teeth in the mouth. Two were on the left side and one on the right side of the mouth. To these roots he had attached gold and built up twelve teeth that are as firm in the mouth and as convenient as the original teeth. It was done by soldering gold to the gold attached to the three roots and running it round to the front of the mouth. Then on the front side of this gold the porcelain teeth are so well attached that not a particle of the gold shows, and the teeth look perfectly natural. Indeed, they are in the mouth as firm as natural teeth, and to all practical purposes are the same.