



583. THE ESCURIAL, NEAR MADRID.

ITALY.

590. Italy is the country of the ancient Romans, who, in the time of our Saviour, were the most powerful people in the world. The kingdom embraces the boot-shaped peninsula and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

591. Travellers visit Switzerland to see the wonders of nature; they go to Italy to see the beauties of art,—splendid churches, beautiful pictures, fine marble statues, and grand old ruins.

592. The lofty *Alps* form a curve around the north of Italy, and the *Apennines* extend through the country from north to south. On the south of the *Alps* are several beautiful lakes.

593. Italy has a delightful climate, and a remarkably blue sky and clear atmosphere.

On the west coast is a low marshy district, in which the air is so poisonous that it is dangerous even to pass through it.

594. The plains, valleys, and lower mountain slopes are well suited to agriculture, yielding grain, the grape, mulberry, olive, and fig.

The plains of the River *Po*, on the south of the *Alps*, are exceedingly fertile, producing large crops

of wheat and rice. Large herds of cows are pastured here; and from their rich milk, cheese of the best quality is manufactured. This part of Italy is also noted for the production of silk.

In the forests of the mountain slopes grow the oak, walnut, and chestnut. Chestnuts are much used as food.

595. Marble of the finest quality is obtained from the *Apennines*. Many beautiful buildings, statues, and pillars are made from it in Italy, and large quantities of it are sent to other countries.

596. The most important exports of Italy are silk, olive oil, fruit, wine, marble, sulphur, sardines, and anchovies.

597. Italy has produced many celebrated musicians, painters, sculptors, and architects.

The people of Southern Italy are generally wanting in energy; many are poor and ignorant; and there are many beggars and robbers in the country.

598. **Rome**, the capital of Italy, is a very old city, built hundreds of years before the birth of our Saviour. It was once the richest and most powerful city in the world. It has many beautiful churches. *St. Peter's* is the largest and most splendid church in the world. Its walls and ceiling are covered with paintings by the most skilled artists. The Pope's palace, called the *Vatican*, is an immense building, containing 4,000 rooms. Rome has many ancient ruins,—arches, pillars, aqueducts, and amphitheatres. The most wonderful of these is the *Coliseum*, where the old Romans assembled to witness their cruel amusements,—men fighting with each other, and with savage, wild animals.

599. **Naples**, the largest city of Italy, is beside a beautiful bay. Within sight of the city is *Mount Vesuvius*, whose smouldering fires sometimes burst out in terrific flames. Near the mountain are the ruins of the ancient cities *Herculaneum* and *Pompeii*, which have lately been exhumed from the ashes and lava in which they were buried eighteen hundred years ago.

600. **Venice** is built on a cluster of small islands. Channels of water serve as streets; and boats, called *gondolas*, supply the place of carriages. There are many bridges over the channels. One, called the *Bridge of Sighs*, reminds us of the cruel government that once existed in the city. On one side of the bridge is a palace, and on the other a grim prison. Criminals were brought across the bridge to the palace to hear their sentence, and then taken back for execution.