

But no one takes it amiss; it is an immemorial privilege of Christmas time.

We hurry from the flower market, where it seems to have been showering roses, camelias, pansies, inignonette, and variegated japonicas for the Novena, to have a look at the confectioners' windows, and at the coral and lava shops, Chiaia and Chiatamone. Of all the beautiful sights none surpass these. They are unique, and in their Christmas dress, they are ravishing. As we wend our way back, bent on sight-seeing, the streets have an air of carnival. Even the animal creation shares in the gaiety. — A cow that is being led along, with a bunch of dewy roses between her horns, looks as if she is going to be an offering to Isis, instead of yielding an offering of foamy milk at the doors; and even the poor ill-used donkey has a garland of flowers fastened to his tail.

The din waxes louder. The bray of the donkey, the noise and indescribable grunt of his driver, the cries of the vendors, the goat bells and the huddle of their wearers, trampling over unlucky feet as they throng homeward through the midst of carriages and pedestrians, the march of a troop of soldiers—lovers of the Madonna also—out in their gayest uniform, with a deafening band of music, the chaffing of the *favolini*, charged with catering for holiday dinners, the carriages of the buyers of Christmas gifts that choke the way, the crack of the *vetturino's* whip—altogether make a scene not to be forgotten. But the climax of confusion is the preparation for *Vigilia*—the eve of Christmas, *una grande solennite*. We walk through *Santa Brigidu*, or the *Gran Mercato*, of the old city. Men, women, and children, dogs, servants, gentlemen, monks, priests and soldiers, all busy with eels; bargaining, buying, selling, weighing, or carrying home eels. Here comes a fisherman with a basket on his head, which is thrown back with wide open mouth, crying "*Capitone*," while a long and slender eel comes twining down, giving his visage the look of a Medusa. He quietly puts it back with his hand, and filling his lungs, again vociferates with wider-open mouth, "*Capitone*." Women, girls, and boys are doing the same. All places swim and wriggle and slide with eels till the time comes for the feast. Friends invite each other to eat *capitone*, and vie with one another in the number of ways in which they have them served, amounting