From Rapallo to Lucerne

By Way of the Italian Tahoe

LIGURIAN TYPE

By Eleanor Connell

THERE is not, anywhere, a more charming spot than Rapallo. By rail it is one hour south from Genoa and is on the eastern Italian Riviera. It is situated almost in the exact center of a horseshoe shaped hill. On the left (the Genoa side) is Specia, Colmati and Nervi.

On the right looking southward—toward Rome—only four and a half hours away, lies Portofino, Sestra Levanti, Santa Margherita and other places. This is all called Liguria.

Each of these places is a jewel in its way. But Rapallo is to me the fairest of them all and sparkles like a gem in its Mediterranean setting.

Today, there are not many traces of Rapallo roman; of medieval times here are quite a few. And the Rapallo of today is well worth knowing. There is not a month in the year when this place is free of visitors, for no matter how warm the day you are certain of a cool night. And winter is a sunny succession of windless days when roses and camellias blossom as in our own California. And often at that season, the hotels and pensions are taxed to accommodate visitors from Rome and nearby cities. From these latter places, the frequent daily trains bring numbers of people fortunate enough to leave the deadly cold of the winter of southern Italy. And, too, many come from England, Scotland and Germany to "thaw out."

Some of the hills show traces of having been fortified. At St. Michael and other places are ruins of towers. Some fine old houses remain; indeed they might be taken as models for many modern palazzi built by Americans there. The Rapallese home proper is picturesque; is often painted in bright colors with terrace and pergola in olive and vine setting. The old palaces of black and white stripes have at sometime belonged to noble families. Rapallo abounds in beautiful walks. From nearly every street the passerby gets a glimpse of a pretty shrine, generally painted blue. And here and there a picturesque gateway. Again, a quiet highway, with a shrine crumbling to decay and seeming to ask its mission in life. The day of service may be over, but a spot such as this delights the eye with its soft and mellow tones.

Here and there you see a quiet campo santo (cemetery). On one of the graves I saw the plaintive request, "a prayer for me, please" (in Italian, of course). Many of the shop fronts are green; in summer a good color as it is restful as well as pretty. In the twisting streets of the shopping quarter one sees in the windows what looks like yellow ribbon. It is past—paste. From it is made macaroni, vermicelli, etc. From time immemorial the women and children of Rapallo have made beautiful laces for church and dress use. These people begin this work at an early age and in spare moments, between washing of clothes and cooking, sit out of doors at work on three legged stools. They are always cheerful. Rapallo has no beggars, for the people love to work.

A familiar sight at every stream is the washer woman beating the clothes on huge stones. From constant exposure, year in and out, in sunshine and rain, their own clothes assume tints which somehow tone well with the Rapallo landscape.

The Rapallese men are good fishermen and lead the world as swimming experts. They are a splendid type of manhood and are all round good fellows. One of the exquisite sights of Rapallo is the church (la chiesa) away up on a hill, seemingly tucked under the clouds. On a moonlit night, this spot, whether viewed from the floor of the valley or from the hill, is enchanting. The orange and lemon trees are familiar to Riviera scenery and the olives and oil famous. Figs, too, are more luscious than in the large cities of Italy. In spring, you walk over miles of wild violets; their odor is deliciously pungent. In autumn, the chestnut foliage gives way to the oaks and then come the wonderful sunsets. The tints change from pale opal to amber; from ruddy gold to deep red. Almost before the sun's last rays are gone, come the balmy starlit nights. The nightingales begin to sing; the tropical plants exhale a thousand sweet odors. And on such a night with the moon shining over the Mediterranean the effect is magical.

The contadini (peasants) enjoy their simple fare and are contented. These people are affectionate, simple and hospitable. They are easily moved to tears and laughter; are grateful for favors granted them and show pride in the matter of taking gifts, always wanting to make a return.

There is not a more beautiful villa in Rapallo than "Tawasentha," the home of Reinhold Herman, known the world over for his musical composition and valuable vocal instruction. He is generally surrounded by a chosen colony of students who travel far and near to reach him.

As I climbed the hill to his home—truly a shrine—it was with a feeling of certainty that at the end of the journey there would be a recompense. You could not spend a summer in Rapallo and not love it. I said addio to the bewitching little jewel of a place with regret. I promised my "maestro" and the dear kindly people who so added to my happiness there that I would try to come back somo day. I hope it will be possible. A visit to Rapallo is a pleasure not easily forgotten.

From Rapallo to Genoa is but an hour's trip. The latter city with its fine seaport and great campo santo and churches is worth a prolonged visit. But the weather was torrid, so after a short stay I went on to Milan.

The beautiful cathedral with its more than 100 spires and turrets holds the eye long before you reach the city, and after leaving Milan, I could not refrain from looking back again and again at this magic building with its pinnacles standing out like exquisite lacework against the blue Italian sky.

In less than two hours we were at Como, the fairyland of the world. One is struck at once with the great beauty of the scene. As you embark on the little steamer and go on your way up the beautiful Lake of Como, you feel each moment too exquisite to last. But, no! Whether you are passing Menaggio, Bellagio or a dozen other entrancing spots the scene of beauty is enhanced with every moment.

At every landing facchini (porters) wait to help you land and picturesque contadini (peasants) advance and retreat like singers on an operatic stage, or so it seemed to me. When you least expected it one would break out into song. The autumn season was just beginning in the land of the Italian lakes with, I remember thinking, perhaps largely the same people coming together as the autumn before. There were as many English and French as Italians and quite a few Americans; a leisurely set addicted to doing nothing in that lovely soft Italian land, and doing it extremely well. The boat stopped at Trevano to receive two men. Both looked familiar and soon I realized that one was Leoncavallo, the other Mascagni, whom we have had in California. At Bellagio they got off to visit (as I afterward read in my Paris Herald) Signor Artruro Colauttil, librettist of "Fedora" and other operas. Our boat again proceeded on its course. Here and there as you glide along you see on the shore a shrine and some one kneeling and praying, bits of ever recurrent color in awning; here and there a strip of bright carpet from a window. The sun began to lower, the evening birds to sing. The hotel verandas were full of people, talking, laughing, eating, drinking and singing; giving just that unmistakable touch of Italy which never fails in any scene. And, though alone and feeling somehow a bit lonely, my heart sung a psalm of thanksgiving for the afternoon that had been and the evening to be.

I could not, without taking too much license as to time and space, write of all the lovely places we passed. At nightfall we were on land. At Menaggio we took a quaint little steam car which carried us through never to be forgotten scenery and in the sweet scented twilight came into Lugano, which was the last bit of Italy we saw. Oh for words to express the beauty of this place! I have never seen one who has been there who does not seem to linger on the very name, as though loathe to leave it. And life could give fewer privileges greater than a sojourn in this heavenly spot. Imagine the situation. Although Italy, it is the last bit of it; so far north as to make it seem certain that you are already in Switzerland. Lugano lies between Monte Salvatore and Monte Bre. The sight of the mountains was overwhelming. The Italian Alps are behind, the wondrous snow clad Swiss Alps ahead. I had a supper of coffee, Swiss style, honey and Swiss cakes, in the quaint little hotel. I heard all around me a jargon of French, Italian, German and Swiss. There was a wonderful hour next morning during which time we were traveling along the St. Gothard railway. The air was as clear as though we were traveling over ground. At noon at Flueln we took a steamer and for four hours were on the bay of Lucerne, passing many places memorable as the home of William Tell. In the early evening I reached Lucerne.

Lucerne is the metropolis of the traveling world. And of all the cities of Switzerland the most fascinating. The situation is superb. As you look from the hill upon the city the view is entrancing. Rigi on the left; Mount Pilatus to the right; beyond, a long range of snowy Alps.

Below is the swift flowing Reuss and the beautiful blue bay of Lucerne. The life, too, is so gay. Besides the thousands of "personally conducted" tourists who visit the place yearly, there is in Lucerne every year a set of fashionable habitues.

This "set" has been an element of many crowded resorts during the summer months, but with the arrival of autumn, when the season is on for the flotsam and jetsam of traveling folk, this more permanent colony coalesces and turns toward Switzerland.

But whether their choice of travel is by the Simplon route, Tyrol or St. Gothard, its members finally converge in the narrowing tunnel which passes right through the Italian lake district, doubly alluring at this, its most beautiful time of the year.

The Kursaal has a band of 30 excellent players and during the autumn season special concerts are arranged with the co-operation of great European artists, vocal and instrumental. Whilst I was there a half dozen came from the Covent Garden royal opera and appeared in concert.

Who, knowing it, does not love Lucerne. The Schweitzerhof "quai" is the favorite promenade. It is always alluring and animated. But especially by night is it a unique picture of fashionable European life.

From June to September, every train that crosses brings passengers from the Bernese Oberland; every boat on the lake is laden with tourists from the four cantons and the St. Gothard, straight through the Alps, brings more from the too sunny south. Everything near and far which meets the eye fills one with delight. To the east rise the twin towers of the Hofkirsche of St. Leodgar, in which the splendid organ peals forth its harmonies every evening at the vesper hour of 6 o'clock. This organ, the most famous of its kind, was built in 1620 by Haas, to whom we owe the wonderful "vox humana." It was again restored by John Goll in 1899 and fitted with a glorious "vox celesta."

To me, one of the finest sights in all Europe is the Lion of Lucerne. We all know the story; when in August of 1792 the Jacobins, resenting the approach of the Prussian army, fought and lost two battalions of Swiss guards, this monument was dedicated to their common memory.

It is sculptured after a model by Thorwaldson. On the face of a rocky cliff, in a recess, lies the lion, wounded to death. He is pierced through the heart, defending the charge entrusted to him. One huge paw is crushing the shield of the lilies of France. A look of mortal anguish is on his face. I had forgotten just what the monument would be, whether it was of bronze or stone or what was the posture. I was guided to it by a friend on the night of my arrival. It is brilliantly lighted from above. I confess being moved to tears when it suddenly confronted me, and daily during my visit to Lucerne I found myself on the spot. I consider it one of the world's greatest sights and worth traveling far to see.

Entering at noon one of the picturesque old shops of Lucerne, in the "Kapellbrucke," where the Swiss chocolate and cuckoo clock merchants do a thriving business, I saw no fewer than 37 of the little carved wooden birds hop out and proclaim the hour.

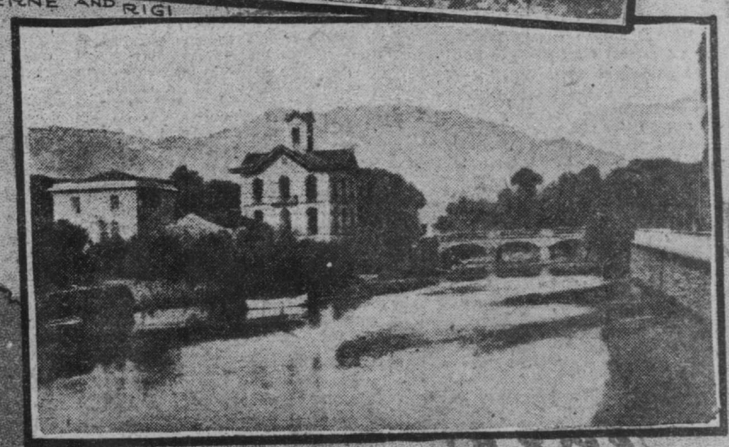
Of the fine embroidery and silks and linens, one could write at length; and no where in Europe can one get such exquisite carved ivories and pretty wood novelties. And one's heart beats faster as one travels the four cantons and thinks of Schiller and of William Tell, of the old farm house, one and a quarter miles from Lucerne, where Richard Wagner spent six years of his life and wrote "Die Meistersinger;" Siegfried, Gotterdamerrung and Siegfried.

I must not forget to mention the most attractive entertainment I ever attended, that offered by a group of 12 Swiss yodelers in native costume. It was so much the real thing, hearing them on their native soil. And there is always the royal Hungarian band in the season. And many delightful tea shops, where somehow you meet every one you know who is traveling.

The days in Lucerne are far too short for the delights offered with every hour. The evenings are indeed filled with music and happiness and cares seem to drop off like autumn leaves.

See Lucerne—and live—that you may see it again.

LUCERNE AND RIGI



BOAT BRIDGE RAPALLO

LACEMAKERS OF RAPALLO

THE LION OF LUCERNE