

SOME ADVENTURES OF AN ILLUSTRATOR

By Joseph Pennell

With Illustrations by the Author

Editor's Note: The publishers of "The Adventures of an Illustrator" have given us permission to reprint portions of Mr. Pennell's autobiographical narrative. This famous illustrator, friend and biographer of Whistler, gives many revelatory and entertaining glimpses of figures of his youth and of the present as well.

WHEN I had finished my drawings for Howells's "Tuscan Cities", it was arranged that I should illustrate some Italian articles written by Vernon Lee, to whom Howells introduced me. In her amazing house I met everyone — Russians, artists, authors, diplomats, and Mary Robinson — all names and nothing more to me. One more blankly ignorant of all that life never existed. But Florence was a somewhat strange place — expatriated Scotch-English Americans — some there to save, some because they liked it, some because they had to. What don't I remember? The good dinners of the banker who had a difference with his depositors and so found himself in Florence loafing instead of working at his bank; Ouida and her dogs; Livingstone, who could drive eight horses tandem round two corners without the police stopping him or his seeing where he was going, or what was coming; the pretty English girl who used to give *soldi* to the counts, when they left the front door of the club and followed her, and she called each one *poverino*; and the family where, when you went to call, you heard a shriek and the hostess said, "It's only Mama"; and then a chorus, "That's Papa home from the club"; and then a yell, "I'm dying!", and a person in a sort of coffin was wheeled in. Then they used to

wheel him out and shoot him into a carriage, coffin and all — for the back opened — and then he was raised up, till one day, when he yelled he was dying and no one heard him, he got so mad he forgot he was paralyzed and he jumped out of his coffin and spent the rest of his life riding on buses and writing poetry. And the adventures of the tourists in Italian — those who were sure they could talk it — when overcharged; the one from Kalamazoo who remarked to the cabman, "*Si voi credevi qui voi putavi s'accommoda sopra una cittadina Americana voi s'baglato.*" And the other who had only one horse for a drive and was charged for two courses, *due horse* being the purest Florentine for *course* — she had stopped on the way. And in the early morning I would be waked by the Bersaglieri, their cock feathers waving, headed by their buglers, trotting back to their barracks from their drill; and in the late evening the men who hummed like a great mandolin, while one sang as they walked the moonlit streets, lulled me to sleep.

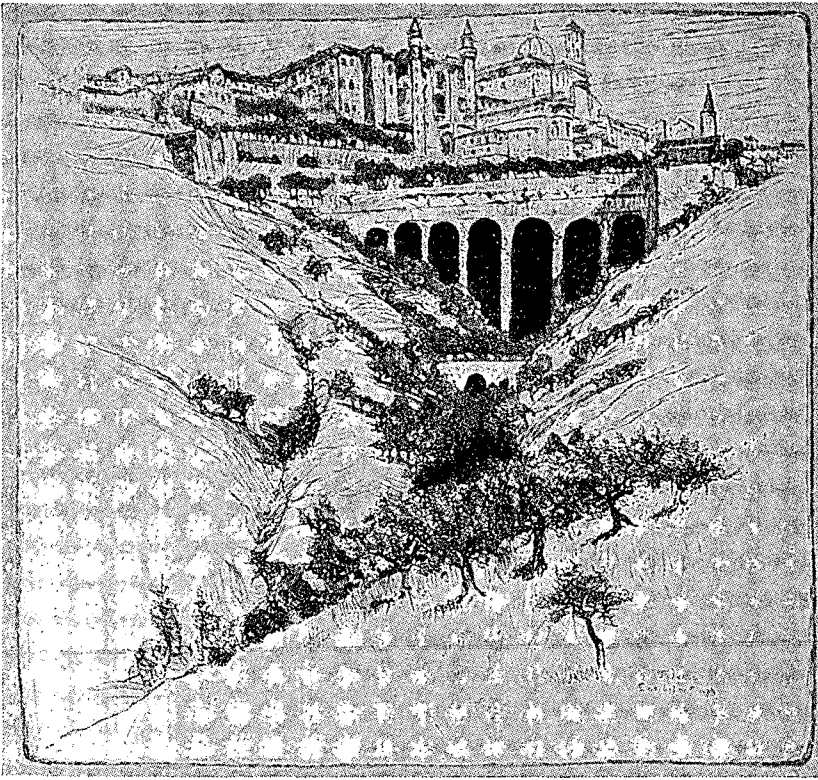
It was arranged finally that Vernon Lee, Evelyn Pickering — she later married William De Morgan — and Mary Robinson, who married Darmesteter — and then Duclaux —, should go to Urbino to do an article on Raph-

ael — it was to appear in connection with some Raphael celebration — and that I should be their chaperon or knight or encumbrance. One May morning we left Florence, second class, and wound up the Val d'Arno by Arezzo and Trasimeno to Perugia. Then no trolley or motor bus carried you to the swell hotel; I don't think the hôtel existed. We stopped at a little inn, the Belle Arti, in a dark piazza, in the centre of the city, for the ladies said they loved the life. Never shall I forget the first sight of the great plain from the great piazza, by the great gate of the city, faraway Assisi, where we would next stop, glowing in the sunset light high on its hillside. But as we looked, Miss Pickering fell ill, and she was sent back to Florence alone. That evening we three went on a search for the Baglioni, then and now only a name to me, up to the great piazza, where the Pope still blesses everyone who passes, then down through the dark, vaulted streets till we came to the blank, black wall of the Baglioni Palace. And as we stood there silent, from the mystery round us came an echo of the fight of long ago. Again and again with E.* and Helen and alone I have stood before that grim wall in the darkness, but never since has it given back the sound of battle, the wails of the wounded, the voices of the victors. It was only a murmur but it was real. Frightened, without words, we came out of the blackness. But we had heard.

Next morning we made our plans to start. We hired a carriage with three horses, fine in feathers, and tinkling with bells. The day was spent, after this, in galleries and churches. To me, then as now, the charm was in the city and its character, yet Vernon Lee said,

*Elizabeth Robins (Mrs. Pennell).

and that was the end of it, "All Italian hill towns are alike and all uninteresting save for their history." That is the author's point of view. We did the Pinturicchios in the Museum in the piazza, and the Raphaels in the convent outside the walls. In the evening we went again to the Baglioni Palace, but there was not a sound. Next morning we started for Assisi, down the long hill, across the plain by the Etruscan tombs, the Roman remains, to Santa Maria degli Angeli, and then up and up the mountain side to the home of the blessed Francis, Assisi mounting ever above us. At last we came to the gate of the city. No touts acclaimed us for their hotel. We rattled and jingled to the one *albergo*, and there we were only guests, the whole town showing the way. The legend of the Blessed Francis was not yet known abroad and had not brought riches to Assisi. We dined on the terrace beside the Church, as the long lines of light stretched across the plain, touching the Temple in the Valley of the Clitumnus with gold, turning the Tiber to silver, and washing the mountains with blue shadows. And when, in the twilight, we asked the waiter about a map and our road, he confessed that he did not even know the way out of the town, any more than our driver, and explained it by saying that he was "a little bad in his eyes". Next morning we saw the chapels in the Lower Church, and that blue heaven with its gold stars is still before me — outside was only a sad city of ruin and poverty. But the driver had found our road. We started and we wound and wound ever up to Gubbio, and down again across a valley, and then came a climb. Two oxen were added and we mostly walked, and up and up we went till at last the high pass opened, and away above was Urbino, beyond another vine-filled valley, the city stretch-



Ducal Urbino standing on its great foundations. From etching made in 1883.

ing from mountain to mountain, built on mighty arches. Our coming was known before we reached it, and a crowd awaited the Milors, and rooms and a dinner with little birds were ready. In the morning, the ladies looked up Raphael and I made an etching of the city from the valley. I have no idea what Raphael had to do with it, save that he was born there. I think I drew the house. But I do know that I have never seen such a bridge as that on which Urbino stands. At that date, though there were no new artists, in one way I was one, for I never went to see an old picture if I could make a new one; but I was a young fool.

Here our triumphal progress ended. First of all there were complications

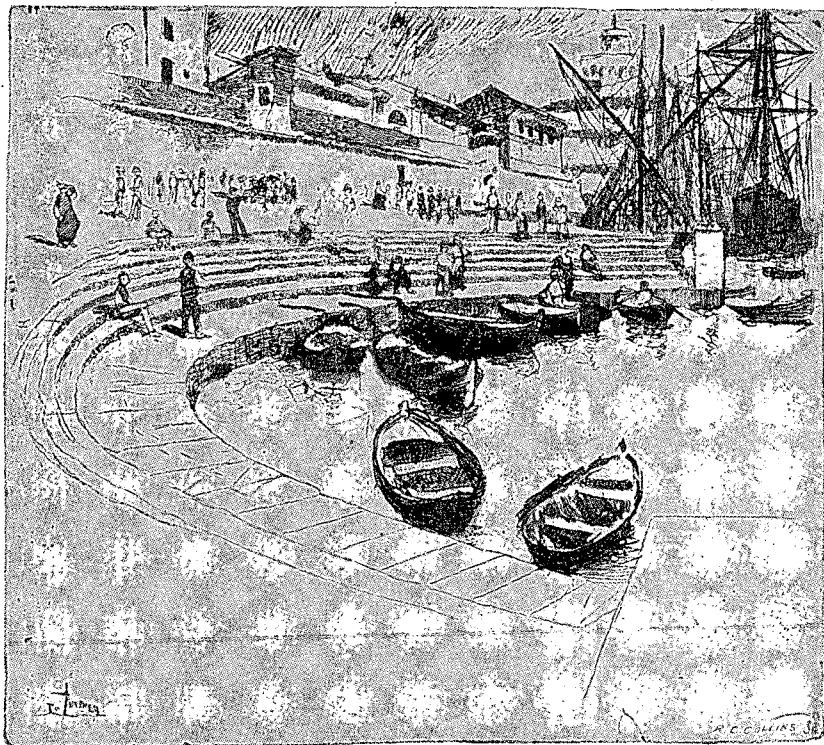
with the drivers of the carriage and the oxen, which I, owing to their knowledge of the language, left to the ladies. But when we started, the landlord, thinking we were successors of Ruskin and "*Milors Inglesi*", asked the price of his hotel for keeping us in it, the ladies collapsed, and I settled matters by handing him a proper sum and saying "*Questo o niente*." I found then that sufficient ignorance of a language is a great advantage—in certain cases. Humbly, alone, without a crowd, we carried our things to the diligence and meekly took our places among the peasants and drummers who filled it. I was on top. Down we started, San Marino on its mountain to the left; below the great plain with Rimini in it

and the sea beyond. In a little while, through the streets of Rimini, we clattered to another dark, dreary palace turned hotel, upstairs, as most hotels then were. The ladies fell upon Malatesta and I fell to drawing, as I have tried again and again, to do the Roman bridges; but I have never forgotten the majesty of the chapels or the sadness of the grass-grown, silent, empty, palace-lined streets. We discovered, too, that our money had nearly run out. The ladies wanted to see the mosaics at Ravenna, then unrestored, and the Pinetta, then unburned, but there was not enough cash to take us all. So we drew lots — or they did — and the result was that I was sent straight back to Florence, third class, without a *centesimo* in my pocket to stop in Bologna, or even to buy anything to eat or drink on the way, while they, having won my money, wrote me that they reveled in Ravenna. However, I had my revenge, for I ate a good dinner in Florence and when, after a week, they came back and I called, I was told that they were always in bed. They got out eventually, and so did the articles, and the curious may find them, Urbino in "The Magazine of Art" and Rimini in "The English Illustrated". But though we all live, the magazines are no more.

Later in the spring I made a second little journey, this time alone, and this time again to illustrate an article written by Vernon Lee. I hired a carriage in Lucca — I could get no bicycle — and after a detour to see the Devil's Bridge, reached the Bagni in the evening and stopped in a little hotel by the river. Outside the nightingales sang, and when they stopped, the river rippled on till morning. At sunrise, I started to walk to Barga and the towns round about. It was Corpus Christi, though I did not know it; the article by

Vernon Lee had nothing to do with the *fešta*. The road, which I have cycled and motored since over and over, moved up among the dark shadows of the chestnuts and then came out into the open country. Tired of tramping it, I climbed up to the first hill town I saw, wonderful from below with its *campanile*. Within its narrow streets all was dismal, all was poverty and squalor; though not the filth the Italian makes when he gets to America. But in America he becomes a different sort of Italian, and he no longer comes from Barga. It was a largish place and as it was a *fešta*, everyone was about. There was no inn, only the house with the bush above the door. There was wine, no Chianti, though this is almost its country. There was no meat, though many goats; no eggs, though plenty of chickens; nothing but stale black bread, ancient cheese and sour wine. But after a five mile walk at sunrise and no breakfast, anything is good.

What do these people eat, or do they, as I have been told, learn to live without eating? So we shall have to live, because it costs too much to dine, and under prohibition we can't dine decently. But most new Americans have never dined or done anything decently. These hill people were grim and silent. The inn reminded me of the English country "pubs", the most miserable in the world, till now that America has gone dry, with only cereals, cold storage, chewing gum and candy to live on, the new American "eats" — the new American word. I got away as soon as possible. The people were honestly poor, for they scarcely charged me anything, and offered last year's chestnuts and showed me a cut across the high hills to the main road to Barga; and some went with me, till I could see the highway glittering in the light below.



The harbor at Leghorn. Engraved on wood for the "Century" from the original etching.

As far as I could make out, all the talk was of America, and that they wanted to go there; but we had no prohibition then, though I hear the Italians have all the wine they want in this dry desert today.

Once back on the high road, I found it filled with the gayest, brightest crowd; and, at last, we wound up into the town of Barga, crowded with people. Mass had begun in the cathedral at the top of the great flight of steps, and before long a procession came out of the church to the peals of the bells and music of the band. First came small girls, carrying great baskets of roses, and as they walked they strewed the streets deep with them, and from the crowded windows and balconies above, draped with hangings, more roses were

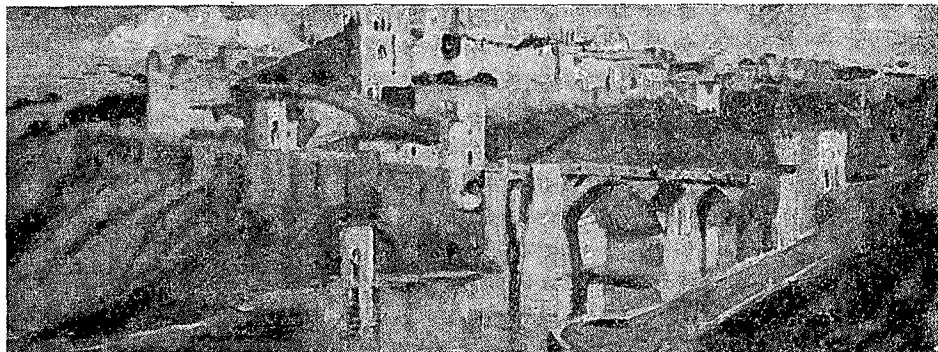
showered down. Then came the city authorities — the Mayor gorgeous in sash and top hat, then priests, acolytes, and last the Bishop, carrying under a canopy the Host, and finally all the confraternities of the country round, moving over the bed of roses. As the Mayor went by, he eyed me closely. I supposed I had done something, though I knelt with the rest as the Holy Thing passed. While the procession wound round the town, I waited on the great terrace strewn with roses, in the glittering air. As I rested, every little while crashes of bells surged from the tower of the cathedral and when they ceased, one after the other, all round the valley and up the encircling church-crowned hills, the pealing jangling was taken up by church after church, dying away in

the far distance, then coming back nearer and nearer, till the cathedral bells alone crashed out again. Soon the procession returned, for the route was short, and soon the Mass was over. Then straight to me came the Mayor. "You 'Merican, you?" "Yes." "You know Five Pointa, New Yorka?" "Yes." "Yes? — Me I sell him Cristofa Colombo; me — rich man me. Come dinner; you?" I came.

Under his own vine and fig tree, on that perfect day, by the side of the church, we dined, looking down on his vineyard bought with Cristofa Colombos, and surrounded by the Common Council of the town, the ecclesiastical dignitaries and distinguished guests from all about. And Cristofa Colombo, the hero and cause of it all, was not there. Everyone, save the priests — and some of them, too — knew New York, Boston, New Orleans, and San Francisco better than I — had tramped our land, each with his tray of plaster casts, and had sold them; and each one, when he had saved enough, came back and bought his little farm or vineyard and was going to live happily ever afterward. For I then learned that all the sellers of plaster casts come from about Barga. At first they did not quite trust me, for my local knowledge of Italian quarters in big cities in America and Europe was vague, but they had another test: "'Merican soldier here — want talk you." A long haired, white bearded prophet sat at the table and I was solemnly introduced. His Italian even was not very fluent, only a few words, and he was deaf; but gradually his American all came back: "Me — *interpretario*, was in war." "What war?" "'Merican War." "What American war, the Revolution?" "Yes; me know Winfield Scott, General United States Grant, General Sherman, Santa Anna — me

interpretario for General Scott and Santa Anna, Mexico." And here was a veteran of the Mexican War, without a pension, and not asking for a bonus; but evidently he had made something out of it, for he was one of the magnates of the town, and he went up still higher in official esteem when his American came gradually back to him. I was able, through the Mayor, to assure the company that his story, which they had apparently doubted, was straight; anyway he knew more of the Mexican War than I had ever heard. And then we dined in the shady pergola.

That was the first real Italian dinner I had ever had — *vermuth* and *sasticcio* and *capretto arrosto con piselli* and *finocchio* and *dolci di zabaione* and *sempre chianti*. But why tell of it to a nation, a hundred millions of whom never had a decent dinner in their lives, and have destroyed by cold storage and prohibition what they had, and can't stand anyone else living decently, and who, like the Senator from Georgia, "thank Gaud, we don't eat like Yu-rope-ens." The dinner lasted till Vespers and then there was *vino santo* and cognac and *strega* and *sigarre Toscane*, and we sat on until dark, and the Angelus rang down from the cathedral and was taken up by one church after another low in the valleys, growing fainter, then farther away by those high in the hills, till it died in the distance toward Volterra, black on the furthest mountain; then it came back, and a last loud burst from the cathedral bells closed the day. If there is anything anywhere more beautiful in this world than the Angelus on Corpus Christi at Barga, I do not know it, and of beauty I know much — and have seen much. Then I had a little supper at the quiet but rather tired out inn, and in the morning went to work, or tried to, for it was not easy to escape from the patrons of Cristofa



Colombo; and to tell the truth, there was rather a similarity in their stories, and they apparently had no adventures, and they had all prospered, and here they were, and they had little Cristofos — and — *ecco!* It was so genuine and they were so delighted with their success over there, but I had to work — at intervals. Luckily, there was a *festa* or market in a day or so, somewhere else, and by the time they came back, I had finished and walked down to the Bagni di Lucca.

These people had made their world, they thought, safe for themselves, and now some are killed and some ruined by land and sea grabbers, D'Annunzio and his heroes, who dragged Italy into the war. Italy is finished, killed by the fools who made the war. Those I saw in Barga, thank God, mostly died before, and so escaped the ruin of the world — the wreck that has caught us all who are still alive. Even Mussolini cannot bring that world back.

THE MULATTO

By Claude McKay

BECAUSE I am the white man's son — his own,
Bearing his bastard birth-mark on my face,
I will dispute his title to his throne,
Forever fight him for my rightful place.
There is a searing hate within my soul,
A hate that only kin can feel for kin,
A hate that makes me vigorous and whole,
And spurs me on unceasingly to win.
Because I am my cruel father's child,
My love of justice stirs me up to hate,
A warring Ishmaelite, unreconciled,
When falls the hour I shall not hesitate,
Into my father's heart to plunge the knife
To gain the utmost freedom that is life.