

Through Pisa

by Madge Macbeth

Santa, all built of the same marble, white with a little blue in it, all showing varieties of the same architecture, all venerable and grave and enjoying the peace of this out-of-the-way seclusion. William Dean Howells said that this was "the unrivalled group in the world, after that of St. Mark's Place in Venice."

A troupe of melancholy, hooded creatures fluttered out from the fine bronze door of the Cathedral. They rattled tin boxes at me and chanted what I hope was a blessing as I contributed to their importunings. Inside, some ceremony was going on, but as is usual on the Continent, it was made as little obtrusive as possible! The tourist's journey through churches is not restricted. Worshippers kneel shrinking in their corners as though to apologize for being there, at all!

THE Baptistry stands out as the most conspicuous of my memories. It contains three stories, the second having been built by thirty-four thousand families, who each contributed one *soldo d'oro*. This fact, coupled with the guide's constant reference to the number of Americanos he had conducted through the glorious, circular temple, gave one the sensation of intense impersonality; as though one were simply another stone on a pile of cold statistics. It wasn't the fine marble font that ensnared my imagination, though it was the size of a small swimming pool; nor did I thrill at the beautiful

pulpit by Pisano. No! It was when, at a sign from my cicerone, a wizened verger sang one note into the distant cupola, that every fibre in me quivered with delightful exaltation.

Some marvel of acoustics prolonged the sound and enriched it beyond the telling. As its sweetness floated down to me, it had the fullness of an organ chord, a supernatural beauty which is untranslatable. And most curious of all, my own voice was converted by some unseen choir so that when it returned to me, it had been harmonized beyond recognition.

THE Leaning Tower has been likened to the Tower of Babel. I do not know how truly, for I never saw that one, but no structure could be lighter or more graceful. Friend-guide, being a man of wisdom, remained below while I made the ascent upward . . . about one hundred and eighty steps, I think. The spiral stairway tilts alarmingly, especially on the down side, so that when I reached the top and peered into space, my sensation was that of looking from a reeling deck, in a heavy sea. No base is visible at all!

Staggering dizzily out of the campanile and standing beneath its shadowing pinnacle, which is sixteen feet out of plumb, is not the most agreeable of one's experiences. The tower seems to move and promise one's immediate extinction. The guide said that many people involuntarily raise their arms to protect their heads and that it was not uncommon for tourists to thrust out their hands, as though to [See also page 56]



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