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WHEN MORGAN WAS MADE a MIDDLE-AGE GOURMET



An Italian Banquet of the Middle-Ages.

The Weird Italian Banquet That Put Him in Such Good Humor That He Yielded a Great Art Collection to King Victor



J. Pierpont Morgan.

WEALTH'S magic ring, rubbed just once in the ancient, romantic city of Florence, sufficed to accomplish in reality what the imagination of Mark Twain did for the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court. It whisked away from the twentieth century another Yankee, more famous and more powerful than Mark's genius ever rose to be, and transplanted him to the fourteenth—to that tumultuous era of noble brigandage, riotous feasting, stronghold castles, wind-blown torches, pitiless barons and pitiful slaves which preceded by a hundred and more years the discovery of the hemisphere that was destined to be his home.

The new Yankee was J. Pierpont Morgan. The wonder worked with him was as substantial as his own massive body or his equally massive cigars.

The magic of his name, the influence of his deeds, the overpowering impressiveness of his wealth, did for him what happens only to mankind in their wildest dreams. Before his living eyes the whole intricate, buzzing civilization of five or

six hundred years ago, for dead, asfigured symbols of which he has paid out stupendous fortunes, was suddenly, magically galvanized into vivid, humming life.

He himself became part of it. Within a few hours he lived the most joyous incidents that made existence tolerable in those hard, cruel, luxurious times.

He feasted amid the very scenes, he ate the very dishes which were esteemed

the acme of epicureanism by the plutocrats, the captains of industry and war, the highest of the nobility, who made those ancient days in Italy a memory never to pall on the modern mind.

It was the longing, the intellectual and temperamental hunger of a lifetime satiated in a single night. But it took a Pierpont Morgan to enjoy it as well as to gain it.

pressive abnegation which Italians love to think characterized Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent; a gentleman who, by the way, took mighty good care to attract to his coffers more than he usually let go.

Mr. Morgan had bid in, through his agents at Paris, all the important items in the great Jules Sambon collection, on sale at the Hotel Druet. It included objects of art of the middle ages as well as examples of modern times. There were valuable coins of Greece and Rome, sculptures in wood, terra cotta and marble, pieces in faience and porcelain, pastels, miniatures, paintings—a true treasure house of the loot of the ages.

While the sale was in progress, King Victor Emmanuel hastened agents of his own to appeal to the competitors that they relinquish to him the pieces they had secured, for he needed them in the creation of the new museum in the Ricardi palace of Milan. Mr. Morgan was approached only after much doubt and consultation, for even a king realized that here was an uncrowned monarch of the financial world who feared no royal reproofs and deemed no rival his equal in such a fray.

But in the end he was approached. With the prompt, unqualified acquiescence which a king might have expected of a subject in the years when kings were kings and subjects subjects, the world's most famous collector surrendered to his royal petitioner all the choice items that had fallen to his lot. Italy's king, and through him the new museum in Milan, secured the collection for \$400,000. Perhaps Mr. Morgan did not lose any cash in the transaction. But gain or loss did not bear on the essence of the surrender. He could have let all his investment go and scarcely have felt the loss. It was more than mere money value that he relinquished: it was the relentless collector's priceless prizes.

Was it gratitude to Italy rather than courtesy to a king that made him so amenable? It seems to have been a little of both; but there can be no question that, while the Sambon sale was about beginning, Italy had just given Mr. Morgan the most exquisite pleasure conceivable in the mind of an archeologist and antiquarian.

Signor Volpi, whose wealth and splendor are among the prides of Florence, had restored the immense Davanzati palace, dating back to the year 1300. He had bought it and had done there, in toto, what Mr. Morgan's altogether eclectic taste has led him to do piecemeal. Any collector's collection is a more or less earnest endeavor to assemble the items of one or many

periods; and he is bound to be the less thorough as his interests become more diffuse.

But Signor Volpi did himself and human limitations the justice of concentrating his energies. He bought the old palace, man-handled for half a dozen centuries, and attacked the anachronisms and blunders of successive generations with ample wealth, infinite judgment and the resources of a profound antiquarian lore. The result has been a triumph of restoration, such as exists in no museum, in no castle or palace, anywhere else in the world.

Once past the portals of the reclaimed Davanzati palace and you are lost to the era of your normal existence, transported to the very atmosphere of medieval times. Only the greatest of astronomers, learned in the movements of the stars in their courses, could, by the help of some stray comet, prove to himself that he was not liable to hear the noise of sudden battle between the armies of Florence and Siena, or find at his elbow some freshly written sonnet of that excellent if sorrowful poet, Messer Dante Alighieri, to the memory of his beloved mistress, the ever-famous Beatrice de' Portinari, virtuous and beautiful wife of Messer Simone de' Bardi.

To this miracle of science and art Mr. Morgan was invited, to be Signor Volpi's guest of honor at a feast in perfect keeping with its medieval scenes.

At either end of the banquet table stood tall candelabra, their sconces carrying great waxen candles, the only light available even to the highest of the nobility in those cruder days except the flare of torches. The torches, too, were there, just as they were used 600 years ago, to supplement the dull if more aristocratic candle glow. Their wavering flames made the shadows of the vast banquet hall wax and wane with a sense of strangeness that was all modern, for to the lords and ladies who used them in their former, time of service they were the merest commonplace of life, to be criticised only when some inept knave failed to arrange them aright.

Those were the times when Italy was emerging from the ruder period of mingled brigandage and tyranny into some sort of order, with the moralists and the sumptuary laws interfering with what we nowadays regard as the ordinary liberty of the individual. There had been periods, not so very long before, when even the amount as well as character of the food was prescribed for the occasion, and that with no regard at all for the manner of sustenance of the poor.

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