

The Piazza Della Signora, Florence, in Medici Times. A painting over four hundred years old, by an unknown Florentine artist, showing the square as it was in those days. On the right is the Palazzo Vecchio, on the left is a glimpse of the Duomo.

Florence— Past and Present

A Talk about one of the Oldest and
Most Historic of European cities,
delivered from 3YA

By
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famous English captain who made a fortune and glory by fighting for the Florentines for pay instead of with the Black Prince for love, as he probably should; the black and white marble facade that is almost the whole of the western front, was added in the nineteenth century and seems in no way incongruous. The Duomo has indeed "seen life."

YOU can reconstruct almost step for step the scene that took place in 1478, when an attempt was made to murder the two Medici brothers, who in fact, though not in name, had become masters of the city. The signal was given one Sunday during Mass. The younger brother, Giuliano, standing beside the eastern-most pillar of the nave, was taken unawares and struck down. The elder, Lorenzo, who was on the opposite side of the aisle, saw the blow, just before it fell, and with two of his friends, made a wild dash to the sacristy. They bolted the heavy bronze doors—the doors which had been cast shortly before by the artist Luca della Robbia, and which are there to this day—and kept the enemy at bay while their supporters rode through the streets rousing the people, and at last forced their way into the Duomo, seized the conspirators, and rescued them.

Fifteen years later the building rang to the voice of Savonarola, the great reforming friar, with his warnings of the impending downfall of the city; a prophecy which seemed to be fulfilled when the King of France swept into Italy with a great invading army, and entering Florence as a conqueror, rode through the streets in the Duomo with a magnificent retinue of French horsemen and Scottish archers, though, when he descended from his horse and mounted the steps, it is reported that the people noticed that he was short and ugly and stupid-looking, and fitted ill the pageantry of the occasion.

And, in those days, mediaeval and modern seem closely linked by the Easter Eve ceremony, when, in commemoration of one of the early heroes who, in crusading days, brought back fire from Jerusalem (Continued on page 24.)

FLORENCE is one of those places where it is impossible to separate past and present. Most places where the sense of the past is strong fill one with the kind of romantic awe associated with "far-off, unhappy things." In fact, the further off they are in time, the deeper one's vague emotions go. One feels it strongly in some old village church in France or England; most of all, perhaps, among the mysterious standing stones and prehistoric cromlechs at Carnac in Brittany, where even the least romantically-minded person will sometimes cease from trying to chip off a bit of stone as a souvenir to confess that it gives you quite a funny feeling to be among all those old things.

That's not the way Florence wears her past. It is closely fused with her present—700 years and more of vigorous, bustling life. And though you may conscientiously "do the rounds," guide-book in hand, and see Dante's house, and the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Baptistery, and as many more churches and picture galleries as your enthusiasm will stand, the fact remains that although Florence is almost as full of historical monuments as Christchurch of street corners, it is not a city of ruins.

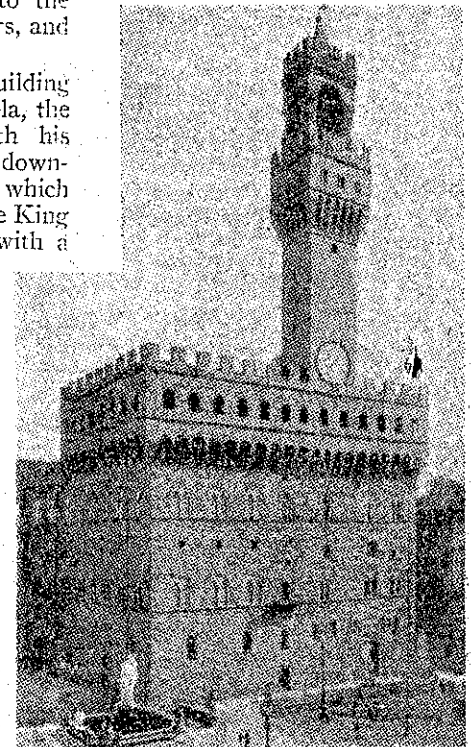
Everyday life still ebbs and flows through and round many of the ancient buildings. The crowd gathers in the great square to listen to the latest in Fascist oratory, as it once listened to magistrates of the people, or speaking from the same windows of the great fortress which has seen so much history, and which is now used partly, I believe, as municipal offices.

A few remaining noble families live in the enormous palaces which were built long ago for Florentine princes—palaces built round a central courtyard whose outer walls, bare and forbidding, with windows high and heavily barred, no less than the iron rings in the walls to which guests once tethered their horses, and the wrought-iron lanterns and sockets for torches, tell of a time when the life of the inhabitants was carried on under very different conditions.

Time has changed, but not taken away the dangers of existence. If you step back thoughtlessly to meditate on advantages of the present, you may be run over by one of the city trancars, which run through streets narrow enough to hold back the rush of a mob, but not wide enough to contain unforeseen developments such as trams.

You buy silver ware and trinkets in the shops built over the old bridge, that was the new bridge, when Dante used to cross it, 600 years ago.

The Duomo, or Cathedral, is the most remarkable of these old-new buildings. Built about 600 years ago, enriched about a century later with windows as brilliant as jewels, and with the monument to the



The castle-like Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of Government over six hundred years ago.