

## A NEW ALBANIAN IN EUROPE.

Another Interesting Letter from W. S. Culbertson.

Florence and its Arts, Monuments and Churches –  
Bologna, the Apennines, Venice and its Gondolas,  
Vienna, Constantinople, St. Petersburg.

Correspondence of the Ledger

ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA, April 16, 1884

Leaving Rome for Florence, distance about two hundred miles, on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10½ a.m., we reached the latter city at 6:30 p.m. Between these two cities the country is much the best that I have seen in Italy. Immense quantities of grapes, and all the different kinds of grain are raised; the town and country houses look brighter – the people better clad and appear to be better fed than in Southern Italy; very few beggars and much more evidence of prosperity; and yet all over Italy, in cities and towns, as well as country, there is very little effort made to brighten or renew their houses by the people, and as many of them are hundreds of years old they look very gloomy.

Florence is the seat of the fine arts; the picture galleries are numerous and some of them very large. The Pitti gallery extending on both sides of the river Arno hundreds of feet, and also the entire width of the river, is well filled with works of celebrated artists. There are a number of large Mosaic manufactories, and the display of Mosaic is very grand. Jewelry is also extensively manufactured and this city is headquarters for marble statuary. There are many handsome residences, with yards filled with flowers, which is a very, unusual thing in this land. The hotels are numerous and well kept, parks and drives very fine, everything more like a northern city than any I have seen in Italy.

There are many Catholic churches. The most noted is the Cathedral, which is very large and handsomely finished, but in comparison with St. Peter's of Rome, sinks into insignificance. Americus Vesputius is buried in one of the old churches; the church of Santa Croce contains the tomb of M. Angelo, and monuments of Dante and Galileo. This church was commenced in 1294. The Presbyterian church is the largest and handsomest I have seen in Italy, and filled to overflowing.

Florence has a population of 180,000. The river Arno runs near the center of the city and is spanned by many bridges. One of them, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is yet in good condition; it is built very wide; shops of every kind are built on both sides and quite an active business is doing in many of them.

Left Florence March 26<sup>th</sup>, at 7 a.m., for Venice, distant 183 miles, and arrived at 4:20 p.m. The scenery from Florence to Bologna is very grand, as we are passing along the base and well up the sides of the snow capped Apennines, with the houses and villages built away up towards the clouds. At Bologna we leave the mountains and run through a very fertile and rich valley to Venice, and enter Venice by a very fine bridge, upwards of two miles long. Upon arrival the traveler is struck by the great number of gondolas and the novel appearance of the gondoliers, with their handsome sailor suits and bright sashes, and the peculiar manner in which the gondola is worked – namely, an oar placed in a notch with scarcely anything to hold it in place – a little nearer the bow of the boat than the stern, and yet with that one oar at the side the gondolier will move the gondola at the rate of about four miles per hour, governing it so that the boat will pass through crowded thoroughfares and never touch. Some of the gondolas have handsome cabins on them, covered with fine black cloth, cushions and lining of the same material. They are all black, as the government will not permit any other color. This is to be regretted, as it gives them a somber, funereal appearance.

The gondola to those residing in Venice is what a horse and carriage is to persons residing in other cities; there is not a horse or wheeled vehicle in all Venice. Passengers and their baggage are taken to and from the railroad stations in gondolas. With a population, it is said, of one hundred and seventy thousand, everything that is used in the city is brought in by water or on men's backs. I was surprised to find that one can walk dry shod in every direction. The rear of all the houses open to a canal but the fronts open to streets, in some instances twenty feet wide, in others not half that width. The Grand Canal is more than two miles long and about one hundred feet wide, more or less. It has over seventy branches, leading in different directions. Most of the hotels are situated on the Grand Canal – visitors prefer that location.

The "Bridge of Sighs," over which the unfortunates passed to be placed in the most horrible dungeons your imagination can picture, is still there; the place they were beheaded, the holes in the stone floor for the purpose of letting the blood into the water below, the door through which the bodies were lowered into a boat to be taken out to the Adriatic sea, the room in which the inquisitors held their mock trials, are all to be seen. There are many churches in Venice. St. Mark's is the most noted and largest, but bears no comparison for beauty and grandeur of finish to many other churches in Italy. The palace of the Doges and the king's palace are of course very handsome; there are many private palaces in Venice that in beauty and richness of finish fully equal that of the king. We were shown through one that belonged to a banker who died

recently, that far surpassed in grandeur and elegance any private residence I have ever seen.

The pigeons are quite an institution in Venice. They congregate in St. Mark's square and visitors go there in great numbers to feed them. They are so tame that they will jump upon your hand and eat corn; no person is allowed to hurt them.

Venice is built on seventy islands, and at one time was a city of importance, but the population is steadily decreasing; beggars are very numerous and increasing. The hotels are well kept and charges moderate. I would advise all persons visiting Europe not to fail to visit the important points of Italy, and by no means to pass Venice.

We leave Venice at 4 a.m. for Vienna, the capital of Austria, distant 552 miles, where we arrive at 10 p.m. About one hundred miles northwest of Venice we cross the Italian border at Poutaba. The whole scene changes. Every thing wears a brighter hue. The Austrians pay much attention to painting their houses, while washing fences, &c., &c., whereas the Italians in town and country, with few exceptions, appear to prefer having their houses look old and dingy. We continue to glide along the snow capped Apennines, sometimes at their base, at others up among the clouds. Much of the land along the route is mountainous and difficult to cultivate; sheep are raised in large numbers, and the people appear healthy and contented.

What are termed way side shrines are numerous in Austria. They are simply a cross, or a representative of the Saviour on the Cross, a representative of the Virgin Mary, or some of the saints, and at these shrines passers by stop and pay their devotions. Vienna is one of the handsomest and best built cities of its size that I have visited; the streets are wide, well paved and very clean; the hotels are admirably kept; but Vienna is a very expensive place in every particular. And here let me digress just a moment to say that traveling first class in any part of Europe I have visited is fully double as high as in the United States. In Europe it will average fully six cents per mile, second class about four cents, and third class, which is miserable, 2½ to 3 cents per mile. Everything connected with railroad travel in most of Europe is entirely different from America. The cars hold but six or eight persons, consequently when full half of the passengers must ride backwards – there is no water, or any other accommodations on the day cars, but they are very comfortable and much better arranged for taking a nap than our day cars. The sleeping cars are differently arranged from ours; they are in compartments for either two or four, which are all on one side of the car and can be entirely closed up, which makes them very pleasant for ladies. The compartments all open into a passage on the side of the car. We have always had compartments intended for four to ourselves without extra charge. These cars have water and all other accommodations. As but few Europeans

travel first class we have frequently had a six- or eight-passenger car the entire day to ourselves. The conductors collect the tickets in what I think a very dangerous manner: they pass along the side of the cars and collect whilst in motion.

I am now in St. Petersburg, Russia, and let me advise every person coming to Turkey or Russia not to fail in getting a passport before leaving, as I do not think we could have gotten into either country without ours.

We will now finish Vienna very briefly. The population is said to be prosperous. Their banks are not specie paying, consequently their bank notes are twenty per cent. discount; what they call silver is mostly brass, therefore will not pass out of Austria. Nearly all the population are Catholic and have some large and very handsome churches. The church of the Capucine Monks is large and portions of it covered with gold; its basement is large and very deep, containing the bodies of all the royal family that have died for two hundred years; there are one hundred and ten, all inclosed in bronze caskets. Maria Theresa and her husband are of the number. Victor Emmanuel, brother of the present Emperor, is also of the number.

The exposition buildings, erected in 1872, still remain and are very large and handsome. We enjoyed our visit very much. The Emperor's palace is quite old and plain looking; the Emperor being at home we did not have an opportunity of seeing the internal arrangements.

We left Vienna for Constantinople direct – distance about one thousand miles. In our passage we cross Hungary and Roumania, both of which countries appear very much the same in people and lands. The face of these countries resembles in a great degree our Illinois prairies and produce the same kind of grains – hogs, cattle and sheep are raised in large numbers, and as there are very few fences you always see men or women herding them, dressed in their sheep skin suits even to the cap. They make rather a grotesque appearance. The houses of the farmers are all small – rarely more than one story in height, and frequently covered with straw. The women plow and do every kind of farm work.

We cross the Danube from the southeastern border of Roumania to Rustchuck, in Bulgaria. This country, until the war with Russia six years ago, belonged to Turkey, consequently is largely occupied by Turks at this time. They are generally a sturdy, rugged, peculiar looking people, their manner of dress being peculiar to themselves. We leave Rustchuck for Varna by rail at 9 a.m., arrive at 4 p.m., distance 150 miles. Bulgaria is not equal to Roumania as regards lands, appearance of farms, towns, &c. The land is hilly and poor, the towns are mostly Turkish, composed of low dark hovels, mostly straw roofs, and why their houses do not burn I cannot understand.

Varna is quite a city, situated on the Black sea. We take steamship at 5 p.m. for Constantinople and arrive next morning at 7.

An account of the Sultan, Turks and dogs, also Russia and some other points I will leave for another time. We expect to leave St. Petersburg about the middle of the week for Berlin, Stockholm, &c., &c.

This is Sunday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, according to our time, but according to Russian count is April 1<sup>st</sup>. A fair of course and a great crowd of people are in view of our window.

I would repeat I am glad I was born in America, and no prospect of gain would induce me to change my home. And another thing I would say is that our American ladies far surpass in beauty, ease and grace any I have ever seen.

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