

Hotel Victoria-Menaggio

Oct 24

Dear Dad:

Two days at this most charming, most comfortable, facing lake Como + the mountains—the enclosed picture will show how it lies on a point. We'd intended to have a [trip?] over the mountains between Lake Lugano + Lake Maggiore, but the weather threatens a storm today so that—unless it clears remarkably in the next 4 hours—we'll go south this afternoon, bound via Milan + Florence for Siena, that lovely old town among the hills + vineyards.

I'm writing of our one day in Germany, I said the people looked well enough treated but there were two signs of real tho hidden poverty + need which I did not give, I think: the food was very bad—the coffee cake seemed to be made of highly adulterated flour: and second, there were almost no motor cars or horses on the street—things were carried in knapsacks on the back of people on bicycles.

Padua, Vicenza + Verona were all of them rather dusty, rather dingy, rather slupy, but all of them had interesting old churches—400 to 800 years old—some of 'em 400 years old when America was discovered! —with paintings by such masters as Giotto. Most interesting from a human point of view was San Antonio, where St. Anthony of Padua (the saint who finds things for you, + does a little healing, + love-match making + useful odd jobs in general) is buried. It's an enormous barn of a church, jammed with pilgrims, Italian peasants, who come to lay their hands on the marble slab of the tomb (under an alter—they can touch the slab at the back of the alter—it was startling + moving to see in that dim abbey the live of work-worn hands held up against the slab). After Venice which is so lovely, so jammed with beauties (+ with tourists!) that after a week it comes to seem too much like over-rich plum-cake, there was a certain relief in the realness of these cities, with normal citizens at real work instead of pestering tourists to buy postcards... the Market—peasant women selling fried cakes, grapes, chestnuts, cheap laces, rosaries.... Cobblers in little dark dens..... low wine shops with wops eating sausage + bread—the a big piazza, or square where small round iron tables set on the pavement sit gorgeous Italian officers with saw-brown belts, high caps +, always, shiny swords.... Between towns, seen from the train, farms with houses of plaster + red tile roofs, set on hills—a live of beautiful slender cypresses beside them... In Padua, the cattle market—farmers with cloaks about them driving in little gigs with low-powered ponies... In Vicenza, a glorious old [?] town house, beyond it a tall slender clock tower.... In Verona—a Roman amphitheater, built about the time of Christ + well preserved; the ornate tombs of the Scaliger's, that family who entertained Dante, built Gothic palaces still standing; + kept at least one war going all the time; finally, the tomb of Shakespeare's Juliet which—except for the facts that Juliet probably never lived, + that it probably wasn't a tomb at all but an ornate mediaeval horse trough—is most gratifyingly authentic.... Our hotel-room in Verona—out enormous room with dark heavy curtains, huge old cupboards, + because it was on a street so narrow that it overpoweringly tempted one to spit across it—no light or air whatever..... so to lovely Lake Como, pretty villages sit at the foot of

mountains, + to this perfect hotel—where we run into Guy Carleton Jones, a Canadian major general when we met at Lake Maggiore two years ago—charming fellow; we had an agreeable evening with him here. Yesterday we took a boat to a town four miles down the lake, then walked back here.

We'll probably be back in London in ten or twelve days, then find a house for the winter and settle down to hard work.... We've heard from the school at Lausanne + they say Wells is immensely enjoying having a lot of play mates.

Love,
H