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ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

BY

KURT HIELSCHER

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All photographs were taken by Kurt Hielscher with an Ica Camera fitted with a Zeiss Lens on Agfa Chromo Isorapid Plates

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MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED
TO
HIS MAJESTY
KING VICTOR EMMANUEL III.
I have much pleasure in coneding to the request to write a few introductory words to Kurt Hielscher’s work on Italy. This volume, now that the spiritual consciousness of our own individuality is slowly re-awakening, expresses one of the strongest characteristics of our people, namely that longing which has attracted the Teutons southwards for many centuries. Italy is the country that has inspired a Dürer, Händel and Goethe to their greatest works, and markedly incited students such as Ranke, Gregorovious and Jakob Burckhardt. Italy is a country with which in some mysterious manner the fate of the northern tribes is interwoven. They have remained true to her in spite of many disappointments.

It is thus clear that particularly Italy would stimulate Kurt Hielscher’s great talent that has been proved and demonstrated in his volumes on Spain and our own beautiful country with their monumental proofs of ancient history and culture. This book is quite “sui generis”. It takes us to the real Italy and displays her to us in beautiful pictures from the Alps to the south coast of Sicily. The views in this work show by their masterly conception and excellent technical reproduction, what there is to be seen in Italy, and above all how to see it. These pictures of Italy will teach even those who know her best, as well as the lover of art and the artist himself what it is that makes this country so noteworthy with her natural beauties and appearance given to her by man in the course of the centuries. They will also teach us to appreciate the perfect harmony nature and art have attained to in mutual competition. It is worth one’s while to study each of the pictures carefully. We see how both the different hours of the day and the seasons augment the artistic effect of the views. But, perhaps, it is better not to speak of this here, for the immediate effect of the pictures will demonstrate the importance of this fact better than my remarks.

The volume on Italy is restricted to architecture and landscape in contradistinction to that on Spain which also depicts the life of the people. This is as it should be. In Spain the life of the people is more in the open air. In Germany, and with all Teutonic peoples, it is mainly within the house. In Italy life has assumed fixed cultural forms in the course of many centuries. Only the south, which was occupied by the Spaniards and influenced by them in its culture, reminds us of Spanish life. And in the south, be it remarked, there still dwell survivors of Moorish population.

What is more important in Italy is the landscape and, in this again, architecture. No country in the world shows such a variety of developed architectural art as Italy. It is particularly rich because sculpture is closely connected with it. Nearly all the sculptural work was designed for public
buildings and squares. The majestic shapes in the tectonic of Italian landscape, which is more pronounced by the almost complete lack of forests on the heights, are still more accentuated by the Etruscan towns that seem to be hewn in the rocks and vest the flat domes of the mountains with their characteristic traits, whereas mediaeval and Baroque edifices fill the ruins of the old walls.

Picturesque mediaeval castles and magnificent Renaissance villas rise on the mountains and are surrounded by dark-green cypresses and pines, whilst the remnants of mighty Roman aqueducts and ruins of Greek temples and theatres stand forth in modern times with their age-blackened masses of ancient stone like fantastic forms of nature, and the towns spread out in the valleys are living proofs of modern artistic activity expressed in manifold forms.

The views in Hielser’s “Italy” show very clearly and emphatically the great importance of architecture and decorative plastic art in their relations to the Italian landscape, whether the monuments be remnants of antiquity spread over the country, or buildings dating from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period. The mighty Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, beginning with semi-Byzantine St. Mark’s rising in the middle of that unique sea-rocked city in Italy’s north-eastern corner and extending to the delicate semi-Moorish Norman cathedrals in southern Italy and Sicily, are the magnificent emblems of the wealth of the cities. The numerous mighty Romanesque churches in the whole of northern and southern Italy with their overladen coarse plastic ornaments are a remarkable contrast to the modest Florentine churches with their restrained façades and bi-coloured stones dating from the times of the early German emperors. The Cistercians imported French Gothic into Italy, where it was soon developed to a unique magnificent Italian style by the Mendicant Orders founded by St. Francis. The ambition and rivalry of the great cities led them to construct the cathedrals in this new style as colossally and richly as possible. Thus many remained incomplete, or were so overladen with sculptures that Milan Cathedral, for instance, looks like a forest of statues. At the same time the citizens of central Italy outdid each other both for the sake of security and magnificence in erecting lofty towers on their houses which nearly made the towns look like modern American sky-scraper cities. Hielser shows in his views of San Gimignano the ruins of such superstructures which have mostly been destroyed by cannon and during revolutions. The return to classic art began in Florence under Brunellesco’s and Alberti’s leadership, re-vested Italian architecture with simplicity and restrained forms that led to the noble and magnificent works of the Late Renaissance. They still give most Italian cities their typical aristocratic and monumental character. But in not a few cases Baroque art has determined their present appearance. It was prepared by no less a person than Michael Angelo under the popes of the Counter Reformation, and namely by the activity of Bernini did it develop into the symbol of the Roman Papacy and its politico-cultural aims. The Baroque masters made use of the beauties of nature and the landscape to contribute to the artistic effect of the luxurious villas and palaces.
Since the middle of the 16th century the popes and their nepotes vied with the princes — especially those of Florence and Naples — in the horticultural and architectural ornamentation of their country-seats and parks.

We obtain a fine artistic conception of all this in Hielscher's book, although the number of examples is limited. He mirrors Italy, and hence he arouses our longing for that glorious country and her art treasures.

Wilhelm von Bode
INTRODUCTION

It was towards the end of winter which still lingered on and seemed so loath to part that I travelled southwards through Germany. The Alps were yet clad in dazzling white. Beyond Bozen winter was forced to relax its hold. I was journeying towards spring and sunny days.

I was tempted to stop at many a place on the way, but I resisted. My first aim was Sicily. The island greeted me with all the glories of spring. Only mighty Aetna was covered with deep snow on its lava-cloaked slopes. My sole disappointment in Italy was in connection with Aetna. The guides in Catania were afraid of calling down its wrath; for but a short time previously two bold climbers had nearly perished on its heights in a snowstorm, although they had kept to the only bridle-path that leads from Nicolosi to the summit. Their experience frightened the others. I travelled round the great mountain. But both in Bronte and Randazzo there was no one willing to challenge the burning mount. Giarre was my last hope. An Italian architect who had climbed the mountain several times during the summer was ready to share the risk with me.

Soon after S. Alfio we left the broad fruit-laden slopes of Aetna. We mounted up through the trackless broom thickets which were as tall as ourselves. Finally all phases of life ceased. We reached the realm of wild lava-streams that were still free of snow. Here primitive forces had once been let loose and the place was still fraught with danger. The lava rises in great waves as high as a three-storey house. Strange spectral figures arose around us, and we were fain to flee. Nearly every step was agony. The porous lava was as sharp as a knife. There were hours and hours of laborious climbing through these forbidding grey-brown labyrinths of waves. Our boots were torn to shreds, our hands were bleeding. But neither would give in, each was ashamed of being the first to pronounce the word return!

Finally we reached the Valle de Bove, the original crater of Aetna. Then the fog came down and wove its horrible net around us. One is perfectly helpless against this frightful foe in such a chaos of rocks. It would have been madness to continue. We were beaten and had to retrace our steps sadly and painfully. Disappointed, I had to drag my heavy camera plates and faithful camera (otherwise a pleasant burden) back to the valley.

A few months later I stood in the crater of Vesuvius. Till I was near the summit the sun had shone in all his splendour. But the clouds were lowering above. When the wind rushed in, the veil was torn asunder for a few seconds. Suddenly there arose the ghostly form of the cone from the depths of the crater; there was a flash of light through the smoke and steam. Then darkness. Everything was hidden in thick clouds. I had to take a picture of this! And
so I possessed my soul in patience till the mist should lift. A carabiniero ordered me to leave the edge of the crater, as one is only allowed to stay there about a quarter of an hour. But the letters of recommendation which Count Bosdari, the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, and Sig. Colasanti, the Director of Fine Arts in Rome, had kindly given me to assist me in my work were respected. I remained. Finally I was quite alone. I waited four, five, six, seven hours and felt the cold bitterly. I had to move about to keep warm. I made up my mind to climb down the steep wall into the crater. It was quite ghostly down there at the bottom. The lava looked like the entrails of some great fabulous monster.

A magnetic force drew me over to the cone. A feeling came over me that I had to see the great secret. The ground was burning hot under my feet. Strange colours danced around me: yellow sulphureous vapour, brown, green, blue-black lava coils. Suddenly they moved and crept slowly towards me — a living red lava snake! Stop! No further! With a crash of thunder the cone vomited stone and glowing blocks of lava into the air, and down they came clattering and smashing around me. My only thought was: back, back, out of this Hell!

Some few days later the crater was bathed in brilliant sunshine, and I again climbed down into the depths and took pictures of their wonders. Months passed and I was up in the mountains again. This time I had to fight my way through the ice wilderness of Monte Rosa's jagged glaciers up to the realms where white death dwells. What I saw is incomparable. What contrasts! There the glowing fiery world-bearing forces, here the power that kills with its cold might all that is created. I left the star-crowned Alps and their emerald lakes. In search of beauty I passed through the teeming fields of the Po to the Rivierian paradise. I dwelt in the death-like solitudes of the Pontine Marshes and wandered through Abruzzi with its wild rocky gorges; I gazed at the beauties of the Gulf of Salerno, at the silent plains along the Gulf of Taranto, and stayed in the forgotten mountains of Sardinia.

Italy is a country of strange contours and great contrasts in her geological structure. This was bound to incite the imagination of her inhabitants and awaken in them all the arts and develop them to greatness and perfection. For this reason no country in Europe has such architectural wealth as Italy, a wealth ranging from the most primitive to the most sublime creations. In Sardinia — unique in the world — there are as witnesses of the dark and distant Stone Age strange truncated conical towers: the Nuraghi; in Alberobello in Apulia we find those wondrous trulli or stone-huts with conical roofs made of layers of masonry. How greatly art developed from here to the Greek temples of Sicily, the mighty castles of the Hohenstaufen times, the magnificent palaces of the Renaissance, the beautiful cathedrals of all styles, the dome of St. Peter's, the precious facade of Siena Cathedral!

Sublimely beautiful and unique cities were built: eternal Rome with her edifices of all epochs; majestic Florence with her gay splendour; careless sun-
kissed Naples; that sea-born marble fairy-tale Venice, and proud Palermo with her Saracen buildings. To these great cities were added innumerable picturesque spots which encircle the sea-shore like a string of pearls or are enthroned in lonely solitude on bare mountain tops. Such a country was bound to be courted and fought for. History there has been written in stone. The memories of great times and great men surrounded us. Greeks, Saracens, Carthaginians, Normans, Teutons, French and Spaniards fought for supremacy and power. Verily, every city and every hamlet tells us entralling stories of long forgotten times: of mighty popes, of victorious emperors and stubborn princely houses, of learned men and artists.

But enough! I do not wish to describe in words. Let my pictures speak for themselves. He who knows how to question them will find that they will answer him.

They depict a wealth of incidents during the happy year of my wanderings through sunny Italy. A longing for the sun took me south. The sun took me back — the sun in my heart and my pictures. When I returned home in winter I had over 2400 with me. But, alas! I could only make use of a fraction in this book. They not only show much that is known, but much that is beyond the beaten track. It was my desire to present a characteristic general impression of the country. I hope to deepen that impression in my next volume ("Unknown Italy") so that, together with my work on Rome that has already appeared, a comprehensive whole will be presented.

I trust that my pictures will find numerous friends, give pleasure to many, and awaken in others fond memories of pleasant days in sun-blest Italy.

Kurt Hielscher
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Rome. Temple de Vesta

Roma. Tempio de Vesta
Roma. Ponte S. Angelo, Castel S. Angelo e S. Pietro

Rome. Ponte Sant'Angelo, Castel Sant'Angelo, S. Pietro

Rom. Engelsbrücke, Engelsburg, Peterskirche

Roma. Puente de los Angeles, Fortaleza de los Angeles, Basílica de S. Pedro

Rome. Pont et Château Saint-Ange, basilique de Saint-Pierre
Roma. Chiostro della Basilica di S. Giovanni in Laterano

Rome. Cloisters of the Church of S. Giovanni in Laterano

Rom. Kreuzgang der Basilika S. Giovanni in Laterano

Rome. Cloître de la Basilique de Saint-Jean de Latran

Roma. Encrucijada de la basílica de S. Juan en Laterano
Roma. Museo Nazionale - Cortile

Rome. Thermae Museum - Courtyard

Rom. Thermenmuseum - Hof

Roma. Musée des Thermes - Cour

Roma. Patio del Museo de las Termas
Roma. Tivoli - Villa d'Este
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Arpino (Heimat des Marius und Cicero)

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Ninfa, ciudad de ruinas cerca de los pantanos pontinianos
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Ruines de Ninfa

Ruinen von Ninfa

Las ruinas de Ninfa
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Naples. On the Posilipo Road

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