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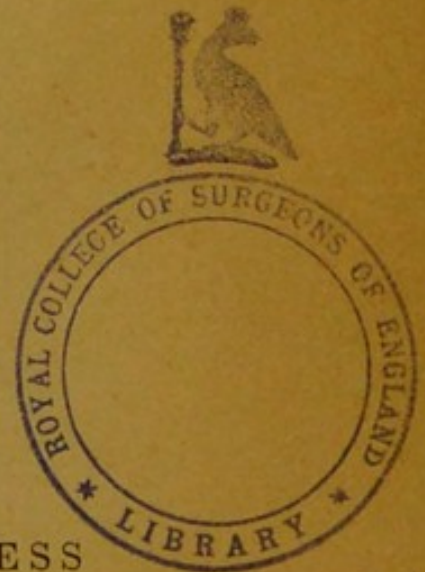
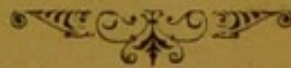
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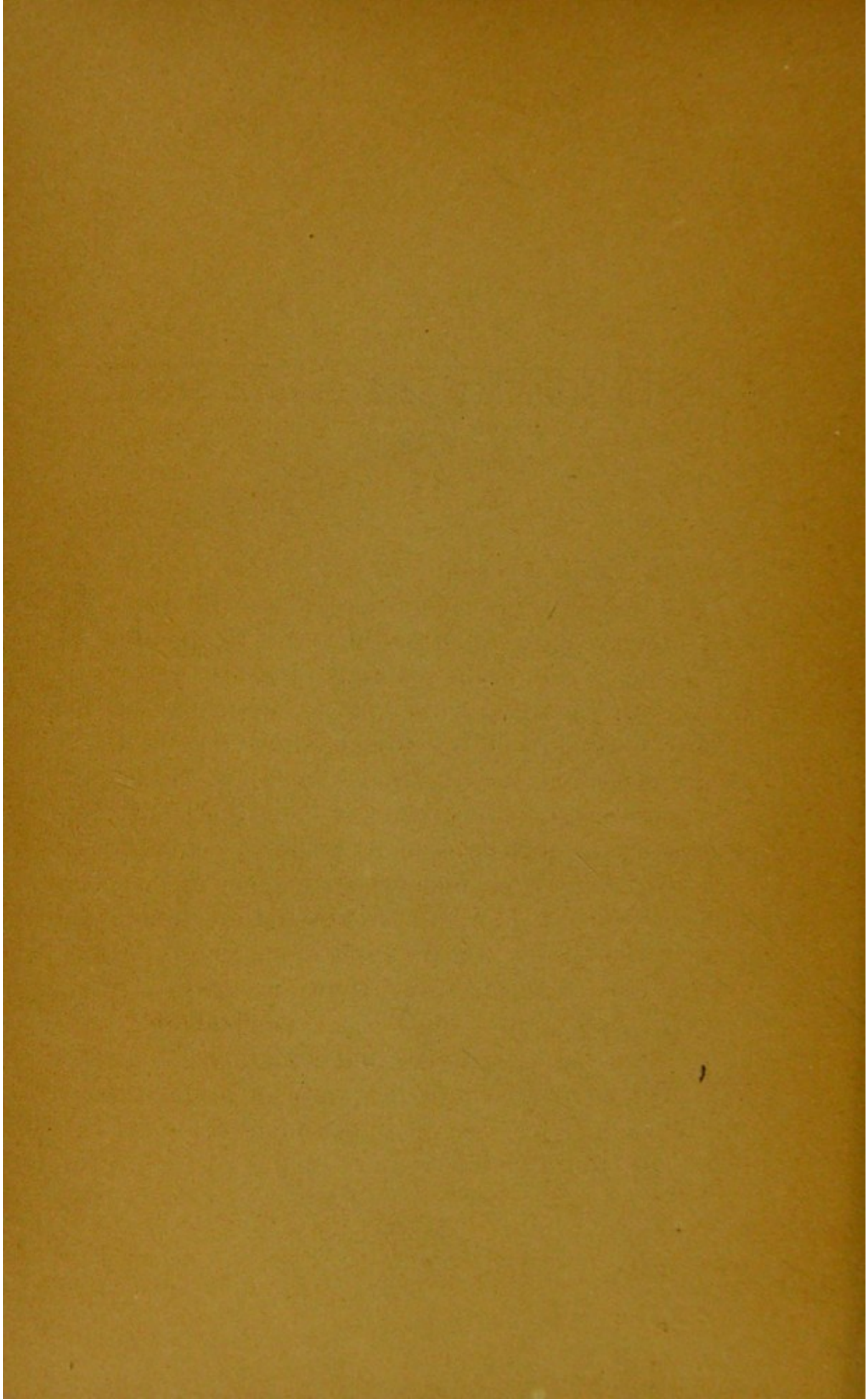
BY

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—
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NOTES ON FLORENCE AS A HEALTH RESORT. ⁽¹⁾

It can hardly be said that the Tuscan capital has hitherto enjoyed the reputation of a health resort in the ordinary acceptation of the term. No mention of it is made in any of the manuals of health resorts. It is generally regarded rather as a pleasure resort for healthy persons, who are attracted by the wealth of its art treasures, its traditional interests, the beauty of its environs, the advantages of its educational institutions, or the pleasures of its Society. Yet, although it be possessed of no mineral waters, nor any special methods of cure, Florence possesses in an eminent degree attractions for certain cases of chronic ill health.

I find that some amount of misapprehension exists in the minds of many medical practitioners, both British and foreign, as to the merits and climatic conditions of Florence; and, it is with the view of attempting to correct such, and to supply some simple details of Florence life and its surroundings that I venture to address this Section to-day. At the one extreme, I have

(1) Enlarged from a paper read at the Section of "Pharmacology and Therapeutics" at the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association held at Glasgow, August, 1888.

found a case of advanced pulmonary phthisis sent to winter in Florence, under the mistaken impression that, being in Italy, the patient would necessarily be able to live an open air life under a warm sun and blue skies; while, at the other extreme, I have met with patients who had been warned by their medical advisers against Florence as a residence most dangerous to health, a perfect hotbed of typhoid and malarious fevers!

Let me endeavour, as briefly as possible, to mention some of the climatic conditions, the sanitary arrangements, and the suitability, or otherwise, of Florence for certain classes of invalids.

1. *Florence* is a city of 170,000 inhabitants, situated in an amphitheatre of hills, in the lower valley of the river Arno, on either bank of which it is built. It lies at a distance of about 50 miles from the sea, and 170 feet above the sea level. The mean annual temperature is 58° Fahrenheit, with a maximum of ~~100°~~, and a minimum of 12°, the mean temperature of January being 41° Fahrenheit, and that of July 77° Fahrenheit. These figures represent the thermometric conditions from 1866 to 1884. Taking the average of thirty-two years from 1852 to 1884 rain fell on 107 days in the year, the average annual rain-fall being 35.6 inches, that of July being 1.2 inches, and that of November 4.5 inches. 103

During a long series of years, 23 *consecutive* days of rain constituted the highest record. This was of course quite exceptional; indeed it is unusual to have rain falling on more than 4 or 5 consecutive days. Snow falls on an average from two to four days each winter, but rarely lies beyond an hour or two. Hail storms come about six times in the year. Mist and fog are very rarely experienced, and only in the mildest degree.

There are 80 days in the year in which wind may be said to blow strongly, twenty-six of these being in the spring months of March, April and May. In the winter and spring months, winds from the North and North East predominate; in summer it usually blows from the West and North West.

II. *Sanitary arrangements.* The streets of Florence are kept thoroughly clean, and for a continental city, it is singularly free from obnoxious smells. Till within the last eight years the water supply was obtained almost entirely from surface wells, which were naturally a source of constant danger. These are still used by some householders, whose conservative tendencies lead to the reasoning that, if their well-water was good and wholesome for their fathers and grandfathers, it must assuredly still be good enough for themselves. The efforts of the authorities, however, and the force of scientific and public opinion on the subject are fast diminishing the number of such, and the facilities now offered by the municipality for the introduction of their aqueduct water are so great, that there is no reason why every house in Florence should not be furnished with it. As a matter of fact, all the good hotels and pensions, and nearly all the furnished houses for letting are now supplied with this good water, the presence of which should be insisted on by every tenant of a Florence house.

The municipal aqueduct water, commonly called *acqua potabile*, drinkable water, was introduced into the city about eight years ago. The benefits of this continuous and reliable water supply cannot be over-estimated. The water is obtained from several artesian wells which are sunk in the ground in the vicinity of the bed of the Arno, about a mile beyond the Porta

S. Niccolò, one of the city gates. The water wells up in a continuous stream, and is led into the city along a strongly built gallery, or subterranean aqueduct, about three quarters of a mile in length. On reaching a point a short distance within the gate of the city, it is pumped up by means of hydraulic power to the level of three reservoirs where it is stored, two being on the north and one on the south side of the river. That on the south side of the river is the *Serbatoio di Carraia*, the grounds surrounding it being seen from the *Viale dei Colli*. Those on the north side are named the *Serbatoio del Pellegrino* and the *Serbatoio della Querce*. The former is situated in a field adjoining the Via Faentina, a quarter of a mile beyond the Barriera del Ponte Rosso; the latter is on the Via delle Forbici, which is a narrow steep road leading off the Lungo San Gervasio, a short distance beyond the Barriera delle Cure. At the *Serbatoio della Querce* two separate chambers exist, one for the *acqua potabile*, and the other for the *acqua reale*, a fine spring water which has for long been used at the Pitti Palace, being derived from Pratolino, some 5 or 6 miles distant. These reservoirs are substantial stone chambers, built under ground, with vaulted roofs resting on stone columns, well lit and well ventilated. From the reservoirs the water is led by mains of cast iron to be distributed over the city. One of these mains passes necessarily under the bed of the river, crossing diagonally from the hydraulic office to a point opposite the south end of the Viale Carlo Alberto, and then follows the line of the Viale to the Piazza Cavour. Though it be not yet introduced into every house, no family need be without it, as the municipality has erected public fountains for its supply in every quarter of the city. It is a hard water, though not excessively so, and ac-

According to a recent report of an independent analyst (1) it possesses all the qualities of a drinking-water of the highest class.

As regards the disposal of the sewage of the houses, it must be confessed that Florence is sadly behind the age. There are two systems in vogue. The one, *Latrine asportabili*, literally "Closets that may be carried away," consists of iron receivers, which are situated in a cellar, or special chamber in the basement of the house. Into these receivers the common waste pipe of the various closets of the house discharges, and it is so arranged that, while the solid matter of the sewage collects in the receiver, the liquid portion passes out into the common sewers. Such jars are carried in closed carts beyond the city every fourteen days. This plan may be said to work well, and the exchange of the empty for the charged receptacles need not be attended by any effluvium.

The other, and old fashioned method, consists in the existence at the basement of the house of a cesspool constructed of stone or brickwork. This may actually be within the walls of the house, but is more frequently in its court, or adjoining garden or street. It is generally ventilated by a shaft carried up to the roof of the house, and in its more modern form is furnished with an overflow shaft, which discharges into the common sewer. These cesspools are emptied periodically by means of suction, the contents being discharged into large barrels which are placed on carts, and so removed. This system certainly constitutes a blot on the civilization of Florence, and where surface wells

(1) See *Sulle Acque dei Pozzi di Firenze, e in particolare sull' Acqua Potabile Municipale, da Napoleone Passerini. Firenze, 1887.*

are still used, forms a serious danger from the risk of their pollution by filtration from the cesspool. It is being gradually abandoned in favour of the first method, and will doubtless soon cease to exist.

The common sewers run under the streets, and discharge into the Arno about two miles down the river from the city. They have been faithfully described in an article on "The Sanitation of Florence," which appeared in *The Lancet* of 7th January 1888.

While on the subject of the Sanitation of Florence, I cannot but refer to some articles which appeared in the columns of *The Times* in January 1887 from the pen of its Roman Correspondent. While giving the author of these letters full credit for the sincerity of his motives, and admitting the justice of his strictures on the cesspool system, I cannot allow to pass unchallenged his statement as to the existence in the city of what he calls "simple drain fever, without enteric symptoms, and with little danger to life, (I quote from *The Times*), often shewing itself as a habitual feverishness, with night sweats and debility, and symptoms which the physicians of Florence used to be in the habit of calling spring fever, growing fever &c, though there is absolutely no malaria of the intermittent, or Campagna type in the entire province of Florence." I can only say that, if this condition existed as an endemic ailment during the residence in Florence of the *Times'* Correspondent, it is now utterly unknown to the English physicians there.

I am also able to emphasize the fact noted in the above quotation, that no malaria exists in or near Florence.

III. I shall now very shortly indicate *the suitability, or otherwise, of Florence for certain classes of invalids.*

No cases in which there is throat or chest delicacy ought to be sent there. Florence is peculiarly trying to such persons, on account of the combination of bright sunshine with cold wind, and of the almost unavoidable sudden transition from sunlight to shade involved in passing from broad streets or squares to narrow sunless streets. Phthisis is particularly prevalent among the native population, ranking as the most frequent cause of death in the city. And while speaking of endemic disease, let me remark on an impression which I find existent as to the prevalence of diphtheria in Florence. In the article *Diphtheria* in "Quain's System of Medicine" I find it stated that "Diphtheria has its favourite localities, localities in which it is always endemic, and frequently epidemic, among such places may be particularly mentioned Florence and Paris." I am unable to give any statistics on this point, but have very rarely heard of its occurrence among the foreign community in Florence, and have only seen two cases of it during a residence of nearly six years. It is worthy of note that cases of simple asthma may do well in the suburbs, more especially on the slopes beyond the city, but a residence on the banks, or in the vicinity of the river, seems to be prejudicial to that complaint.

I must also add that cases of chronic rheumatism, whether articular or muscular, should not be sent to Florence.

The cases which seem to do well in Florence are those suffering from anæmia, amenorrhœa, nervous exhaustion, melancholia, and functional digestive troubles. I do not suppose that there are any specific elements in its atmosphere of a tonic or curative value. There is neither excess of the ozone which we suppose to exist by the sea, nor the balsamic odour of pines,

nor the fragrance of flowery meadows; but there is, in relative abundance, bright sunshine, and an atmosphere almost entirely free from smoke, and stirred by breezes from the adjacent slopes of the Apennines. There is an excellent market, vegetables being especially abundant and cheap, while the tonic value of the pure red Tuscan wines I find to be considerable. An excellent supply of dairy produce is now obtainable by the recent establishment of a dairy farm a short distance from the town. From this, milk and butter are sent twice daily to the city, and milk can be had to drink at the farm. It is under English management, and all the arrangements are such as to secure perfect purity of the milk.

Great care should be exercised in the matter of dress by visitors coming to Florence. It is essential that flannel, or at least partially woollen under-clothing should be worn both by night and day, and that the feet should be particularly well protected, as the floors of all the houses are of stone. The museums, galleries, and churches are cold, and it is a wise precaution for the visitor to have some extra covering or wrap, which may be put on on entering such places.

It may be well to say a few words as to the times and seasons of Florence life. The middle of September is as early in the autumn as visitors should arrive. Before this the heat is too great to allow one to go about with any pleasure. From this time till the end of October there is usually clear and cool weather; during November and December there is a considerable rainfall. Bright sunny weather may be expected in January, with perhaps a fall of snow once or twice in the month, the snow, however, seldom lying beyond an hour or two. Cold north winds from the mountains are

prevalent in January, February and March, tempered with sunshine. April and May are the choicest months of the year, the air being mild, and the flowers, foliage, and fields in their beauty. During June the heat becomes oppressive, and most of the resident foreigners leave the city then, to return towards the end of September or in October.

