

ROMAN, GOSSIP.

BY

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LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1894. *Scit*

**Roman gossip. By Frances Elliot.**

Elliot, Frances, 1820-1898.

London, J. Murray, 1894.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081581740>

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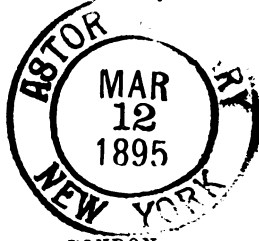
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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,  
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

**To my Friends,**  
**IN THE HOPE THAT THIS**  
**LITTLE CHRONICLE**  
**MAY AMUSE THEM.**



## PREFACE.

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THE day of heroes is past in Rome, but it is well to have some further record of it.

History has touched it, but there is still much to tell the English public of the familiar lives of such men as Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel, and Pio Nono.

My gossip has gone beyond these names and connects itself with the romantic epoch of the formation of a new Italy either by friends or foes. It has associated itself with the great masters of art and literature, such as Alfieri, Rossini, and Canova, and the Princes of the land, as well as that great family of Buonaparte so inherent in the very soil of modern Rome.

Small gossip, it is true; familiar—domestic—but for that not to be despised; and to this I have added some of my own experiences extending back to the days of Papal tyranny in the occupation of Rome by a French army.

FRANCES ELLIOT.

7, GEORGE STREET, HANOVER SQUARE.  
London, 1894.



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# ROMAN GOSSIP.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PIO NONO.

To visit the Pope you must dress à l'*Espagnole*, in black with a veil arranged on the head—a fashion which, I think, must have been invented by some papal *belle*, such as Lucrezia Borgia or Theodora Marozia, it is so very becoming.

In the old time a papal dragoon arrived at your door with a summons printed on an extra large sheet of paper, with the day and hour set forth in which you were to make your appearance at the Vatican.

At the time specified I drove to the ever-beautiful Piazza of S. Pietro with the surging fountains, to the royal entrance on the right-hand side, under the stately cream-coloured colonnade, built by the Chigi Pope, Alexander VII. (and as such always interesting to me), the Chigi arms—five mounts and a star, quartered with the golden rose and shield of the Rovere—everywhere displayed.

At the bottom of the ascent of the *Scala Regia* stand the Swiss guards, quaint figures in gaudy parti-coloured clothes like court-cards, some lounging, some talking a horrible *patois*, their halberds resting against the huge columns supporting the vaulted ceiling—in a kind of *nonchalant* repose.

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Rome, resplendent in chain armour, casque, and plumes, like glorified Crusaders) to keep order.

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Different nationalities in those days, before railways made travelling easy, ran much more into separate sets and parties than now, when good society is an amalgamation of all.

There was the set of rabid Protestants, who abused *everything*, habitually mentioned the Pope as “the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Jeremiah the Prophet,” stigmatised his blessing as a curse, met in prayer, and sent out missionaries in Rome, as if it were a savage island of the Pacific.

Also the Roman Catholic pervert set, pretty numerous at this time, included Manning, then little favoured by the Vatican, and living in a kind of honourable banishment at the Minerva Convent, Dodswell, Maskill, and Talbot of Malahide, created a Monsignore, who could not talk to you for five minutes without persecuting you to become a Catholic, and to kneel down and say a prayer.

I do not accuse Manning of such misplaced zeal. At all times he maintained a dignified reserve, which made such folly impossible. His efforts were more secret and subtle, but the others rendered themselves utterly ridiculous, and lowered and vulgarised the cause they urged.

Now I never hear of “converting” priests or Prelates; the genus is obsolete. People, including Jews and Mahometans, come and go in the Eternal City, unmolested as to faith; but at that time a perfect *furor* existed for making converts, and in some company one could not call one’s soul one’s own.

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Then there was the English set, exclusive, dull, pretentious, keeping much aloof, as a numerous colony, and

appropriating an entire quarter of the city about the Piazza di Spagna, with their own shops, prices, books, and servants. They formed in those days a powerful faction, which has now entirely disappeared, almost as unapproachable as the Roman Princesses, specially towards Americans, whom they held in the light of Pariahs, and were always ready to explain to the Romans that, although speaking the same tongue, they (the Americans) were sprung from the dregs of the British nation.

The American set, on the other hand, some four thousand strong, despising the English, formed quite a world in itself, with its own manners, customs, and drawl, to which outsiders, specially English, were rarely admitted.

I remember being invited by the then American Minister, Mr. Cass, who lived in the Piazza del Popolo, to a most charming dance of young American girls, almost without a *chaperone*, myself the only foreigner present. There was a great deal of laughing, and romping, and fun, all of a most harmless kind, but which would have been deemed excessive elsewhere. I was never asked again. When I inquired the reason, I was told that my being admitted at all was considered as too great a favour to repeat. But what dwells in my memory is the surpassing loveliness of the girls. I never in my life saw so much beauty gathered together except at Seville.

How changed this is now, when the Americans, specially the heiresses, metaphorically "walk over the course," appropriating the beauty, the choicest society, and the best marriages in all the capitals of Europe, specially at Rome; quite turning the tables on the more insular British, who lack their powers of ready adaptability and social tact—a most wonderful change indeed, and hard to comprehend.

Now and then in those days an artist (some Columbus

in his line) would "discover" and portray a wonderful, saint-like young creature (for, lively as they were, the American girls *look* extremely quiet), and excited universal rapture by his work; but, generally, the fragile and delicate beauty of these pale daughters of the New World was reserved for the admiration of their own active, bustling, go-ahead countrymen, proverbially then, as now, the best and most devoted lovers and husbands in the world. Here again is a great change. Now some of the first Princes of Rome have married American ladies, and they are certainly much more appreciated in society here than the English.

What lovely faces I recall in those days! What a light of love and life in their sweet eyes! What alabaster skins! What wealth of silky hair! I dare not break the spell by naming them, though they linger in my memory, for nearly all whom I remember have long since departed to that silent land where neither sun nor moon, nor any earthly light can shine upon them more. Peace be with them! They were a lovely throng!

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Last of all there was the artist set at Rome, a large and distinguished community of all tongues, nationalities, shades, colours and conditions: a real Bohemia, divided into circles of distinct social variety, aristocratic, *mezzoceto*, rowdy, misanthropic, classic and devout, so numerous, I think no one ever counted them, specially as it was the fashion in the dirty, smelly old Rome of those days for the greatest artists to burrow in the most beastly holes just, as it were, to make the contrast between the squalor of the outside and the ideal beauty within the more vivid.

What a *coterie* they were! English, American, Italian, Spanish, Swiss, German—a jovial, many-hued company, with many a name which made one's soul thrill.

As strangers now visit churches and galleries, so then great part of our time was spent in rushing from one studio to another, and canvassing their various merits. To visit the studios was part of the *maraviglie* of Rome which no stranger omitted.

Received everywhere, fêted, loved, the companions of princes, kings and potentates, when such were here—the most honoured guests at the tables of the great, it brought infinite honour to be counted as one of them.

Yes, I loved the artist world, and willingly lived in it. Dear old Gibson! so identified with Greek art, that he would sit for hours in the twilight contemplating his own tinted Venus (Mrs. Gibson, as we irreverently called her), as if she were alive.

Who of that day does not recall the pale contemplative face of the great pupil of Canova, his tightly compressed lips and regular features? His manner aristocratic in its philosophic self-respect, those grey far-seeing eyes, and the little action of the hand as he demonstrated his favourite topic, *colour in marble*.

Gibson lived in an ugly little studio, in the appropriately named Via dei Greci (turned into a stable now), surrounded by his tinted goddesses, Cupids, nymphs, and nereids, loved and courted by all, at once the most modest and the most unflinching of men. No English society in Rome was complete without him: the Romans honoured in him the successor of their own Canova; the various Embassies were proud to receive him; and as to the strangers resident in Rome, they would, if they could, have cut him up into little pieces, the better to share him. Could you have taken seat in his studio long enough, you would have met the whole civilised world, not only of art but of fashion, beauty and rank!

You might or you might not approve marble *tinted*—for so delicate was the shade, it could not be called

colour, only real colour in the gold ornaments and on the border of the robes—but Gibson's Venus is an exquisite creation. To my mind, no statue of modern days so nearly approaches the antique (certainly not Canova's representation of Pauline Borghese, much too self-conscious and *maniérée*), in the simplicity of the *pose*, placid in the consciousness of triumph, the golden apple awarded by Paris in her hand. In the action of the downcast head and widely open eyes there is that divine indifference and sublime calm which stamps the Grecian conception of the gods.

Then there was the great American sculptor, Crawford, a self-taught genius, the very opposite of Gibson in his original views of plastic art: a realist, but of such a temper of mind and power of hand that while in his presence you felt swept away from the calm divinities of Greece into a sphere of action and movement all his own.

In his great work cast in bronze, the monument to American Independence, erected at Washington, the General himself habited in the ungraceful lines of modern garb, surrounded by groups of patriots and soldiers of various nationalities, the difficulties of modern costume are surmounted with such consummate skill, that figures and dress seemed appropriate and inseparable.

The great doors for the Senate House he never lived to finish. These were all works of a magnitude seldom attempted in our time. I recall, too, a lovely Flora, in another style, and a group of the Babes in the Wood, lying dead among the leaves which the birds are spreading over them as a pall, of such exquisite pathos, involuntary tears rise to my eyes as I recall it.

Alas! Poor ill-fated Crawford! At his prime he sickened of a strange and incurable malady, and in the flower of his fame went down to nothingness.

Thinking of him now, I rejoice to remember that it was

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by my pen the English public first knew what a great artist was born into the world. Now he is as renowned in England as he was at Rome.

There was Story, too, young then, and in a certain measure of fame, well known, but entirely different from his bold countryman Crawford.

Dessoulavy, Rogers, Tilton and Page, Americans all, ardent young spirits then, pressing on towards a goal each did not attain; and Penry Williams, soft and dreamy in his landscapes, but too ornate and artificial for high art.

Tenerani, too, was a great name, rising out of the feeble ruck of modern Italian sculpture, specially in his fine work, "The Angel of the Resurrection," waiting, trumpet in hand, for the signal when the graves shall give up their dead and stand before the Lord for judgment.

The German, Overbeck, a monkish old man, living in the Ghetto, keeping the fasts of the Church, and praying over his canvas like Fra Angelico, had a great faculty for outlines in sacred subjects, but as a colourist he was *nil*; himself a man so silent, of aspect so uninviting, and of manners so austere, one could never believe him the creator of those virgins, angels and glorified spirits among which he lived. Great praise was lavished on him by the new pervert party, such as Manning and Talbot, but, in point of fact, he never deserved his fame.

Cornelius—the father of modern German art, in conjunction with Schadow and Overbeck—lived then in the very house in the Via Gregoriana, on the Pincio, where, forty years before, those three ardent young spirits determined to break the bonds of custom, and, patronised and assisted by the Bavarian Crown Prince, the deposed Louis, King of Bavaria, revived fresco-painting; first in the school of Düsseldorf, and then at Munich. The walls of this house are still decorated by their first efforts, which,



with some crudeness and inexperience in the use of a novel material, indicate uncommon power.

Riedel, too, that Goliath of the *genre* school, catching his lights on Undines, Kobolds, and Nixes, as from the living sun, lived in the Via Margutta. To appreciate Riedel, you must see him in the Pinacothek at Munich. There is a certain fervour in his colouring never attained before, and which appears to have died with him.

Meyer and Coleman, the Paul Potter of our age, bring up the rear.

One, too, there was, a youth, with the form and features of a Greek god, nor wanting either, the tower of ambrosial curls of the Apollo, neither vain of person nor of work, yet with a certain exclusiveness about him even *then*, which held him aloof from all contact with his fellows, as he passed them hurriedly, as if afraid to linger—on some high errand.

Already he had made his mark, in his first picture, "The Procession of Cimabue," bought by the Queen, and his fellows, though hating him for his success, grudgingly declared "they expected great things from him."

Born, as it were, ready armed, he was from the first the favourite of fortune as he still is.

Happy mortal! His course has been a triumph from then till now, when he styles himself "Sir Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy!"

But I must stop, for in my recollections of the artist world my pen runs riot.