

Mr. and Mrs. Percy Eckhart, 206 Cumberland avenue, Kenilworth, returned last Friday from a six weeks' trip to Virginia Hot Springs, Charleston, Richmond, and Asheville. Their daughter, Miss Elizabeth Eckhart, who attends Vassar, spent her spring vacation with them.

The George McKinneys, formerly of 1425 Forest avenue, have moved to 916 Oak street, Winnetka.

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DOING EUROPE MINUS A GUIDE

By E. TODD WHEELER

Editor's Note: WILMETTE LIFE takes pleasure in publishing herewith one of a series of extremely interesting letters written by E. Todd Wheeler, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Wheeler of Wilmette, who with his wife, is engaged upon a tour of the principal European cities. Mr. Wheeler, who is an architect, emphasizes the fact that his travels are without benefit of tourist guide. "What I had in mind," (in these letters) he says, "was to try to show that these cities are not the scenic, architectural and historical museums which tourist bulletins so often make them seem, but are really living cities full of active people whose life is very much like our own. I have not tried to give a complete picture, but merely a few simple comments." Mr. Wheeler's next letter will appear in an early issue of WILMETTE LIFE.

Florence, Italy
March 27, 1934

Since I last wrote you, Mrs. Wheeler and I have traveled down the Rhine to Munich, an interesting trip architecturally but one on which we had little time to observe much else. From Munich south to Venice, however, we did see some very impressive country. While in Munich I arranged our travel through Italy and fell into the clutches of a young Italian with a very superior name and a love of the home town. With glowing descriptions and a folder of pretty pictures to help, Signor Casagrande convinced me that it would be a great mistake not to spend the first night out of Munich at Bolzano, his home, a town located in the Tyrol and a center for tours into the Dolomites. It was seven hours to that point, which is long enough for one day, so I decided we would do that. Then I discovered that train connections for going on to Venice the following day would be pretty poor, but was assured that the morning in Bolzano with a trip to the top of a nearby mountain via funicular railway would more than repay for the afternoon of slow travel. So it did, but not in the way anticipated.

Greeted by Snow Storm

The ride from Munich to Bolzano via Innsbruck and Brennero was through beautiful mountain country. Our first introduction to sunny Italy was in a heavy snow storm at Brennero, the border town. Later it cleared so that we saw that snow on the jagged ridges of the high ranges—a grand sight. But when we got to Bolzano down in the valley it was raining in a cheerful spring fashion, and the next morning it continued to rain. The sky remained so clouded over that we had only a glimpse of the beautiful mountains surrounding the town and no desire to take a ride on the funicular. It was then that I caught the true significance of Signor Casagrande's parting remark, "Good day, Mrs. Wheeler, I hope you have fine weather in Bolzano."

The ride over the mountains and across the plain to Venice was long but interesting. In addition to seeing beautiful country we had the privilege of riding with some twenty Italians who did not, as we had been told, travel with wailing babies and large baskets of lunch, but who did talk twice as fast as we do. Most of them had a very jolly time even when they stayed on the train only for a station or two, and made sport of helping the less nimble ones up and down the steep, ladder-like stairs of the old coaches used on the slow trains. In Germany these trains were called *personnenzug* or folk train. I don't know what they are called here but they certainly answer to that title.

In Beautiful Venice

Our introduction to Venice via the Central station and at night was not impressive, especially since it was raining. But the next day the sun was out and we caught the color of the city, softened by the sunlight and moist air. It is this mellow light which gives

to St. Mark's square that feeling of lightness and airiness which is its chief charm. That day we walked through the central part of the city following a map, verifying directions at each corner and rubbing elbows with the buildings that line the narrow ways. In Amsterdam we thought we had seen all the cats there were, but their multiplied descendants must have come to Venice, judging by their numbers. Scarcely a doorway or iron-barred window did we pass that did not shelter a wild-eyed cat of one variety or another. Venice is known as the city without streets, where the taxis are gondolas and where all the world comes to visit the Piazza San Marco. I would say that Venice is, rather, a city of narrow streets filled with singing people and prowling cats, a city to which all the world should come to get lost, as it is a better place for that than any other we have visited. There are practically no vistas, and the best way to reach a given spot is to follow the sun and trust to luck. We did that one afternoon with surprising success. A hundred church bells sound the hours and call the people to worship, but there is a delightful freedom from auto horns, and the occasional toots of the vaporettos or steamboat street cars are not disturbing.

Enjoy "Ice Cream"

One of our pleasures in Venice was found in visits to the gelati places, where they serve the Italian counterpart of our ice cream. It is half way between ice cream and ice, and can be very tasty. It was still too early in the year for much sidewalk "gelat-ing" but it can be enjoyed even in an overcoat.

The Italian government believes in the consumer tax, and many things carry a direct tax surcharge. Advertising bills may not be posted unless they have the tax stamp pasted on them. Restaurant bills are subject to a similar charge, and a simple hotel bill ends up by being well plastered with stamps. The one I got in Venice had eight stamps of four different varieties attached to it. When I first inquired about a room the clerk named the charges complete including camera, servizio and marca da bollo. When he said this, all I caught was what sounded like "Marco Polo," and I couldn't see the connection, but of course camera is room, servizio is service, and the marca da bollo is the tax represented by the stamps. It is a grand system to keep the clerks busy and probably is a painless way of collecting taxes.

Splendid Tourist City

We stayed in Venice four days and got to feel like old inhabitants. We used to go down to the Piazza San Marco at least once a day to watch the tourists, many of whom came in for a day from their cruise ships. In some cities the most interesting parts are missed entirely if the stay must be restricted to one day, but in Venice you can see the best of it without going far from St. Mark's, which makes it a splendid tourist city. It is true that the charm of this famous square grows

with recurrent visits so that you want to return to it again and again, but the first impression is the most striking and is really thrilling.

Observe Celebration

The high point of our visit to Venice came on the second day. That morning when we reached St. Mark's we discovered much to our surprise that all the shops were closed and a big parade was in the process of formation. It turned out to be the Italian Fourth of July, and the accompanying celebration was a wonder to behold. I have never seen such a variety of colorful uniforms, resplendent with medals, plumes and silk-lined capes. Most Italian officials wear capes which they wrap closely about their shoulders so that the general impression you get is of a Robin Hood hat, a bell shaped cape and two feet moving along below it. So many of the Venetians—men, women and children—marched in this parade that few were left to watch. That was where the tourists helped out by keeping the marchers from feeling hurt for lack of audience. Just before we left Munich we saw a big demonstration with much marching and marshalling of crowds. Compared with the German precision and order this parade in Venice was a riot. Some of the men carried their little boys on their backs, many marched with no uniform at all except for a "Si" card, corresponding to the German "Ja" button, pinned to their lapel, and all of them marched with very little regard for principles of drill. But all showed a most contagious enthusiasm and apparent pleasure in what they were doing.

Meet Home Folk

It was this scene which greeted the visitors to Venice on March 23—a real show. Among those who came ashore from a Mediterranean cruise ship were Mr. and Mrs. L. Philip Denoyer of Kenilworth. We had hoped to meet them there that day but were a little doubtful about finding them in the mob that filled the square. After a while we spotted them on the balcony of the Doges palace where they had a good seat for the parade, but they came down to see us anyway and we had a most delightful visit then and later that evening. We were mighty glad to get some news of home, that hadn't come through a Paris reprint. Mr. and Mrs. Denoyer had some fascinating experiences to tell of their visit to Egypt and the Holy land. They expect to get home in two weeks, probably about the time this letter reaches you.

Interesting People

I think the most interesting of all we have seen have been the Italian people, in the restaurants, at work, on parade, in trains, everywhere. The enthusiasm with which they march is typical of their attitude. On the train from Venice to Bologna we were in a compartment with four others, all Italians. They kept up such a lively and humorous conversation that it was a pleasure to listen to them even though we understood nothing of what they said. You cannot be indifferent towards people like that. True, the same enthusiasm is carried over into the blowing of auto horns and singing on the streets, some of which is not exactly a lullaby, but even there the expression is joyous, not vicious.

In Florence we have found at last the sunny Italy which we had been promised—and it is as beautiful as it has been said to be. Very soon we go to Sicily for a week, where it is already mid-spring and where sunlight is guaranteed, just as in Florida. Quite incidentally, there are some Greek temples there at which I shall have a look as we pass through. Later on we shall go to Rome and thence north into Switzerland.