

Two volumes forming a massive scrapbook have come to light over a hundred years since they were compiled. Closer examination revealed that it was far more than just a scrapbook but a comprehensive diary written in fine copperplate style by the author and traveller Douglas Valentine Hardy (1853-1923) entitled 'To Italy – Notes by The Way' and dated 1900. Accompanying the text were over six hundred illustrations being photographs, postcards, prints and maps together with various ephemera such as menus, bills and tickets. These are reproduced on flickr.com. [See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mr-hardy-goes-to-italy/sets>] The volumes have been transcribed from the original handwritten text and edited to form the first published edition. Douglas Hardy and his good lady, known affectionately as 'The Duchess', join with fourteen other fellow travellers at Dover before crossing by steamer to Calais and onwards to the Riviera to start their Gaze's conducted tour of Italy under the guidance of their 'Courier' Mr Switzer. Hardy maintained a pocket notebook of all he saw and heard, and later on return to his home in Harrow would transcribe his journal with the illustrations collected into the two volume scrapbooks. This formed a description of what was a late Victorian middle class version of the previous century's Grand Tour which in those days could only be afforded by the nobility and gentry. The reader may experience the gambling hell known as the Casino at Monte Carlo; the shock of motor cars crossing a square at fifteen miles per hour; why the ladies were not permitted to view the statue of Herodius; discover what was claimed to be the greatest painting in the world; why they stood on the higher side of the Tower of Pisa; what really happened in the Tivoli fountains that inspired La Dolce Vita; the horror of the Blue Grotto; the delight of finding an English tea room and many more adventures full of wonder and romance. The style of writing with its humorous asides reminds us of Mr Pickwick; Mr Pooter (A Diary of a Nobody) and Three Men in a Boat. As a gentle warning this is not a journal for the faint-hearted and politically correct who find offence even with Noddy, Biggles and Tintin, as Hardy occasionally resorts to the cutting wit of a modern day 'Jeremy Klaxon'. However, the enthusiasm of Hardy for Roman history rivals only that of a Boris Johnson, his appreciation of Italian art to that of a Brian Sewell, and the love of the local cuisine to that of a Nigellissima. Today, the modern sophisticated traveller or art historian may relive this enthralling tour of more than a hundred years ago and note how the sights and sounds, churches, museums, galleries, vistas, hotels, transportation and cuisine may have changed for better or worse but still comprise a memorable journey.

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