pations, they were swept away like cobwebs by the fine speed of our descent, for Mario was in a particularly expansive humour and swung the little bus about with a professional dexterity that was marvellous—in the sense that it caused us no alarm, so confident were we in his ability. And the land swept about with him on this turntable of a road, swinging like a cradle this way and that. At one corner he slowed for the Japanese girl and her camera and I caught a glimpse of a couple of appropriate eagles sitting motionless in the mid-heaven, staring down at the vanished altars of Erice.

GEORGE ELIOT
(1819–1880)

In March of 1860, just after finishing The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot embarked on a five-month tour of Italy with her common-law husband, George Henry Lewes. Eliot intended Italy to "chase away Maggie and the Mill from my thoughts; I hope it will, for she and her sorrows have clung to me painfully." The trip was all she could have hoped. Despite the rigors of travel over snow-covered mountain passes, and despite her precarious health, Eliot was exhilarated by Italy and wrote to a friend of her astonishment that she had not suffered a single headache since setting out. Eliot and Lewes explored Genoa, Pisa, Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Padua, Venice, and Milan with unusual energy and enthusiasm. Despite initial disappointment with her first views of modern Rome, visits to its ancient ruins led Eliot to feel "an intoxication of delight, making me long to stay here and study till I know Rome by heart all except those ugly modern streets which are enough to scare away every haunting spirit of the past." In Florence, the haunting spirits of the past inspired Eliot with the idea of setting a novel in fifteenth-century Florence. That impulse bore fruit two years later, with the publication of Romola in 1862. In Eliot's later masterpiece, Middlemarch, her heroine Dorothea retraces Eliot's steps as she goes sightseeing in Rome during her honeymoon, but unhappiness prevents Dorothea from feeling the sheer delight in her surroundings that we find recorded in the letters and journals Eliot wrote during her Italian journey.
Journals from Italy

JOURNAL, ITALY, 1860

I had looked forward for years to the journey to Italy, rather with the hope of the new elements it would bring to my culture, than with the hope of immediate pleasure. Travelling can hardly be without a continual current of disappointment if the main object is not the enlargement of one's general life, so as to make even weariness and annoyances enter into the sum of benefit. One great deduction to me from the delight of seeing world-famous objects is the frequent double consciousness which tells me that I am not enjoying the actual vision enough, and that when higher enjoyment comes with the reproduction of the scenes in my imagination, I shall have lost some of the details, which impress me too feebly in the present because the faculties are not wrought up into energetic action.

Here follow some selected impressions of the journey:—Perhaps the world can hardly offer a more interesting outlook than that from the tower of the Roman Capitol. The eye leaps first to the mountains that bound the Campagna—the Sabine and Alban hills and the solitary Soracte farther on to the left. Then wandering back across the Campagna, it searches for the Sister hills, hardly distinguishable now as hills. The Palatine is conspicuous enough, marked by the ruins of the Palace of the Caesars, and rising up beyond the extremity of the Forum. And now, once resting on the Forum, the eye will not readily quit the long area that begins with the Clivus Capitolinus and extends to the Coliseum—an area that was once the very focus of the world. The Campo Vaccino, the site probably of the Comitium, was this first morning covered with carts and animals, mingling a simple form of actual life with those signs of the highly artificial life that had been crowded here in ages gone by: the three Corinthian pillars at the extremity of the Forum, said to have belonged to the Temple of Jupiter Stator; the grand temple of Antoninus and Faustina; the white arch of Titus; the Basilica of Constantine; the temple built by Adrian, with its great broken granite columns scattered around on the green rising ground; the huge arc of the Coliseum and the arch of Constantine.

The scene of these great relics remained our favourite haunt during our stay at Rome; and one day near the end of it we entered the enclosure of the Clivus Capitolinus and the excavated space of the Forum. The ruins on the Clivus—the façade of massive columns on the right, called the temple of Vespasian; the two Corinthian columns, called the temple of Saturn, in the centre, and the arch of Septimius Severus on the left—have their rich colour set off by the luxuriant green, clothing the lower masonry, which formed the foundations of the crowded buildings on this narrow space, and as a background to them all, the rough solidity of the ancient wall forming the back of the central building on the Intermontium, and regarded as one of the few remains of Republican constructions. On either hand, at another angle from the arch, the ancient road forming the double ascent of the Clivus is seen firm and level with its great blocks of pavement. The arch of Septimius Severus is particularly rich in colour; and the poorly executed bas-reliefs of military groups still look out in grotesque completeness of attitude and expression, even on the sides exposed to the weather. From the Clivus, a passage, underneath the present road, leads into the Forum, whose immense, pinkish, granite columns lie on the weather-worn white marble pavement. The column of Phocas, with its base no longer "buried," stands at the extreme corner nearest the Clivus; and the three elegant columns of the temple (say some) of Jupiter Stator, mark the opposite extremity: be-
tween lie traces, utterly confused to all but erudite eyes, of marble steps and of pedestals stripped of their marble.

Let me see what I most delighted in, in Rome. Certainly this drive from the Clivus to the Coliseum was, from first to last, one of the chief things; but there are many objects and many impressions of various kinds which I can reckon up as of almost equal interest: the Coliseum itself, with the view from it; the drive along the Appian Way to the tomb of Cecilia Metella, and the view from thence of the Campagna bridged by the aqueduct: the baths of Titus, with the remnants of their arabesques, seen by the light of torches, in the now damp and gloomy spaces; the glimpse of the Tarpeian rock, with its growth of cactus and rough herbage; the grand bare arch brickwork of the Palace of the Caesars rising in huge masses on the Palatine; the theatre of Marcellus bursting suddenly into view from among the crowded mean houses of the modern city, and still more the temple of Minerva and temple of Nerva, also set in the crowded city of the present; and that exterior of the Pantheon, if it were not marred by the Papal belfries,—these are the traces of ancient Rome that have left the strongest image of themselves in my mind. I ought not to leave out Trajan's column, and the forum in which it stands; though the severe cold tint of the grey granite columns, or fragments of columns, gave this forum rather a dreary effect to me. For vastness there is perhaps nothing more impressive in Rome than the Baths of Caracalla, except the Coliseum: and I remember that it was amongst them that I first noticed the lovely effect of the giant fennel, luxuriant among the crumbling brickwork.

We should have regretted entirely our efforts to get to Rome during the Holy Week, instead of making Florence our first resting-place, if we had not had the compensation for weariness, empty ceremonies and closed museums in the wonderful spectacle of the illumination of St. Peter's. That, really, is a thing so wondrous, so magically beautiful, that one can't find in one's heart to say it is not worth doing. I remember well the first glimpse we had, as we drove out towards it, of the outline of the dome like a new constellation on the black sky. I thought that was the final illumination, and was regretting our tardy arrival, from the détour we had to make, when, as our carriage stopped in front of the cathedral, the great bell sounded, and in an instant the grand illumination flashed out and turned the outline of stars into a palace of gold. Venus looked on palely.

LETTER TO MRS. CONGREVE. 4TH APRIL

Oh, the beautiful men and women and children here! Such wonderful babies with wise eyes!—such grand-featured mothers nursing them! As one drives along the streets sometimes, one sees a madonna and child at every third or fourth upper window; and on Monday a little crippled girl seated at the door of a church looked up at us with a face full of such pathetic sweetness and beauty, that I think it can hardly leave me again. Yesterday we went to see dear Shelley's tomb, and it was like a personal consolation to me to see that simple outward sign that he is at rest, where no hatred can ever reach him again. Poor Keats's tombstone, with that despairing bitter inscription,* is almost as painful to think of as Swift's.

JOURNAL, JUNE

We left Florence on the evening of the first of June, by diligence, travelling all night and until eleven the next morning to get to Bologna. I wish we could have made that journey across the Apennines by daylight, though in that case I should have missed certain grand startling effects that came to me in my occasional wakeings. Wonderful heights and depths I saw on each side of us by the fading light of the evening. Then in the middle of the night, while the lightning was flashing and the sky was heavy with threatening storm-clouds, I waked to find the six horses resolutely refusing or unable to move the diligence—till at last two meek oxen were tied to the axle, and their added strength dragged us up the hill. But one of the strangest effects I ever saw was just before dawn, when we seemed to be high up

* "Here lies one whose name was writ in water."
on mighty mountains, which fell precipitously and showed us the awful pale horizon far, far below.

We left Bologna in the afternoon, rested at Ferrara for the night, and passed the Euganean Mountains on our left hand as we approached Padua in the middle of the next day.

After dinner and rest from our dusty journeying, we took a carriage and went out to see the town, desiring most of all to see the Arena Chapel.

It stands apart, and is approached at present through a pretty garden. Here one is uninterruptedly with Giotto. The whole chapel was designed and painted by himself alone; and it is said that while he was at work on it, Dante lodged with him at Padua. The nave of the chapel is in tolerably good preservation, but the apsis has suffered severely from damp. It is in this apsis that the lovely Madonna, with the Infant at her breast, is painted in a niche, now quite hidden by some altar-piece or woodwork, which one has to push by in order to see the tenderest bit of Giotto’s painting. This chapel must have been a blessed vision when it was fresh from Giotto’s hand—the blue vaulted roof; the exquisite bands of which he was so fond, representing inlaid marble, uniting roof and walls and forming the divisions between the various frescoes which cover the upper part of the wall. The glory of Paradise at one end, and the histories of Mary and Jesus on the two sides; and the subdued effect of the series of monochromes representing the Virtues and Vices below.

From Padua to Venice.

We make the journey to Chioggia but with small pleasure, on account of my illness, which continued all day. Otherwise that long floating over the water, with the forts and mountains looking as if they were suspended in the air, would have been very enjoyable. Of all dreamy delights, that of floating in a gondola along the canals and out on the Lagoon is surely the greatest. We were out one night on the Lagoon when the sun was setting, and the wide waters were flushed with the reddened light. I should have liked it to last for hours: it is the sort of scene in which I could most readily forget my own existence, and feel melted into the general life.

Another charm of evening time was to walk up and down the Piazza of San Marco as the stars were brightening and look at the grand dim buildings, and the flocks of pigeons flitting about them; or to walk on to the Bridge of La Paglia and look along the dark canal that runs under the Bridge of Sighs—its blackness lit up by a gaslight here and there, and the splash of the oar of blackest gondola slowly advancing.

From Venice to Vernon and Milan.

We left Milan for Como on a fine Sunday morning, and arrived at beautiful Bellagio by steamer in the evening. Here we spent a delicious day—going to the Villa Somma Riva in the morning, and in the evening to the Serbellone Gardens, from the heights of which we saw the mountain-peaks reddened with the last rays of the sun. The next day we reached lovely Chiavenna, at the foot of the Splügen Pass, and spent the evening in company with a glorious mountain torrent, mountain peaks, huge boulders, with rippling miniature torrents and lovely young flowers among them, and grassy heights with rich Spanish chestnuts shadowing them. Then, the next morning, we set off by post and climbed the almost perpendicular heights of the pass—chiefly in heavy rain that would hardly let us discern the patches of snow when we reached the table-land of the summit. About five o’clock we reached grassy Splügen, and felt that we had left Italy behind us. Already our driver had been German for the last long post, and now we had come to an hotel where host and waiters were German. Swiss houses of dark wood, outside staircases and broad eaves, stood on the steep, green, and flowery slope that led up to the waterfall; and the hotel and other buildings of masonry were thoroughly German in their aspect. In the evening we enjoyed a walk between the mountains, whose lower sides down to the torrent bed were set with tall dark pines. But the climax of grand—nay, terrible—scenery came the next day as we traversed the Via Mala.

After this came open green valleys, with dotted white churches and homesteads. We were in Switzerland, and the mighty wall of the Valtelline Alps shut us out from Italy on the 21st of June.