

LETTER II.

Florence, February —, 1845.

DEAR —,

When I see you again, I shall have a long story to tell you of the descendants of Americus Vesputius. I will give you a part of it now.

It had always been a matter of wonder to me, that of all the Americans who had visited Florence, and written about its great men, no one should have said anything about the Discoverer's descendants. Indeed, so entirely have we been cut off from all information on the subject, I must confess it was with the greatest astonishment I heard the other day, that there is one son and several daughters, lineal descendants of Vesputius, now living at Florence, in poverty, unnoticed and unknown.

I was making some inquiries at a *reunion* of literary men, a few evenings ago, about the Vesputi family, and a gentleman who knows them well promised to introduce me to them the following day. He was a connexion of the family of Carlo Botta, the author of the History of our War of Independence. There is a man, too, of whom I shall say something at another time.

The next day this gentleman called round at the appointed hour, and we walked to the house together. "Is it not strange," said he, as we left the hotel, "that the descendants of the man who discovered your Continent, and who lived in the palaces of Princes and Kings, should now be obliged to become servants to get their daily bread. The sisters (with the exception of Ellena, who is living in America) are dependent on their daily earnings for their daily bread, and the brother, a well educated, noble young fellow, is employed by the Grand Duke's government in the office of finances, on a salary of \$60 a year! They have all come together this morning, from the different scenes of their occupations, to meet the first American who has ever sought their acquaintance. What a strange meeting! A traveller from the distant continent Vespuccius discovered, coming, more than three centuries after his death, to his birth-place, to search out his descendants, who are living helpless, and dependent, on the very spot where their ancestor was a companion of princes, and lived on his own paternal estate!" We talked on, and we walked on, till we reached the house where the family had assembled. It was the house of a friend, perhaps of a connexion of the family.

Here we found them gathered. Two sisters and a brother, the young Cavaliere Amerigo Vespucci, with his youthful wife. Two sisters were absent—one beloved, who is teaching her own beautiful tongue in Paris, independent while her strength lasts—an-

THE DISCOVERER'S DESCENDANTS.

other in America, where, by her dissolute life and bare-faced deceptions, she has blasted the prospects of her family, perhaps for ever! I have sometimes known the luxury of feeling the warm grasp of a hand shrivelled with hunger, as I entered the damp cellar of a worn out, cast-aside English operative, to leave a mite, and speak a word of consolation, but I have never been where my presence seemed to excite so much gratitude. I had the evening before expressed a hope, that in spite of the bold fraud practised upon our government by an unworthy descendant of the Discoverer, some act of recognition of her innocent sisters might yet be passed by Congress, and they all still find a home for themselves, and their children, in the New World. These words had been borne to them, and they were the first gleam of hope that had shot across their path for many years. Now when I entered they flocked around me and pressed my hand in silent gratitude, and I am not ashamed to say that we wept together. Before us hung a portrait of their ancestor, painted by Bronzino from life, which they had always preserved, and refused to part with at any price, even when they knew the pangs of extreme poverty. I felt strange emotions when I looked on that picture. The face of the bold navigator was turned away from earth to the stars above him, and I could not but think he saw a new world there, and I blessed God that he did not behold the dark vale of misfortune his own descendants

were to travel long after he was dead. We sat down and talked about Vespucius, and his fate and his fame. I give you the facts as they gave them to me, of their sister. This character has made herself quite notorious in both hemispheres, and it is high time the world should know her true history. The romance of mystery does very well for such a lady, until somebody unluckily strips off the false wrap-page, and reveals the truth.

Many years ago, Ellena Vespucci made her *début* in the gay circles of Florence. She was gifted with uncommon beauty of person, great vivacity of mind, and captivating manners. Less indebted to her literary advantages than to her native genius, and that tact peculiar to her sex, she determined that finesse and personal charms should win for her a fortune which would atone for the lack of a more auspicious birth. She was courted by the gay, and the noble, and some of the leaders of rank and of fashion were soon added to her conquests. Her intrigues and amours at last became so bold, she brought herself into contempt, and she thought she would court fortune in another land. She applied to the Grand Duke for papers, who, to get rid of her, gave her letters for the Court of Louis Philippe, and he was glad enough to do it at so cheap a rate. She had, in various ways, found means to support herself in luxury at Florence, but she was unmindful of her poor sisters, who lived on in their indigence and dependence. I have been assured by indivi-

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duals here who knew the facts, that when Ellena saw she must leave Florence, she represented to her sisters a plan of her own, of making a voyage to America, for the purpose of pressing the claims of the Vespucci family with the governments of the New World. Under this pretext she obtained from the family no small portion of their little treasures. They gave up some relics of the Discoverer which they had clung to in all their fortunes.

She arrived in Paris, and was received at court, where she soon became the star *du beau monde*. The centre of admiring and courting throngs, who hung upon her steps, she forgot the mission she had undertaken. Among the dissolute courtesans of France she ran a brilliant career of pleasure and dissipation. She at last reached the acme of her ambition. One of the royal Princes acknowledged her charms, and bowed at her feet. Even in Paris, good taste fixes a limit to indulgence, and her career was suddenly brought to a close.

She sailed for South America, and made an application to one or more governments there, either for appropriations of lands, or money. Fortune frowned upon the fair suppliant south of the equator, and she sailed for the United States, to make her last bold dash—to win or lose all upon one throw.

The history of her diplomacies would make an amusing, and yet a humiliating picture, for herself and many persons connected with her intrigues. Relying upon her own personal charms, upon her name,

and the veneration felt for her great ancestor in the New World, and probably more than all, upon the rage among our people for all that is foreign, making them the dupes of adventurers more easily than any other nation, she began her crusade by playing off one of the boldest impositions ever attempted. With the French Minister for a *chaperon*, she at once took the stand we have successively assigned to the whole troop of foreign adventurers who have come to our country to make fools of us, and succeeded in all cases so much to their wishes.

She said she had been banished from her native land by a tyrant, for nobly attempting the restoration of its liberty, and she showed on her arms (which she generally wore bare for the purpose) the scars she had received in battle! That she was the last human being in whose veins flowed the blood of Americus Vesputius—that her estate had been confiscated by a tyrannical government, and she, the last of her race, had fled with a forlorn hope to the Capitol of the noble Republic, reared upon the soil discovered by Vesputius, where she hoped to find an asylum from all her sorrows, a home for her descendants, and a grave to rest in, at last!

All this would have been very well if it had not all been *a lie*. There happened at that moment to be a brother and three sisters of this diplomatist living in Florence, in poverty and dependence, waiting with anxiety for some favorable tidings, from an application they supposed was being made in the name of

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all the children of the Discoverer. So far from being banished from her country by a tyrant, for an heroic attempt to restore its fallen liberties, she had been sent off for her vulgarity and dissoluteness—and the less she ever says about the honorable scars won in the Service of Liberty, the better ; people have generally taken particular pains to cover up scars received in places like the one where she got hers ! So far from having had her estate confiscated by a despot, she never had any estate to confiscate : and she had for years eaten the bread of this despot, who is beloved by his own subjects, and by the generous and the good throughout Europe !

But the refugee thought a score of lies would serve her purpose better than the simple truth, and she pushed her application with that kind of desperation a doubtful attorney does, a doubtful cause, when he apprehends the arrival of some counter testimony that may upset his cause.

Means were levied from all quarters—sumptuous dinners were given to one class, appeals of sympathy made to another, promises were extended to a third, her own smiles were bestowed upon all who had votes to give, and her more particular favors extended toward the choicer few. Eloquent advocates were found in both Houses, the suppliant, pining, weeping (but always fat) refugee, was an honored guest at the mansion of the President, and the proposition to give this Amazonian heroine a million of acres of land (more or less), was coming

to a vote! A lucky accident sent the Bill to the tomb of the Capulets, and saved our reputation as a nation, from going there itself. Certain gentlemen who had their own reasons for what they did (every man has his reasons, and the devil too), lamented with the fair one over this unexpected calamity—they even went so far as to pass round a subscription, and quite a sum was pledged. But they had mistaken their customer—She, “the last of her race, and *such* a race, accept charity? Not she! Oh! no! A million or nothing.”

Thanks to the sagacity, or the discretion, or the independence of somebody, the nation was saved from a disgrace that would have covered our name in every quarter of the globe. It would have been a fine story to have been told in Paris, where her pranks are known, that the Congress of the Great American Republic had been humbugged, not only into solemn debate about so filthy a subject, but had voted a province of land to a woman who is known in Europe as “the mistress of a hundred men.” To cap all, had she outwitted the grey-haired Senators of the Republic, on the most essential point of the whole, viz: that she was the only descendant of Vespuccius, instead of being, as she was, but one of five children, and deserving not even six feet of American earth—it would have made us a bye-word to the world. But we were preserved from such utter disgrace. Honor to the noble men who saved us!

Foiled in her base attempt, the bold adventuress

HER SUBSEQUENT HISTORY.

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retreated in mortification from the Capitol and soon left the Continent. The facts were never fully known to our people; and in the gay world of London, chaperoned by a gay and dissolute nobleman, she had a short, but not a brilliant career. The English are not so convenient game for such characters—their blood is too cold. She fortunately fell in with a gentleman who did his best to make her a heroine; but the plan failed. For a time she was admitted to good society. I happened at this period to be in London (1840), and saw her one evening at the house of Wm. Beatte, Esq. Her arms were bare as usual, with her scars of Liberty full in view; and I heard her tell that night, the same old story about fighting in the open field astride of her charger, I forget how many days and nights, &c., &c.

But it was soon convenient for her to quit England. She found friends who found her in money, till at last she fell in with a high-life *roué*, who gave her an “asylum from the ingratitude of an American Congress, under the sheltering walls and trellises of an Italian villa at Ogdensburgh.” So much for the history of this woman, who has done what she could to dishonor her own name, and blast the hopes of her kindred.

Her sisters had for a long time had no communication with her, and they had only learned of the failure of her application to our Government, by common report in Italy. They felt mortified and chagrined beyond expression. “We did hope,”

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they said to me, "that a frank and honorable appeal to the sympathies of your generous nation would have been responded to, with magnanimity. We did not feel that we had any *claim* to your bounty; we knew that all the world give Columbus the glory of the discovery of America. They say it is more than enough that Vespuccius give his name to the American Continent. (He had nothing to do with this.) But still we rejoice that the application that was made was rejected. Injustice would have been done to all parties, by a grant, from which we should have received no advantage nor honor; and such strange conduct as our sister was guilty of, deserved no better reward. But we hope you will tell the facts to your Government, that no portion of the blame may fall on us. If the day shall ever come, that your Congress shall show any recognition of us, as the descendants of the Discoverer, whatever way they may select of doing it, it will fill us with gratitude. It would, indeed, be an inspiring hope, if we could believe it would ever be realized, that we should one day be able to provide ourselves with a home in the New World, and go and live there, and be buried at last in the soil our father was the first to step on. Do you think we should be kindly received among the Americans, after we have been so badly represented there?"

I could not but feel, when I saw the tears fall from the sisters' cheeks, how deeply, how cruelly they had been injured. Nor could I help breathing to

GENEALOGY OF THE VESPUCCI.

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them the hope that when all the facts should be known, to our people and our Congress, something for them would be done. The expression of this hope seemed to flash a gleam of joy and cheerfulness over their countenances; and when I remembered that our people are a generous people, I could not believe this hope would ever be clouded by disappointment.

They brought out a few relics of Vespuccius. At last they unrolled their genealogical table, which showed a proud race. Their ancestry can be traced back clearly in one bright line, to the early ages, before Peter the Hermit went over Europe to arouse its millions to march to the recovery of the Saviour's tomb. In that line there were many illustrious men. Warriors, Ambassadors, Naval Heroes and Discoverers, Scholars, Artists, Poets and Magistrates, many of whom had formed alliances with the great and the noble of different countries. They had filled the highest stations in the old Republic of Florence, and left their impress upon their times. They had been the familiar companions of kings and princes, lived in their own palaces and been lords of their own estates. How were they now?

They are greatly attached to the Grand Duke; and they told me he has always shown them great kindness. They are indebted to his generosity for an annual pension, which was decreed by the Signory of Florence to the Discoverer ages ago, and which every successive sovereign has regarded.

Such is the veneration still felt for the memory of that wonderful man who has shed so much glory over Tuscany. This pension is necessarily small, for the Grand Duke's revenue is inconsiderable; and a great number of poor and unfortunate individuals look to him for assistance. His aid is never denied, and the kind and delicate manner in which it is bestowed, makes it a thousand times more grateful. But I shall speak of the generous and paternal character of this noble Sovereign by and by.

It was a long visit—we talked till midnight—and when I came away, I could not but feel grateful that a casual, but kind word that fell from my lips the evening before, had secured for me the opportunity of shedding some light upon hearts that had so long been overcast with the deepest gloom.

A day or two after, I received a call from the learned and courteous Count Græberg de Hemso, Chamberlain and Librarian to the Grand Duke, with an invitation to be present the following evening at a presentation at court. These Drawing Rooms, which are held during Lent, are attended without parade; and I was glad of an opportunity of seeing a Prince who had, by his mild, paternal government, won the love of his own subjects—by his enlightened views of Art, Government, and Literature, the respect of all Europe—and by his kindness and attention to literary men, gained their admiration and esteem.

During the conversation (which I have no hesita-

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tion in relating, since he has often expressed the same feelings, and does not conceal them anywhere), he alluded kindly to the interest I had manifested in behalf of the Vespucci family (which was the first intimation I had of his knowing what I had said or done). He said "he regretted most deeply the unfortunate circumstances which attended the application made to our Government in favor of the Vespucci," and he asked me if I "thought it would have succeeded if it had been properly made." I could not but express the fullest belief that it would.

"It is really a pity, then," said he, "that the indiscretion of that lady should have placed it out of the power of your Government, to have done an act of generosity, which would have placed that unfortunate family under such lasting obligation. I regret it deeply, too, for another reason; for I lost so fine an opportunity of being myself placed under an obligation I should have been equally sensible of, to a great and free People, who are advancing more rapidly in the arts and sciences, and in all that constitutes true civilisation, than any other nation in the world. You think a kind feeling will still prevail in America towards the Vespucci when the facts are known; and I must say I know of no act of a foreign Government, that could afford me so much satisfaction, as that your Congress should publicly recognize the claim of the descendants of our Great Tuscan to your kind remembrance."

The Grand Duke courteously told me, that although

it did not become him to interfere in the matter, nor to do anything in his public capacity, "particularly, said he, "as no interchange of diplomatic courtesies exists between my Court and the President, which I regret, yet, if you can suggest any manner in which I can contribute to the consummation of your own views, it will afford me unmingled pleasure to do so." He had the kindness also to say, that at any time it would give him much satisfaction to receive any communication from me on the subject, or a visit from me at the Palace.

The Grand Duke has now gone down to the Maremma. Knowing it was my intention to leave Tuscany soon, he obligingly sent me an invitation to visit him there, when he would have leisure to confer with me on the subject.

Believing this chit-chat about the Discoverer and his children may interest you, I will tell you the rest as soon as the rest comes.

But now I am tired, and so are you.

Your true,—&c., &c.