

only memorial of the Romans, who left less mark on this town than on most of their other possessions.

From the Cathedral a pleasant walk is found by turning up the hill and climbing steep ways where the very cobbles are set on edge to give the feet a grip. One goes past charming houses, set about with chestnuts, sycamores and vines, up streets deeply guttered to carry the wild rush of winter rains, and which, being quite impossible for cars, have a rare rustic quiet. One feels that here the war never came, and that one is seeing the true life of an Italian town, as it has been lived for centuries. There is an



*Street Scene in Cortona. Note typical overhanging upper storey*

unchanging stillness, broken only by children's voices and the occasional clatter of shoes. After the bustle and rush of such places as Perugia, Cortona is very soothing, and infinitely restful.

The climb leads past the house of Pietro Berettini, Cortona's other famous artist and architect, and a quaintly-worded plate let into its front records that there on November 1, 1596, Pietro was born of humble parents. Oddly enough, he is hardly represented in his native town either by pictures or by buildings.

This house is just below a delightful little tree-shaded Piazza whose centre is occupied by a curious and ancient well, called the Pozzo Caviglia. Near the well one strikes the Via Niccolo, sign that one is approaching the smallest, and the most ramshackle, and yet the friendliest little church in all Tuscany, the Church of San Niccolo. At last, right at the top of the town, it comes into view, set at the end of a cypress-planted forecourt that looks over the whole plain north of Trasimeno, right over to where the volcanic cone of Monte Amiata lifts against the western skyline.

San Niccolo is often closed but a knock on the side door brings out the old lady who seems to be in charge. She is very proud of the great treasure of the church, an altar-piece by Signorelli. Her pride is justified, for this picture, a *Deposition*, has a rare harmony and richness of colouring, together with a beauty of line and composition which together make it a masterpiece fit to rank with the Orvieto frescoes. It is the sort of picture one remembers when a hundred other paintings have faded from the mind's eye. It would be worth the walk even if that walk were not its own reward. The old lady is very anxious for her treasure to be properly appreciated and cheerfully clambers on the altar and removes the cross to afford a better view. Do not be alarmed if she then proceeds to attack the frame of the picture with a large butcher's knife. She is not about to wreck it. This is merely her method of levering it out, for it is on hinges and swings out to reveal on the back