

# SIENA

by "CHAMELEON"

OF all the towns of Tuscany, Siena bears off the palm for the attraction it exercises over those who have once wandered its charming medieval streets. Florence has more buildings of fine marble, and more works of art. Cortona is quieter and more secluded. Arezzo, Pisa and Lucca all have their claims. But of all of them Siena, that city set proudly upon a hill, is supreme for the preservation of the atmosphere of a historic past.

Little of modernity has crept into it. The streets have never been widened since they were planned to suffice for horse and foot, without being so wide as to make easy the task of an invader. New houses there are, upon the outskirts, but in the centre of the city the magnificent old Gothic palaces still wall the narrow streets, and lovely fountains still serve as gossiping places, while the casual stroller sees everywhere treasures in wrought iron and carved stone.

The visitor entering from the North would do well to disembark at the old Porta Camollia, and see the town on foot. He will find no memorials of the days when Siena was a small Roman colony (Colonia Julia Saena) for the buildings date almost entirely from the 13th and 14th centuries. That was the flowering time. In 1384 the Great Plague gave the city a blow from which



it never really recovered, but it retains in its relative decline the feeling of that joyful and ebullient time when to be a Siennese was to live in a world where everything was possible.

The visitor walking down the Via Camollia soon reaches the Via Cavour, which is the principal street. Some half-way along this street of the right is a tiny church, S. Maria delle Nevi, in an island block of its own, notable in that it possesses as an altar piece Matteo di Giovanni's *Madonna as Queen of Siena*, one of the loveliest Siennese paintings of the 15th century, a time when a famous school of painting was centred here. A little further on, on the opposite side, at the top of a tiny sloping piazza, is the Palazzo Salimbeni, now used as a government office. It is a perfectly preserved Gothic palace, extraordinarily satisfying to the eye in the gracefulness of its grey stone facade, while the wrought iron detail is as good as the architecture. The interior is very well preserved. This building is typical