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Gertrude Forde**

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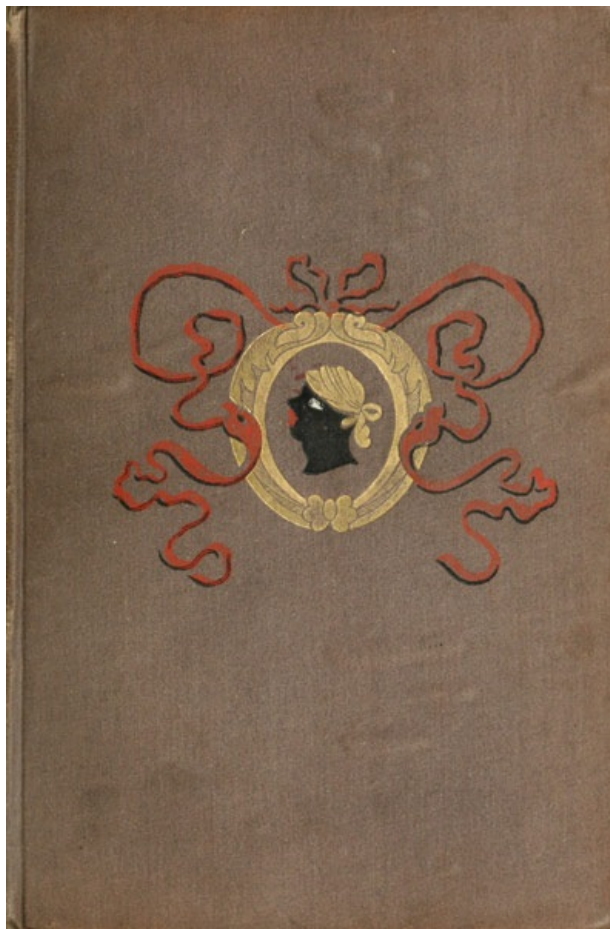
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# A LADY'S TOUR IN CORSICA.

BY  
GERTRUDE FORDE.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*  
VOL. II.



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## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	EN ROUTE FOR BAVELLA—AN ECCENTRIC LANDLORD	<a href="#">1</a>
II.	THE FOREST OF BAVELLA	<a href="#">16</a>
III.	SARTENE	<a href="#">29</a>
IV.	THE LION OF ROCCAPINA	<a href="#">38</a>
V.	BONIFACIO	<a href="#">45</a>
VI.	CURIOSITIES OF BONIFACIO	<a href="#">58</a>
VII.	A SERMON BY THE WAYSIDE	<a href="#">67</a>
VIII.	TO VICO	<a href="#">88</a>
IX.	EVISA AMONG THE HILLS	<a href="#">103</a>
X.	GIANT FORESTS	<a href="#">113</a>
XI.	PORTO, LA PIANA, AND CARGHESE	<a href="#">132</a>
XII.	FROM CARGHESE TO AJACCIO	<a href="#">147</a>
XIII.	BOCOGNANO BUGBEARS	<a href="#">154</a>
XIV.	THE FOREST OF SORBA	<a href="#">176</a>
XV.	THE INZECCA	<a href="#">192</a>
XVI.	THE LAST OF ANTONIO	<a href="#">204</a>
XVII.	TO BASTIA FROM CORTE	<a href="#">213</a>
XVIII.	HISTORY OF CORSICA	<a href="#">232</a>

[1]

## A LADY'S TOUR IN CORSICA.

### CHAPTER I.

#### EN ROUTE FOR BAVELLA—AN ECCENTRIC LANDLORD.

Sainte Lucie di Tallano is the halting-place for the forest of Bavella. From thence you can mount up to the Bocca; starting early, and spending the whole day in the forest, returning again to sleep at Sainte Lucie.

There is another route, sometimes followed, by which you drive down the other side of the forest to Sollenzara, on the east coast; but, as this place is reported to be exceedingly dirty, and is, besides, not healthy after the winter months, if it is then, it is not to be recommended. From Propriano to Sainte Lucie is a five-hours' drive, and a steady ascent the whole way.

[2]

The road is less interesting than usual in Corsica, and, for some distance, is almost tame, winding amongst low green hills, and by the side of a foaming river swept by willows. Some queer-looking crows with white breasts were fluttering about here; and, further on, the river was spanned by an old-fashioned Pisan bridge, wide enough only for mules and foot-passengers, with no parapet—made in the days when carts and carriages apparently were not.

There was a good deal of traffic on this road: plenty of muscular-looking Corsican dames bestriding their mules, and generally followed by a foal; and heavy charrettes, drawn by six mules, and filled with sacks of charcoal, brought from the forests above.

Then a hideous red tower came in sight, stuck on the summit of a low hill, like a piece of scarlet sealing-wax; and which, our driver informed us, was the summer residence of some country magnate, who migrated thither yearly with his family "pour prendre l'air frais."

[3]

As we mounted higher, the scenery grew finer, with a rather dreary grandeur; and as we paused to rest the horses, Nos. 1 and 2 got out to walk, and No. 3 took the opportunity to sketch.

Meanwhile, the driver stood beside the carriage, eyeing her performance with some curiosity. He was a short young man, with a heavy figure, but the head and neck of an Antinous, and a pleasant

refined face, with the mixture, often seen in Corsica, of dark eyes and a yellow moustache. He was as proud and reticent as the rest of his race, and hitherto we had scarcely heard his voice, although he did his duties well, and was sternly attentive to our wants.

No. 3's first effort at friendly conversation did not prosper. "I suppose you come from Ajaccio?" she asked, meaning to be kind and sociable.

But your true Corsican does not understand patronage, nor care for sociability.

"Non," replied the little man, shortly.

"Oh, from the mountains, then?" she continued, affably. [4]

"Non plus," was the unresponsive return.

No. 3 made one more effort, although feeling a little snubbed by her companion's taciturnity. "But you know these parts well?"

"Mais oui; je l'espère," was all the answer she got as he turned away, either too proud or too shy to talk; leaving her mentally resolved to make no further efforts at friendliness with this most unfriendly Corsican.

This resolution, however, soon melted away, as did Antonio's shyness; and, before long, we and our young coachman were the best of friends.

He was very different from most of his class.

Antonio had already, although only twenty-four, been nine years a driver, having had only two years' schooling; but, in that short time, had taught himself to write and to read both Italian and French. Nature had taught him to be a gentleman, and had endowed him with two qualities rare in his country—industry and a desire to rise. [5]

He had a kindly gentle nature; although his sleepy dark eyes were quite capable of the national flash of sudden anger; and joined a conscientious integrity to the usual dignified reticence and independence of manner.

Corsican coachmen, whether private or belonging to livery stables, are usually paid at the rate of only twelve or thirteen francs a week (about ten shillings); and on this wretched pay the men have to find both food and clothes, if in a public stable. Of course, in the season, they make about as much by their "pour boires;" but this is very uncertain, and, at times, fails altogether.

There is not much occupation open to those few Corsicans who will work. Agriculture only goes on in part of the country; and masons and day labourers are really not required.

The projected railway across the island will be the greatest blessing to those of the natives who have the good sense and manliness to prefer work to starvation.

It is doubtful how many will do this. In Ajaccio, every winter, families are at death's door through the inherent idleness of their heads, who will neither work nor beg, and who apply the words of the Unjust Steward to themselves. In the country, matters are equally bad. [6]

Toil and beggary are equally obnoxious and degrading in their eyes; and they often prefer, both for themselves and their innocent children, actual starvation.

It is a most incomprehensible state of things to the practical British mind, but a characteristic not confined to Corsica. I cannot resist quoting a passage from Mr. Hamerton's book, "Round My House."

"The contrast between certain races and others," he says, "in regard to the sort of pride which scorns self-help, is very striking, and it is worth remark that a certain form of nobleness appears to be almost incompatible with the watchful activity of really effectual self-help. The Highlanders of Scotland and the Arabs of Algeria have both a certain sentiment about self-help which is far from the English feeling, and still further from American or French feeling upon the subject. The Highlander will, no doubt, work a little when absolutely compelled by what to him appears unavoidable necessity, but he takes no delight in his work, and feels degraded by it. He will submit to any amount of inconvenience sooner than apply himself heartily to remedy it." Mr. Hamerton goes on to quote two cases in point, both of which came under his notice but lately in the Highlands. [7]

One was that of a congregation divided from their parish church, in all but dry weather, by an impassable stream, which it would have been easy enough to span with the simplest of wooden bridges, but which remained for years unregarded, whilst the population preferred, to a few hours' work, the constant trouble of going by a long circuit to their church.

The other case was that of a landing-stage, always dangerous on rough and stormy days, where a little pier might have been easily run out; but where things remained *in statu quo* year after year, to the destruction of property, by reason of the inertness of the surrounding boat-owners. [8]

But meanwhile we, on our way to Sainte Lucie, were mounting higher and higher towards the clouds, among scenery that was becoming grand. The purple ranges of serrated peaks that stood out against the sky were very fine in their misty outlines; and, on the mountain side just above us, three villages, one beneath the other, caught the last lights of the setting sun. The upper one,

called St. Henri, was distinguished by its picturesque church spire standing out among the green trees and grey houses; the lower one was Olmiche, and the middle one, Sainte Lucie di Tallano. On the left of Tallano, rose a fine building like a church, but which, we were informed, was a deserted convent, with a treasured picture within its walls.

As we toiled slowly up the heights, many a small unpretending black cross of wood, half covered by macchie, rose from the hills or stood beside the roadway, marking the place where life had been lost on this dangerous path, or taken by the hand of fellow-man through robbery and revenge.

The situation of Tallano was lovely; but the appearance of the village did not promise luxurious quarters for the night. The entrance to the little inn was not bad for Corsica; but the bare little *salle à manger* and comfortless bedrooms were uninviting. The floors of the latter were dirty, the furniture broken, and chiefly conspicuous by its absence, and the air within close and muggy. [9]

However, here we were to stay for the night— *nolentes volentes*—so it was of no use grumbling over the inevitable. There were but two rooms to spare, but a *canapie* was brought in for No. 3.

As a Corsican traveller, I give this piece of advice strongly: by all means eschew canapies. They are usually one foot wide, and of the consistency of a deal board; and, having been used as couches by the family, their friends, and the children for years, without ever a dusting, or the advantages, possessed by a bed, of changed sheets and counterpanes, are, as a rule, indescribably filthy and unpleasant.

If, however, as at Tallano, a bed is not procurable, and you are very tired, a canapie is perhaps preferable to bare and dirty boards, over which disports the nocturnal beetle; and the best plan then is to shut eyes and nose as closely as possible, and dream of your own dear cot at home. [10]

But I am bound to say the Tallano dirt was all on the outside. The beds were perfectly clean, and, but for the snores of the old landlord and his family, reposing in the *salle à manger* close by, we might have enjoyed undisturbed repose.

Dinner was announced to be at seven o'clock; and we found three other places laid beside ours at the little round table. Presently the door opened, and in walked three Corsican "messieurs;" all very stiff and shy, and all got up, in our honour, in irreproachable evening attire. Three stiff but polite bows were made, to which we responded in like manner; and then, in solemn silence, broken only by the clatter of the ragged unkempt waiting girl, we all sat down to commence our soup, our fish, and sweet-breads. The silence was growing hysterical, when one of our party, afraid of losing her manners with her gravity, ventured to remark that the evening looked stormy. [11]

The three messieurs instantly all lifted their three shiny black heads with a look of relief, and rushed at the witty remark with the avidity of hungry dogs upon a juicy bone. Conversation having been thus happily started, flourished healthily to the end of dinner.

All three were young men whose duties kept them in this small village; one being telegraph and post-office overseer, another some sort of government land agent, and the third of trade or profession unknown. None of the three had ever been out of their native island, but all seemed intelligent and well educated; and their courtesy and good manners were beyond criticism.

They told us what they knew about the country, and about our excursion to Bavella to-morrow; and one of them insisted upon bestowing a nice piece of "orbicular granite" upon No. 3.

This so-called orbicular granite (which is no granite at all, but probably a kind of hornblende) is a natural curiosity of Corsica, and is said to be found rarely, if ever, in other countries. A fine quarry of it is being worked in the hills just above Tallano. The stone is of a pale malachite green, covered with narrow white rings that run in every direction, not only across but through the stone, and have every appearance of fossils. They are not fossils, however, but of the same substance as the green foundation. It is very handsome when polished, and is sold in small pieces for house and church decoration, and for fancy articles. [12]

Dinner being over, the three messieurs departed, each with a polite bow; and we prepared to draw round the fire and enjoy a private chat.

But we counted without our host, who presently appeared, pipe in mouth, and after inquiring if our dinner had been good, and putting more wood upon the fire, drew his chair into our circle and showed an intention of joining us. He was rather a gentlemanly old man, with keen black eyes and iron-grey hair; but decidedly eccentric. We had been warned beforehand that he was "quite mad;" and so felt a little alarmed now by his friendly proximity, but were soon reassured by his manner. He was not master of much French, however, and had a habit of saying "Hein? hein?" all the time his neighbours were speaking, which did not improve matters. But he was exceedingly irate when he could not understand what was said; and his splutters of wrath were only equalled by the geniality of his smile when, a little later, he brought up his children, one by one, followed by their young mother, to say "bonsoir" to the English ladies, and lift their little caps from their round heads. [13]

A more queer character I never saw than this old fellow, with his irritable temper and his tender heart taking transparent turns on his countenance. Velvet cap on head, and pipe in mouth, he told us tales of our compatriots who had passed the night at his inn on their way to Bavella, invariably inquiring if we were of their acquaintance; and sometimes expecting us to recognize them by a description of their personal appearance only, without the superfluity of a name.

One anecdote he told with especial pride, relative to a gold watch worth 500 francs, left behind by an Englishman under his pillow the last night he was here, and which he transmitted by the next English visitor to its owner, subsequently found at Ajaccio.

[14]

"If you leave anything behind you, mesdames, in my house, you need have nothing to fear. Nothing is ever lost *here*."

And he was no doubt correct. But the peppery side of his character came to light later on in the evening, when No. 3, having retired to her room, found the canapie made up with *one* very narrow sheet, open necessarily only at one side, by that means further reducing the width of the narrow berth.

Somewhat indignant, she called up the nondescript waiting girl, insisting upon another sheet, and the remaking of the canapie; which was effected with a little unwillingness.

She had just retired again and locked her door (which fortunately boasted a key), when the old gentleman came hammering at it, to know what had been wanted.

She informed him nothing was wanted now, as her wants had been supplied; but this did not satisfy that irate personage late of the sunny smile, who still demanded admittance, evidently with the intention of scolding.

[15]

But it was of no avail his rattling the door handle, and trying to force an entrance, as No. 3, a little frightened, remained firm, and fortunately the door also; and after an appeal to his better feelings through the excuse that her attire was, at the moment, insufficient for the reception of company, the old gentleman at length retreated, grumbling loudly to himself.

[16]

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FOREST OF BAVELLA.

Bavella is so high up amongst the mountains, that, unless the day be cloudless, it is useless to make the ascent, as every view is otherwise lost.

We were favoured by the most perfect day imaginable; and from morning till evening, not a mist wreath came to hide a single peak or confuse a single line of the mountain ranges.

We got up at daybreak, and breakfasted on dry bread and coffee at 5.30 a.m.

At 6 a.m. we were in our carriage, brought round by the ever-punctual Antonio, and driving up the steep ascent in the long shadows of early day, sunlight on the mountain tops, larks singing their carol, and heavy dew lying on the sweet-scented grass and macchie round us.

[17]

Every yard of the way was lovely, and every turn brought out new beauties; grandest mountains rising from purple mists of morning, with jagged peak and architectural column, wide deep gorges, and villages nestling everywhere with campanile in their centre, among steep green hills.

Suddenly we came face to face with the snow-clad mountain of Bavella, white and glittering; and, standing before it, a perpendicular mountain of purple rock, serrated in the most wonderful manner, like a row of columns or a Druid's temple. This mountain boasted the name of the Fourca di Basinao, we were informed; and it continued to rear its wild hydra head before us all day from behind grassy hill or group of trees, until at length we faced its precipitous sides on the Bocca di Bavella.

Evia, further on, is a picturesque village, embosomed in trees, which shut out the most magnificent hills. Here was a fine old church, and tall campanile, as usual standing apart from the church; and, pacing slowly before it, a polite old curé, in rusty brown cassock, who took off his well-worn wideawake and bared his white head as the carriage passed.

[18]

The road to Bavella is not among the best. It is not a diligence road; and is, besides, a good deal cut up by the heavy charcoal and wood waggons which ply constantly up and down it.

The turns are sharp, and the route steep and rutty, as well as narrow; and a nervous person might feel uncomfortable winding above a deep precipitous gorge, at the bottom of which rushes a foaming river, and from whose opposite slopes rises the impenetrable forest.

Mossy rocks lay up the side of the cliff above our path; and presently great Titanic boulders, twice as big as an ordinary house, covered the mountain flank, and hung across our road, intermixed with the gnarled and knotted trunks of broken trees.

Here the ground grew soft and park-like; arbutus and garden shrubs edged our way; and Mediterranean heath, nine or ten feet high, over which peered grey crag and various trees, made the air heavy with sweetness.

[19]

Then on, to more open ground, past the village of Souza on its boulder-strewn hill, surrounded by groves of ilex and pine, overlooking wooded gorge and merry cascade; on, with the smoothly rounded snow mountain, and the peaked, richly coloured rocks ever before us—with sheets of

blue and white anemone scattered upon the mossy ground at the foot of giant trees; ascending more and more steeply, with views ever more and more beautiful, into the enchanted forest, fir-cones crackling under the horses' feet, and thickly growing pines throwing shady tracery over the sunny pathway.

Caterpillars' bags overhung the road; and here and there a hacked tree had poured out a rich stream of turpentine. The bark of one of these was covered by a multitude of lovely little insects, something like ladybirds, but flat, scarlet coloured with black spots.

Gradually we went winding up to the Bocca or head of the pass, every break in the trees showing wider and more extensive ranges of mountains; and great golden lichen-covered crags, surrounded by ferns and overhung by pines, presenting at each turn a more perfect study for a sketch. Corsica is certainly the heaven of a landscape painter, and Bavella is one of her highest attractions. [20]

The road was rough and narrow, however, now; and here and there, where a party of cantonniers, or road-makers, were at work repairing, their heaps of stone still further narrowed the passage for the carriage, which on one or two occasions passed the corner with three wheels on the ground, and the fourth hanging over the edge of the precipice!

The forest ceased as we reached the Bocca, to recommence, at the same distance, down the other side. The top of the mountain was bare and rugged, crowned by a few cedars; but from this spot the most magnificent of views lay spread out before us. The forest lay all around us at our feet; from the other side of the gorge rose the wonderful Fourca di Basinao; and far away below swelled seven ranges of mountains, billowed and commingling in varied hues of purple, hazy blue, and vivid crimson. [21]

A few steps further brought us to the edge of the slope leading down to the other side, and to the route towards Solenzara; and this view was almost more beautiful than the other. Forests of pine and lighter beeches covered conical hills, that looked as if we could have thrown a stone upon their tops; darker majestic rocks rose like gigantic ruined castles behind them; close beside us was an unbroken cone of pure snow; and, far away, beyond all, a wide sweep of bluest Mediterranean with the island of Asanzara lying, gem-like, upon its bosom.

All down this side of the hill, for two or three hundred yards or so, the bare rocky ground was covered with low huts of wood or stone, roughly put together, and not more than ten or twelve feet long. These huts, which were like a series of human mole-hills scattered over the hill-side, had an open space left for doorway, but neither door nor chimney. Peeping inside one, we saw that it was very dirty, with no other flooring than the muddy ground, and that the only article of furniture within was an old pan. [22]

These wretched hovels are, for three or four months together, the homes of the poor cantonniers at work upon the roads; who herd here together anyhow, obtaining bread and country wine from the little *locanda* close by, placed under the brow of the highest slope.

At this *locanda* our horses were put up for the mid-day halt; and from it, presently, a little circle of five or six women issued, very curious to eye the foreign ladies, and, if possible, to question them. One of these was the landlady of the little public-house (for inn it was not), and the others were the wives of a few of the cantonniers whose energy or means had enabled them to follow their husbands.

They were not long in squatting round us in a ring as we sketched, talking rapidly in their Italian patois to each other, and persuading the brown-eyed, sweet-faced landlady—the only one of the party able to speak French—to ask us whence we came and who we were. She was too shy to begin at first, but, once started, kept up a brisk conversation. Here, in her little home, 3700 feet above the sea level, she had known but few visitors, especially foreigners, and she was full of interest and curiosity. [23]

For some minutes we were plied by the usual round of questions as to our nationality, as to the beauty of England, and the riches of its inhabitants; and we found the usual difficulty in convincing them that we were not millionaires.

"Ah, madame!" said the woman, pointing to the little reticule which No. 1 carried over her arm; "you *know* there is enough money in that bag to make my fortune."

As the bag in question really did contain money, her remark was not so far from the truth as it might have been.

"Was it not very lonely living up here all the year round?" we asked her.

"Ah, well; it was *triste* in winter, for sometimes they were snowed up for six or seven months together; but in summer it was not dull, for she had friends like these with her."

"Had she any children," we asked, "to brighten up her solitude in winter?" [24]

The dark eyes filled with tears, and the rough brown face softened, as she shook her head sadly, "No, not one; and she had been married four years."

"But," we said, consolingly, "there may still be some, at some future day."

"Ah, madame, I have prayed the Holy Mother of God, and I think it must be because I am not

good enough. But this month (month of Mary), I have sent an offering to her shrine; and perhaps she will hear me this time."

The wistful eyes of the poor woman still wore their touching expression as we said good-bye, and, after a two-hours' halt on the Bocca, walked off on our return journey.

I should advise all travellers, except those of unusually stout nerves, to do as we did, and start before the carriage on returning, doing the first three or four miles of descent on foot.

Even with so careful and skilful a driver as ours, cantering down this uncommonly steep and narrow road must be a doubtful enjoyment to most persons not accustomed to live on the edge of a precipice; besides which, the lovely scenery can be much more fully appreciated on foot and at a walking pace. [25]

It is something too, to drink in the grand solitude of this forest-covered mountain side, where the rustle of trees, over whose heads you often look, and the weird calling of some forest bird, are generally the only sounds to disturb thoughts which seem to expand with the wide grandeur of nature.

About a quarter of a mile from Sainte Lucie we got out, and, dismissing the carriage to its stables in the village, explored the little convent church upon the hill.

The convent itself, with strong walls and narrow windows, is now turned into a stable; but the church door stood open, and we entered.

A perfect pandemonium it appeared to be: some men playing jigs on a wretched little harmonium in a corner of the building, and about sixty children, of all ages, rushing about the place, dancing and shouting. [26]

The men, as usual, took little notice of us; but the children ceased their games, and followed us in open-mouthed curiosity from side to side of the little church, as we made a tour of inspection. It was a poor little place, dirty and neglected, with a number of wretched daubs upon the walls—one, the old and treasured picture, having been painted in the twelfth century, but certainly nothing to boast of, except in the way of antiquity. These children of Tallano were pretty and amusing.

We were sitting on the wall in the lane outside the inn, waiting for dinner, when one of them, a round-faced, brown-eyed boy of about twelve, seated on a mule, came riding past us once or twice, giving furtive glances each time.

"Bonsoir," said we at last.

"Bonsoir," said he, turning a blushing, delighted face towards us. "*I* said 'bonsoir' to *you* before, when you passed me in the street." Saying which, and having satisfied his curiosity, the little fellow turned round his steed and finally rode away. [27]

The expedition to Bavella from Tallano can be done in ten hours; viz., five hours going up, two to rest on the Bocca, and three for the descent. It is, therefore, an easy day's excursion. But it is well worth while giving up twelve or thirteen hours to it: starting at five or six o'clock in the morning, and returning at seven, thus having four or five hours in the middle of the day for a good ramble in and out of and round about this beautiful forest.

Bread and cheese, or other provisions, must be taken, as the little locanda supplies absolutely nothing eatable in the way of food; although they probably have some of the good red country wine, for which Tallano is celebrated. Enthusiastic Englishmen do occasionally spend a night upon the Bocca; but, judging from what I saw of the locanda, it would be absolutely impossible for any lady to sleep there; and one gentleman, who had passed a night in a log hut near the top of the pass, and who conceives himself, as a rule, proof against the attacks of any noxious insect, told me that he never spent so miserable a time in his life, and that he would not repeat the experiment for twenty Bavellas, exquisite though they might be. [28]

At Tallano we had nothing of this sort. Discomfort, and even dirt there might be; but it was dirt of the bearable kind, unconnected with entomology.

But no doubt the accommodation differs. An English lady, met since our return, informed me that she and her party spent several days in the forest, in one of the *forestier's* houses, for lodging in which, permission must be obtained from the authorities at Ajaccio; and that, although destitute of all comforts and almost of furniture, the house was not in any way obnoxious from dirt. [29]

### CHAPTER III.

#### SARTENE.

The route to Sartene from Tallano descends for some distance on the Propriano route, and is not particularly interesting.

After passing the queer old Pisan bridge, however, it branches off to the left, into a soft green



shady road, faced by a handsome conical mountain, and bordered by ilexes, cork-trees, and clustering flowers.

The rest of the way is a continual ascent until Sartene is reached.

Steep boulders, growing grander and more massive, and half covered with a scarlet leek parasite that is positively dazzling in the brilliant sunshine, rise on each side of the road, interspersed with ilex-trees, myrtle, arbutus, and many shrubs, sometimes lying gently in a flat grassy nook, like a garden rockery. [30]

Near Sartene, the road grows terribly steep, winding for miles round and round the hot interminable hill, on the side of which lies the town, looking clean and superior. Blue sea peeped out behind us, and snow mountains invited us in front, as we got out, and, remembering that both good men and women are merciful to their beasts, toiled up the steep ascent beside the carriage.

Antonio had the best of it; for, with his hat pushed well back from his sunburnt face, he was consoling himself with a pipe for his long, hot walk. Antonio never smoked whilst on the box; hence, the sight of a steep hill had charms for him. In this respect, as in all others, he was a pleasing contrast to the Bastia coachman, who puffed his vile tobacco inside the carriage night and morning. Antonio appeared to think he must only smoke on sufferance, and at first used to retire behind the carriage whilst enjoying his uphill treat, directing the horses by an occasional call, and hastily smothering his pipe in his hand if spoken to. [31]

Just before the entrance to the town, stood, close beside the road, an enormous boulder of grey stone. On this had been placed, evidently by nature, a smaller round one. On the top of this was reared a lofty iron cross, eight or ten feet high, a dove flying from its summit, and, as is always the case in Corsica, the crown of thorns, the ladder, spear, hammer, and nails, even the sponge upon the stick, fastened to it.

At both entrances to the main street of every considerable village or town in Corsica you invariably see this large cross, generally of wood, and nearly always accompanied by these implements of the Crucifixion; but that at Sartene, reared on its great grey rock, with the background of blue mountains and green groves, was one of the most striking in the island.

The Hotel de l'Univers, in the principal street, was quite a cheery sight to way-worn travellers. It was no dirty little inn, with foul smells and objectionable bedrooms; but a really airy, pleasant hotel, situated in a rather stuffy street, but with dainty, well-furnished bedrooms, and a large comfortable *salle à manger*. After Corte (and of course excepting Ajaccio), it was the best hotel we had seen in the island. [32]

After a slight lunch we went out, and, strolling through the hot glaring streets and up a steep dusty hill, found ourselves at the picturesque little church of St. Amiens, built on a grassy level half-way up, overlooking lovely views.

Attached to this church is a large, thick-walled monastery, in fashion like a bastion; and, as we sat sketching on the grass before it, a string of monks came slowly by, entering two and two through the narrow door which opened into the monastery.

They were dressed in brown cassocks, with light-brown girdles and long rosaries, brown cowls, and sandalled feet that were equally brown.

They walked along demurely enough, with their eyes cast upon the ground, until they reached the narrow doorway; but, as they turned to go in, each monk gave way to the sinful appetite of curiosity, and glanced stealthily from under his shaggy eyebrows at the three strangers. A lofty wooden cross stood on the green a few yards from the church, and we were a little astonished to see that neither the brown monks, nor the fat and homely sisters who afterwards passed on their way to Vespers, saluted it in any way with signs of reverence. [33]

These sisters, comfortable-looking old ladies, with broad smiling faces, dressed all in black with enormous flapping white hats which were probably useful, but certainly not ornamental, were *sœurs de charité*, or nurses of the poor.

The pretty little church was dainty and pleasing within as without.

In honour of the month of Mary, a very grand Madonna, dressed as usual in sky blue, and surrounded by an arch of silver tinsel and white artificial roses, was placed in front of the altar for the contemplation of the faithful. Many quiet simple souls came into the cool, shady little building from the glare outside, to tell their beads, and to sit for a few moments in quiet meditation before the gaudy but sweet-faced figure; and among others two little girls, who, after kneeling down for a minute or two, commenced whispering and giggling audibly. [34]

I made friends with these two little things, and presently they sat, one on each side, holding my hands and looking up into my face with the brightest and most eager of black eyes. Jaenne and Sophie, as they informed me they were called, were in the middle class of life, and were good French scholars.

They were on their return from school, and were awaiting the priest's call to attend confession. The burden of their sins did not appear to weigh very heavily upon these small reprobates, as they chatted away to me with great friendliness, imparting to me their great desire to travel and to visit England, and showing particular curiosity as to the appearance and disposition of my

mother.

"Isn't she *very* unhappy," asked the handsome little Jaenne with the gleaming eyes, "to think you are so far away from her?" [35]

"My mother wouldn't let me go," said the small, freckled, mischievous-looking Sophie; "not now at least. But I'll go some day, when I'm big."

"It's very beautiful in England, isn't it?" asked Jaenne. "Much more beautiful than Corsica? Is it very cold?"

"I should like to live in England," remarked Sophie, sagely, "because *everybody* is very rich there!"

Beyond the church, and down the road for some distance, lie pretty scattered tombs surrounded by foliage, and reposing against wooded or grassy hills, and beyond these a populous little cemetery.

After strolling in this direction, Nos. 2 and 3 returned to the town, and went into the cathedral at one side of the Grande Place.

As we walked up the long flight of stone steps leading to it, a group of children rushed after us, shouting and dancing, and pursuing us round the interior of the church itself. Not much was to be seen there. It was a gloomy, dusty-looking place, far inferior in attractions to the graceful, well-kept little St. Amiens; but the Virgin's altar stood out in magnificence of large blue and silver-spangled curtains, surrounded by flowers, real and artificial. [36]

Hastening down the steps again, we soon got rid of our tormentors, and walked to the other end of the town to make a quick sketch of the boulder cross.

During the two or three minutes that we stood there, a crowd of forty children speedily collected, with the addition of one man and two women. The smell of garlic was suffocating; but good breeding prevailed, and a dead silence pervaded the interested group, one and all bent upon a polite and stealthy peep over our shoulders. For this purpose, a low wall behind was in great request, and one or two boys got upon each other's shoulders to attain the desired end.

The excitement became intense, when, hearing a whisper of "Ah, Rosina, ecco!" I looked down, and perceived a tiny, picturesque child with round face surrounded by the usual bambino's white cap, from off which had fallen a large straw hat, still hanging by its strings behind her neck, and proceeded to sketch her. [37]

"She's drawing Rosina! she's drawing Rosina!" became the cry; and the sudden rush of the juveniles compelled me to close my sketch-book, and make good my escape, escorted by an excited, but friendly crowd, to the Hotel de l'Univers, where table d'hôte was just over, but where a modest little dinner of nine courses had been kept hot for our benefit. [38]

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LION OF ROCCAPINA.

From Sartene to Bonifacio is a drive of about seven hours, including an hour's baiting in the middle of the day.

The scenery at first is not very fine, and leads through many a bleak and rugged hill, varied by gigantic boulders, and half-stifled ilex and arbutus.

Some of these boulders were remarkable for their strange hollowness, and would have made excellent bandit caves, had they been a little more hidden by the cystus and arbutus which bordered the way.

About half-way to the pass of Roccapina, however, a fine range of blue rocks rose on our left, close at hand, and continued for some distance to stand sentinel over the little valley through which we passed.

Our drive to-day was varied by an amusing chase. A poor little foal, following its mother and her master, got separated from its friends, through fear of our carriage, and fled precipitately down the road before us. [39]

After vainly shouting to its deaf owner, and trying by means of gentle driving to turn it back, Antonio at length jumped down, and we all followed his example. But the small beast, now out of sight of its mother, and not possessed of much wisdom, would not be persuaded to follow the same road; but, cleverly dodging our outstretched arms, rushed for protection to the horses, nestling up between them, to their great contempt and indignation.

The chase became exciting, and No. 3, standing at the horses' heads, was quite exhausted with laughing, Nos. 1 and 2 having shouted themselves quite hoarse, when Antonio, by a dexterous rush, suddenly caught the snorting, terrified foal up in his strong arms, and began to carry it

kicking down the road. At the same moment a pitiful neighing was heard round the corner, and the stupid owner at last appeared, dragged back by his afflicted mare; and in another moment, mother and child were happily re-united. [40]

The pass of Roccapina is wild and picturesque, overlooking the sea, and many a rocky range. The open pass is bordered by loose boulders, and far beneath lies the little bay of Roccapina, three or four large coasting vessels lying in its harbour, mere black atoms in the distance; the white sandy road winding down to it, dotted with charcoal carts drawn by their six or eight mules, looking like so many moving centipedes upon the hill-side.

The long headland, which juts far out into the sea and protects one side of this bay, has upon its furthest height a high round tower, and upon the summit of the nearer hill, one of the greatest natural curiosities in Europe. It consists of the figure of a lion, seated upon the high peak with a lordly air, looking out to sea—an entirely natural formation in the rock.

For miles this lion can be seen, lifelike as if from the chisel of a sculptor, his very features being marked out by the natural indentations of the granite, and his pose full of spirit and vivacity. [41]

Behind the headland, sweeps of blue sea and distant points of brown and purple rocks form a fine background, and in front the ground slopes away by a rocky winding road to the sea level.

A little Douane, represented by one pleasant elderly gendarme, and a tiny inn, are the only dwellings on this bleak and lonely spot, or for miles around its windy solitudes.

A tame tortoise, and some queer Corsican ware inside the bare little inn, consoled us during our mid-day halt for a passing shower, and our bread and cheese was augmented by the only luxury possessed by the good-natured landlady, who sold us an apronful of walnuts for twopence, and laughed cheerily at our original Italian.

Distorted and fantastic boulders gave way after a time, on the road down, to macchie and plains of corn-fields bedecked by sheets of scarlet poppies, as we left off following the margin of the sea-shore and struck inland once more amongst the green hills. [42]

A wide rock-strewn plain, with a rocky line of hills in front, and a dry sandy road, nearly stifled us, and we were glad to get into a lovely lane hedged by arbutus, up which twined the loving purple vetch, to a height of more than eight feet, and where flowers—scarlet, blue, white, and golden—hid everything but blue sky from our aching eyes.

Breezy hills, peeps of sea, and malarious-looking plain, followed each other in quick succession, as we wound up and down, never leaving the sea-coast far behind.

Reaching the top of the last stony height, about six miles from Bonifacio, a splendid view lay spread before us. As far as the eye could reach the great Mediterranean glittered like a blue mirror to the horizon, with its white cliffs and low blue hills, surrounded by many small islands, while the white bastion walls of Bonifacio glistened in the noonday sun far off upon the mainland, overtopping all.

On our right rose the splendid rocks, black pointed and well-nigh inaccessible, upon which is situated the Hermitage de la Trinité. [43]

This monastery has been for many years deserted and untenanted, but an immense black iron cross stands out with weird arms pointing into the summer sky from the extreme summit of this wild eyrie.

Looking at the almost perpendicular rocks, it is difficult to believe that any one could scale those heights; and one felt that here, at any rate, was a monastery which could have little or no communication with the outer world.

The next four or five miles seemed interminable, as in a burning fiery furnace of heat we drove along the level, sandy road leading to Bonifacio, bordered by a few dusty olives, and plentifully sprinkled with the black wooden wayside cross.

Nearer the town we passed between wonderful chalk cliffs, curved and hollowed and glittering, some having every appearance of high built walls. When at length we emerged from these white, cave-carved cliffs, we were at the bottom of an almost perpendicular hill, from the summit of which rose the bastions of Bonifacio.

The long narrow harbour which winds from the sea round one side of the town through more curious chalk cliffs, ceased at the edge of the roadside, and the lower little town or quay, with one or two small stone towers, lay beside it, before us, under the brow of the hill up which we must ascend to the citadel and town proper. A more wild and extraordinary looking situation for a town it would be impossible to conceive; and of all the towns in Corsica, I have no hesitation in saying that Bonifacio is best worth a visit. [44]

Perched on the summit of its steep hill, its chalk foundations overhanging the blue sea on one side, and flanked by harbour and distant purple hills upon the other, the great mass of masonry looks proudly down, with the invincible pride of centuries, upon its Sardinian neighbour, and upon the waters that surround three sides of its steep fortress. [45]

## CHAPTER V.

### BONIFACIO.

The town of Bonifacio proper is within the citadel walls, and two roads ascend to the heights. One is wide and handsome, winding round the lofty walls and entering the citadel by a strong drawbridge with fine old chains; the other is a stony zigzag, too narrow and too steep for any vehicle, and only available for men, women, and mules. This also leads by a lesser drawbridge into the well-defended town.

On entering through the main gates of the city, you find yourself in a wide street, which will be handsome when some ruined houses are repaired, and others now building are finished. Between the houses, come peeps of breezy hills and blue harbour. The ascent is still steep and stony, although wide; and the street, which is the only good one in Bonifacio, soon comes to an end. [46]

An intricacy of narrow byways leads out of it in every direction. Into some of these we penetrated, and found them most curious.

The houses were enormously high, supported by flying buttresses from one roof or wall to the other across the narrow street; while the road itself (by courtesy so called) was made up of mighty cobble-stones, varied by large holes, with here and there a sudden drop of a foot or two. There was of course no apparatus of any sort for lighting up these side streets, and I could not help wondering what was the percentage of the population whose nocturnal errands in these dark, dangerous alleys gave them a contused or broken limb.

Here and there among the overleaning houses came a break of queer old stone arches, leading by some black and filthy staircase into an abode of darkness from which came the voices of dogs and children.

Our passage down these back streets, however, was a nervous and hasty one, and we took care to keep in the centre of the five or six feet of stony way, knowing by uncomfortable experience the national propensity of treating the highways as drains, and the possibility any moment of a deluge of dirty water from an upper window upon our heads. [47]

In one street, a little wider than the others, and which boasted a row of shops, a brown monk was collecting coppers for his order in a little tin can, against which he rattled his brown rosary suggestively.

He was a very dirty, but a very polite monk, and showed withal rather a pleasant, honest face as he bowed to us, turning back his cowl to get a better stare.

The main street at its end branched off into two steep paths, one of which led to our "hotel," (!) and the other, equally steep but rather wider, brought us out, by rough stony passages, first to the barracks, large and white with an open square in front, and then, under an archway (over which is a little room once inhabited by the first Napoleon when a Corsican lieutenant), to a wide breezy common.

This common, covered with grass and corn-fields, with flying wind-mills, one or two military towers of heavy white stone, containing gunpowder, and some fortifications, is the plateau of the rocky height upon which Bonifacio is built. [48]

Reaching the edge of the grassy plateau, we looked down the almost perpendicular chalk cliffs to a depth of several hundred feet below, where the blue water chafed and sparkled, as it worked away busily in its endless task of excavation.

Straight before us, across the straits, lay Sardinia, one or two houses showing a glitter across the nine miles of white-ribboned currents that rushed with terrific pace between us and her. Then, turning back, and wandering out again through the drawbridge, we descended the steep hill up which we had come, and watched the inhabitants, as, in the cool of sunset, they came riding in with their various burdens upon their mules.

Many of them were loaded with grass and ferns for provender, and some with sticks, and some had tolerably heavy barrels slung on each side of their beast. [49]

One long-suffering mule was heavily weighted. A barrel on either side, a sack of hay, and a big lad of fifteen or sixteen was at first his load; to which presently was added an additional boy, who climbed up behind and perched himself upon the sack of hay, as the poor mule plodded slowly uphill.

This elder boy was assuredly one of the most beautiful of God's creations ever seen. The grace and symmetry of his figure and movements were perfect, as with supple, bare brown feet pressing against the mule's sides, he urged on the patient beast; his features were faultless, and his splendid eyes were almost hidden by the long lashes that matched the short coal-black curls under his ragged cap.

"Poor beast!" said No. 3, as the mule passed; "how tired he is!" For one felt one must see those dark eyes raised.

They were raised, as the boy glanced up at us with the scowl of a beautiful demon; then, suddenly changing his mind as he caught our friendly looks, a smile broke over the chiselled mouth and

flooded the Italian eyes; and, in an instant, the demon became an angel. I would have given a five-franc piece to have sketched that boy, but it would have been almost as much as one's life was worth to have asked him to stand.

[50]

A little further on came an old wayfarer, ragged and infirm, leaning heavily upon his stick, and followed closely by a little sheep. When I spoke to the old fellow, the sheep paused too, and looked up in my face like a dog; and when its master held out his brown withered hand, ran up to place a warm nose lovingly within it.

The poor man who "had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he nourished, and which lay in his bosom, and which was unto him as a daughter," is a well-known character in Corsica, where tame sheep often take the place of dogs, and are domestic favourites.

In Bastia I have seen a sheep walking leisurely down the pavement of the street, looking in at doorways and sniffing here and there quite at his ease, and quite disregarded, finally lying down in the sun to sleep upon the public pathway. And I remember one handsome sheep at Ajaccio that amused us greatly by its climbing powers.

[51]

We had strayed out upon the shore a mile or two from the town, and were sitting down to rest by the sea, when a very grand coastguardsman passed us. His real motive was evidently curiosity, but his feigned one was expressed by the telescope in his hand, carrying which he mounted a ridge of rock hard by, to gaze out upon the unbroken horizon.

The gold braid on his black and white uniform was fresh and telling; and the tame sheep which followed his every footstep was as white as snow.

When the coastguardsman paused, the little sheep paused; wherever he went upon the slippery seaweed-covered rocks dashed with spray, there followed she; and, when he was about to pass us, she stared for a moment with frightened air, and then, with a little cry, tucked herself close to her master's side until we were left behind.

Nearly all these Bonifacio people were civil and friendly, touching their caps and wishing us good evening.

[52]

Military and naval uniforms gave the streets a gay air, and the inhabitants appeared of a less solemn disposition than most Corsicans.

During the whole of our visit to the island, I never heard but one man (or boy) whistle, out of Bastia, Ajaccio, and Bonifacio; and in the villages nothing but chorus singing is heard, and that of the most dismal kind, and but rarely.

But here in Bonifacio, children, and even men, might be heard singing gay military airs about the streets.

The Hotel du Nord gave us a terrible shock. How it ever got itself christened "hotel," even in Corsica, is a mystery to me.

The little stony street which led up to it was so steep and so narrow that we and our packages had to leave the carriage at the bottom, and climb up to the broken hovel-like doorway, which a swinging board informed our astonished eyes was the "Entrance to the Hotel."

[53]

A stone step down into the darkness revealed before us a narrow, creaking, wooden staircase, up which we went wondering, preceded by the polite maître d'hôtel. A door then opened on a little wooden landing, and showed a long dark room, kitchen and *salle à manger* in one, in which were already seated a good many Bonifacians, drinking red wine and smoking cheap tobacco.

Through this room and its astonished inmates, we were led into two little apartments, each containing a bed, one of which was screened off so as to make the larger room a sitting-room.

This was all the accommodation to be had; but a third room was promised in another house for No. 2, "when the military gentleman now occupying it should have departed," which he had promised to do before evening.

It seemed incredible that there should be no better inn at a place like Bonifacio, one of the five principal towns in the island; but so it was; though the excellent fare and unceasing care and attention of the active little landlord deserved every commendation.

[54]

This man's French was most extraordinary, and had it not been that he took such evident pride in its display, we should have informed him that his Italian was the more comprehensible; but his kindness was excessive and his charges most moderate.

He was particularly anxious to impress upon us the fact that a handsome house, now building in the main street, was his new hotel, which would be opened by next summer, so that we should have very different accommodation on our next visit.

He also insisted strongly upon the cleanliness of his house, and his knowledge of the English prejudices against creeping beasts.

"Mesdames," said he, emphatically, "pour chaque punaise que vous trouvez ce soir, vous pourrez me donner un soufflet demain matin!"

With which handsome offer he led the way to the house, a few doors lower down the street,

where was the "extra apartment," making many apologies as to its present state of untidiness, which would be remedied directly.

[55]

Any place more cut-throat-looking than this room I never saw. It was a sort of long low garret at the very top of an apparently deserted house, up four or five flights of wooden stairs, and led out of another lumber garret, as bare and unfurnished as itself.

"Don't sleep here," said No. 3; "you will dream of brigands all night!"

"You will be choked with dust, and devoured by fleas," said No. 1.

"I hope they *will* clean it out," said No. 2, whose nerves were brigand-proof; "and I hope the house won't catch fire. But I shall sleep here."

Our polite little landlord was right as to his immunity from the worst of nocturnal horrors. But he had been wary in omitting fleas from his penalty of a box on the ear!

"Well, how did you sleep, mesdames?" he asked, as he brought us our breakfast at eight o'clock next morning.

"Very well," said two of us.

[56]

"Ah!" he replied, triumphantly, "I told you my house was clean!"

"But," said the third, quietly, "twenty-seven fleas *are* a good many to catch at one sitting!"

The poor man's face fell. "Ah, peste!" said he, with a vexed air; "that militaire kept three dogs in his room. What is a man to do?"

As for me, the beauty of the night alone prevented my sleeping. It seemed a shame to be lying idly dreaming when the clear moonlight outside was lighting up such weird beauties of nature.

My little window looked down from the very summit of the citadel rock, over perpendicular chalk cliffs, upon the dashing waves far, far beneath, where by daylight I had watched them playing over malachite stones and purple seaweed.

All around stretched the bay, the chalk cliffs, and little detached stacks, grooved and hollowed by the wasting waters; and the long promontory, edged by black rocks, jutting out into distant depths of blue Mediterranean. On this promontory stood a signal-house, and a lighthouse; and at the extreme end of it was a curious natural rock, shaped like a broad watch-tower, with pagoda roof.

[57]

But now, the bright moonlight shone on a black sea lit up by silver crests, and golden gleams from the distant lighthouse threw strange lights across little shadowy bays, whilst the detached rocks stood up like black ghosts raising fantastic heads towards the deep blue sky.

All night long the sea moaned wild music ceaselessly, the rising wind tossing up white jets of spray to catch the silver moonlight, and increasing towards morning into a tempest cry.

[58]

## CHAPTER VI.

### CURIOSITIES OF BONIFACIO.

The history of Bonifacio is rich in stories of romantic sieges and heroic deeds of valour. In 833 a Tuscan Margrave, on his road home from Africa, first built a fortress there, calling it after his own name, Bonifacius; he and his family becoming for nearly a hundred years the feudal lords of Corsica.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Genoese cast a prudent eye towards Bonifacio, and seizing upon it, they raised its almost impregnable fortifications, making it henceforth one of their chief centres.

Special privileges were granted to the citizens, families were brought over from the mainland, and Bonifacio became the first Genoese colony in the island.

[59]

For the next four or five hundred years, this great citadel sustained many a furious siege from various outsiders, and from the Corsicans themselves; but always remained faithful to Genoa, and bid defiance to every foe in the conscious strength of its massive bastion walls.

Many a time were the inhabitants brought to death's door by famine; but their marvellous courage and endurance never failed them, and Bonifacio became a byword for impregnability. Often the women, as well as the men, assisted in the defence of the city; and women, children, and old people voluntarily starved themselves, so as to reserve the modicum of food to strengthen the arms of the fighting men.

On one occasion when, blockaded by the Turkish fleet and decimated by famine, they were vainly waiting for the succours for which they had sent, their unfailing spirit inspired them with the notion of a successful ruse.

In the early morning, just before dawn, the enemy encamped outside heard sounds of joy coming from the beleaguered city, shouts raised, drums beating, and bells ringing; and when the sun rose, beheld detachments of foreign soldiers in fresh uniforms walking upon the city walls and filling the streets of the citadel.

[60]

That this was the long expected help they could not doubt, although struck dumb with amazement and disgust to find that, under cover of the night, the enemy's forces had been able to land to the relief of the distressed city. It was only after the siege was raised, and the combat had ended in the triumph of the heroic defenders, that they discovered that the supposed foreign battalion was nothing more nor less than the wives and daughters of the citizens, who, in order to intimidate them and attain their own end, had played the part of those allies for whom their heart was sick with waiting.

There was a bright sun and a high gale as Nos. 2 and 3 went out early to inspect some of the curiosities of Bonifacio.

One glance at the foaming, boiling sea, told us that it would be impossible to visit the beautiful marine caverns for which the chalk cliffs are famous, and which lie within a short rowing distance of the town. So we repaired to the celebrated Aragon staircase.

[61]

For this purpose we had to seek the barracks, from whence presently issued a guide with a key. Entering through a doorway upon a part of the cliff walled off, we followed to the very edge of the precipice. Not till then did we see, overhanging the angry waves, the rough narrow staircase, cut almost vertically down the face of the rock.

On one side over-arched the chalk cliff, and on the other was a rough wall two or three feet high. If it had not been for this protective wall, we should infallibly have been blown over into the sea, as, frantically clutching our hats in the roaring wind, and leaving our umbrellas at the top, weighted down by stones, we prepared to descend the exceedingly steep and broken one hundred and ninety-four steps.

This staircase, cut out by order of the then King of Aragon (for a long time ally and feudal lord of Bonifacio), between three and four hundred years ago, was intended, it is said, for the approach to his private landing stage; but, at all times, this rocky bay must have been a most unsuitable, difficult place of embarkation for pleasure seekers, and it seems more probable that it was first hastily excavated by the inhabitants for the stealthy receipt of succours by sea.

[62]

Anyhow, it is reported to have been useful on many occasions to smugglers; and this seems more than probable from its appearance.

What with wind and steepness, it took us some time to descend, and No. 3 was greatly incensed by the guide's offers of assistance, and his final remark, "Mademoiselle a peur?"

"Do you think," she asked, wrathfully, "that there are no rocks in England? *We* live in an island, too!"

The little platform of rock at the bottom was raised two or three feet above the level of the waves, and protected in front by a low stone wall, over which surf dashed. Loose rocks of chalk lay all about, and round and over them played the swift water, turning its shallow rapids into richest, clearest green, brown, and orange hues.

[63]

Sardinia was pale with the mist of the sirrocco; and the "bouches" between us raged in a storm of white breakers.

On the little plateau below lay a sheet of that surf-loving mauve flower with which the Iles Sanguinaires abound; and also a quantity of a beautiful kind of ice plant, whose pointed, thick, light-green leaves glistened with an infinity of brilliant balls like dew-drops.

After a tedious mount up again to the top of the staircase, and past the barracks, we were conducted to the "Grand Moulin," where, from an artesian well beneath the surface of the sea, water is pumped up to the level of the cliff.

This mill is only used in summer, and waters the gardens of les militaires.

When there is not wind enough to move its sails, four men turn a large iron windlass on a little platform within.

From this platform, on dropping stones, we found that they took sixteen seconds before splashing into the water at the bottom.

[64]

Three hundred and sixty steps reach from the land level to the water level; and down these winding stone steps our guide was exceedingly anxious that we should go.

He shut the door, and, carrying a lantern, desired us to follow him into the foul-smelling, dank, gruesome darkness.

But thirty-five steps led to the first platform, and here we struck work, greatly to the man's disgust. But things creeping innumerable bedecked the yellow walls, and monstrous beetles, two inches long, scuttled by; and, with petticoats well tucked up, we retreated upstairs incontinently, notwithstanding our guide's remonstrances, and his assurances that this was far finer than the other staircase, and decidedly the greatest curiosity in Corsica, if not in the world.

Very glad was I to escape from insect clutches, and wander out beyond the town to seek some sketching spot in the open, sweet air.

This I found on a little path overhanging the main road up to the citadel, and cut in the grassy slope of the cliff. [65]

A very difficult position it was to maintain this windy morning, and I really thought sometimes that both I and my juvenile crowd of attendants would be blown bodily over the cliff-side on to the highway far below, to the astonishment of passers-by.

The Bonifacio children I found extremely curious, but withal well-behaved.

Finding that they could not be induced to retire, I made use of them; and one held down the flapping page of my sketch-book, while another held my umbrella over my head. We became very good friends, and they were exceedingly anxious not to intercept my view, but the brisk fire of questioning kept up by them added another difficulty to a rapid sketch.

Garlic and conversation, however, had to be endured, as their politeness did not go the length of making themselves scarce.

Even the offer of a handful of sous as soon as the carriage came up, could not induce them to disperse, notwithstanding the persuasion of one of their number, a pretty boy of about eleven. [66]

Finding that his companions would not move, he turned to me, and took off his cap. "Madame," said he, with the air of a courtier, "I go; not for the sake of sous, but because you desire it. I have tried to make these others come, but they will not."

"Sir," replied I, to the small but courteous Corsican, "you are a gentleman."

And the brown-eyed, dignified boy walked off, not to be seen again. [67]

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SERMON BY THE WAYSIDE.

We were glad enough to reach Sartene on our return, after a hot and dusty drive.

We had ordered a relay of horses from Ajaccio next day, to meet us half-way between Sartene and the capital, so as to do the whole return distance in two days; and we quite looked forward to our snug little rooms at l'Hotel de l'Univers. But, alas! for the futility of human hopes!

No sooner did "shades of eve prevail, and the moon tell out her wondrous tale," than Nos. 2 and 3 found themselves surrounded by a black and scarabean army. From every direction swarmed these unpleasant visitors in bold assurance, and nothing daunted by the sight of their brethren's corpses upon the polished floor.

In this dilemma we called in the deaf but friendly waiter, who solemnly fetched a dustpan and brush, with which he performed the funeral obsequies of the dead, and the prompt execution of the living. [68]

"You will now sleep well, mesdames," said he, consolingly, but unveraciously; "behold, they are all dead!"

But he mocked us; and another five minutes found us again demanding assistance, whilst, with disturbed faces and gathered up petticoats, we strove to evade the approaching enemy. This time the landlord accompanied the waiter.

"Why do the black beetles come to-night? There were none last time," we asked, reproachfully.

"Voila, mademoiselle, they *will* come sometimes, and we cannot help it. The kitchen is on this floor, and there has been a spell of hot weather. But they will not hurt you, mademoiselle, they do not bite."

"Ah!" said we, miserably, "you do not know English ladies. They have a horror of creeping beasts. We would rather have something that *did* bite, than a room full of black beetles." [69]

The fat, good-natured countenance of the portly landlord was filled with compunction at the sight of our distress. He made another tour round our room, and crunched one or two more black beetles. "There will not be many more now, mademoiselle, and indeed they will not hurt you. But shall I have beds made up for you in the sitting-room next door? There *might* not be so many there."

But this well-meant though useless offer we of course declined; and, with a sympathetic good night on one side, and a melancholy one on the other, the two kindly Corsicans retired.

At half-past five next morning I was awakened by shouts in the street outside my window, and going out into the large stone terrace upon which our windows all opened, I looked down upon a lively scene below.



It was Sunday morning, and had been chosen as inspection day for the gendarmes of Sartene, by a certain M. le general, who was going the round of the island on such duties, and who was stopping at our hotel.

[70]

First came the review of the mounted gendarmes, and then of the foot police. These latter were only fifteen in number, but seemed remarkably well up in their drill.

M. le general, capering about on his white horse, was a very gorgeous spectacle. His scarlet cloak was rolled up behind him as a saddle cushion, and his pistol holsters in front were striped black and white, while his own uniform was blue.

The inspection lasted scarcely an hour; but the general's shouts to his small body of soldiers might have been heard a mile off.

It was a lovely sunny morning, and, as we were to leave for Ajaccio at 9 a.m., before eight o'clock No. 3 was out, tearing up the hill towards St. Amiens, with the purpose of sketching one or two of the picturesque wayside tombs which adorned that road.

An early walk on Sunday morning is the time to see the natives in Corsica.

The large church square just beyond the hotel where the gendarmes had been drilled, was full of men, three or four hundred, with, as far as could be seen, not a single woman amongst them; but descending the steep hill from St. Amiens were many neat, black-robed women returning, prayer-book in hand, from early Mass, and all saluting the English lady and her sketch-book with a grave surprised politeness.

[71]

Men, women, and children, all riding mules, were also coming in from the country to spend their Sunday in town.

The quiet gravity and the extreme tidiness of these holiday makers struck one forcibly. They all pursued their way in silence, the men usually with spotless white shirts appearing under their velveteen coats, and the younger women with clean, starched, white head-gear; but both men and women totally destitute of either ornament or colour in their dress.

It was a beautiful morning for a sketch, and the interruptions, though many, were not discourteous.

Once No. 3 felt an animal's breath snorting on her neck, and turning round, saw a mule close behind, its rider, gun on back, looking over her shoulder with great interest.

On her saying good morning to the man, he immediately smiled and lifted his cap; and remarking that he wished he knew how to draw, he gave his mule a gentle kick and continued his way.

[72]

"Bon jour, mademoiselle," said a bright voice a few minutes later; and, looking up, No. 3 saw an old woman standing before her. She evidently belonged to the lower orders, and was poor, although neatly dressed in a semi-conventual attire of black serge, edged with white, and wearing a long rosary and cross by her side.

She appeared to be very old, and was toothless, and consequently a little difficult to understand, but had an upright carriage, and the sweetest and blithest of old faces.

"Good morning," said No. 3; "you have been to church, I suppose?"

"Of course, mademoiselle. And not you?"

"I do not always go to Mass," replied No. 3; "I am not of your religion."

"No, mademoiselle? Ah! what a pity? You are English, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, madame."

"But they believe in Jesus in your country, do they not, mademoiselle?" said she, innocently.

[73]

"And where are you going now?" asked No. 3, when she had satisfied her old friend on this point.

"I? Oh, I am off to visit my 'pauvres,' and my poor dear 'malades.'"

"Do you visit them every Sunday morning?"

"Why, every morning, mademoiselle!"

"But are there many malades in Sartene?"

"Oh yes, mademoiselle. There are always plenty who are sick and suffering, or infirm, or unhappy; and they are glad to see me. They are all good to me, my poor children!"

"But you are so old yourself. Don't you get tired, running about all day like that?"

The old soul laughed merrily.

"I am used to it, mademoiselle, and le bon Dieu has given me strong legs. Sometimes I am tired in the evening; but I am longing to be off again next day. It makes one so happy to feel one can do something for le bon Dieu, though one is old and poor."

[74]

"You are a sister?" asked No. 3. "But you do not live in a convent, do you?"

"Oh no, mademoiselle, I have never lived in a convent. I live by myself, and amongst my children."

"Your poor children?"

"My poor and my sick children, mademoiselle."

"You look very happy," said No. 3, gazing up into the wrinkled, beaming old face.

The old sister suddenly bent down, showing a large brass ring on her forefinger, on which was carved a crucifix.

"Look, mademoiselle," she exclaimed, kissing it reverently; "this is what makes me happy! Lui—c'est mon époux, mon ami, mon Dieu!"

It was time to return homewards; and as No. 3 got up, her new friend wrung both her hands affectionately.

"Tell me your name, mademoiselle," she said, "that I may know for whom to pray. And you, when you go to your Mass in England, you will remember old Catarina Rinaldi, will you not?"

And with a parting smile, the old woman moved off briskly, her face shining with the reflection of the spring brightness on the wayside, down which she passed. [75]

Open air sermons are sometimes the best.

At the bottom of the hill, a tall woman, bearing an enormous earthenware jar perched sideways upon her head, appeared suddenly; and an intelligent boy of thirteen or fourteen also passing, was pounced upon by No. 3 to make known her wish to the countrywoman that she should pause a moment to be sketched.

The black-eyed woman laughed shyly, but after a moment's hesitation consented, understanding apparently that it was her big pot only which was the attraction. But no sooner did she find out that her face also was to be inserted in the sketch, than, with unfeigned fright, she covered it with her hands and prepared to run away.

A short argument followed, in which both No. 3 and her interpreter endeavoured vainly to reassure the model; but it proved useless, and, still keeping her hands before her brown face, she presently hurried off, regardless of the sneers of her juvenile but more highly educated countryman. [76]

"What on earth frightens her?" asked No. 3.

"How can I tell, mademoiselle? Behold, these country women are so ignorant and stupid!" replied this youthful Solon, with a shrug.

"Do they believe in the evil eye in Corsica?"

"Maybe. A few foolish ones."

"Perhaps she does?"

"It may be so, mademoiselle. She is but an uneducated woman from the hillside."

No. 3's new friend walked home beside her, and was an exceedingly agreeable companion.

He spoke very good French, and his stature, which was small but dignified, was augmented by a large shiny black hat.

No. 3 felt quite glad of his manly escort as she passed through the great square again.

"Are there no women in Sartene?" she asked, "or do they never come out of doors?" [77]

"They come out in the evening, mademoiselle, and walk about; but they never leave their houses in the morning, unless it is to go to Mass. They have plenty to do indoors."

"And the men do nothing?"

"It is not a man's place to do household work," replied the young man, with evasive dignity.

The carriage was at the hotel door as the two came up, and the young Corsican took off his cap politely as we drove away.

From Sartene to Ajaccio is a nine-hours' drive, without any pause; and of course cannot be done without a change of horses half-way.

These we had ordered at Bechisano, but they did not arrive, and great was Antonio's disgust when we had finally, after an hour's waiting, to drag on our tired horses to Grosseto, where we found the fresh couple awaiting us.

We, however, had no objection to an hour's rest in the village of Bechisano, where, sending away horses and driver for rest and refreshment, we got rid of our bread and cheese, and began to take a woman's portrait. [78]

The crowd around us increased every moment, and before long I had counted seventy-five heads, all jammed close beside the carriage. But they were the most pleasant and friendly of people.

Conversation became exceedingly animated, and the pretty, sensible-faced woman who, with jar and bimbo, acted as our model, became the object of much harmless chaff.

Finally, amid a great deal of laughter, an innocent-looking old crétin, with a childish face, was dragged forward as a fit and very willing subject for our pencils.

But one and all, though full of merriment, were perfectly obliging and courteous; and even the children pulled one another off the carriage, admonishing each other not to shake the artists. One boy's face struck me by its rare and peculiar beauty. It was of a deep olive, perfectly oval; and his delicately curved lips never lost their gentle gravity as he kept his large liquid brown eyes with their heavy fringes fixed upon us, leaning his head against the carriage, and answering our remarks in one or two gentle monosyllables. I never saw a greater contrast than there was between this pale, beautiful, refined boy-countenance, and the face of a poor little girl behind him. She was dirty and untidy, ugly to an extreme, and with evil passions expressed on the childish features to an unnatural degree. The slightest push caused her to scowl and retort, with a malignant anger in her fierce black eyes that was positively appalling. This small Corsican seemed more than ready to start a vendetta on her own account before long. [79]

We were still sitting laughing and sketching in the carriage, surrounded by our numerous admirers, when I heard an astonished voice at my elbow.

"Had you not better walk on a little, and so get rid of all these people?"

And looking down, I saw Antonio's grave face, a little more serious than usual. It was clear he regretted our want of dignity, and did not admire such bonhomie in the foreign ladies under his care.

"We like the people, Antonio; they amuse us," said I apologetically, and feeling sure that by the remark I was losing caste in his eyes. [80]

Antonio immediately retired a few steps, and sat down upon a low wall behind the carriage in silence, keeping, however, a scrutinizing watch upon us and our surroundings, and ready to pounce fiercely upon the first boy whose audacity might tempt him to scale the coachman's box.

And before long Nos. 2 and 3 had taken his advice and walked on, leaving No. 1 alone in the carriage to hold *levée* with the assembled multitudes.

A terrific shower forced them, however, soon to rush to the nearest shelter, which consisted of a large rough-looking wooden house beside the road.

Entering within the doorway, they stood in a deserted passage, full of logs of wood, and from one end of which ran a tall wooden ladder—the family staircase up to the habited rooms. Down this ladder, presently, peered several small pairs of bright eyes, soon augmented by a detachment of female faces, all grinning and curious, but retreating hastily when we showed signs of advancing. [81]

After a time, however, one, bolder than the rest, beckoned us hospitably upstairs; and, rather curious to see the family *ménage*, up the steep ladder we went.

We found a low dark room, almost unfurnished, save for two or three wooden stools, on which, and on the floor before the hearth, sat four or five women, and as many children, enjoying the blaze of the log fire.

Their gossip appeared very merry, and they fell into shrieks of laughter over the attempted Italian of Nos. 2 and 3. Of French they could neither speak nor understand a single word, except one woman, who with many smiles offered us each a stool before the fire, remarking with much dignity, "Moi, je suis *le maître* de cette maison. *Ceux-la*," pointing to her group of friends, "sont les femmes des cantonniers!"

There was a great deal of laughter over our endeavours to parcel out the right children to the right mothers, and a positive refusal at first to accept the few sous we brought out as a thankoffering for the fire and shelter. [82]

The difference between the Corsican men and women often struck us; the former so grave, reticent, and thoughtful; the latter so merry, gay, and careless.

On the road back to Ajaccio, Antonio became communicative, and talked of many things.

Sartene, he said, was not famous for its peaceable character in this somewhat unpeaceable island. In Sartene the fashionable weapon, however, is no firearm, but a heavy knobbed stick akin to an Irishman's shillelagh.

Nearly every man carries one of these, as we had noticed, underneath his arm, but with no idle idea of assistance in walking.

In a quarrel these heavy club-headed sticks can do great execution; and, as the men are always quarrelling, broken heads are tolerably common, and murder not unknown.

"Last night," said Antonio, "I was in the stable, and a young man was with me, talking. Presently another entered, and after a few minutes picked a quarrel with the first. I didn't heed them much, for I was looking after my horses. But presently I heard a blow, and saw one of them fall flat on his back. The other fellow had hit him on the head with his stick, and he seemed dead." [83]

"What did the assailant do?" I asked; "was he shocked?"

Antonio smiled his quiet amused smile. "He walked off. No, he was not shocked at all."

"And you?"

"I did what I could. I put some straw under the young man's head, and gave him water; and in about an hour he got up and went out."

"Is he much hurt?"

"Oh, he will have a broken head for some time."

"And what will he do to his assaulter? Break *his* head next time he sees him?"

"Perhaps he may do that, too. But he will go this morning and lay the case before the prefect." [84]

"And what will be done to the man who knocked him down?"

"Oh, he will be fined."

A queer mixture of law and barbarism appears to co-exist in Sartene.

"Antonio," I asked, as we passed through village after village full of idling men, standing at street corners, whilst the church bell vainly called for Vesper worshippers, "do the men in Corsica never go to church? Have they no religion?"

"Not much, mademoiselle. They seldom go to a service unless there is some grand procession, and, for the most part, they do not themselves know what they believe."

"They are not staunch Roman Catholics, like the Italians?"

"The Jesuits are banished from Corsica, mademoiselle. They taught much, and the people miss that. Then the French have brought in new ideas, and many of our men have learnt to scoff, from them."

"Are not the priests respected, then? Are they not good?"

"Some are good, and some are bad, mademoiselle; but the people do not listen much to them. Sometimes, monks will come round the villages preaching, and they do good, for they are holy, and the men listen to them." [85]

"Do the priests never try to stop the vendetta?"

"How can they? Those that are quarrelling would not listen to them. And for that matter, you may see a priest himself sometimes walking about with a dagger or a pistol at his belt."

"But only to defend himself?"

"Well, yes; to defend himself," replied Antonio, a little doubtfully.

"Antonio," said I, "do *you* think it right to shoot your enemy down?"

"No, I do not think it right."

"But, if he had shot one of your family, would you do it?"

Antonio was silent. He was a calm, but a very truthful young man.

"Would you?" I asked again.

"I don't know, mademoiselle. A man cannot tell what he may do in anger."

"But it would be murder," said I; "and now you have courts, where your enemy would receive due punishment." [86]

"But if he got off meanwhile to the *macchie*," asked Antonio, his dark eyes gleaming with a spice of mischief, "and was never seen again; what then?"

"Well," I said, after a pause, "you must be a difficult race to manage."

"The Corsicans quarrel amongst themselves sometimes, mademoiselle; and they kill one another sometimes; but they are a quiet people on the whole. They are content to live upon little, they neither beg nor steal" ("nor work," he might have added), "and they make no commotions. If there is any disturbance in the country, it is caused by Italians. There are more Italians than French in the island, and they are very rough and disorderly. If ever a stranger is molested it is by the Italians. No Corsican will ever speak rudely to you, mademoiselle."

There are certainly no begging propensities about the Corsicans. It had been with the greatest difficulty that we managed to make the bimbo's mother at Bechisano allow her baby to clasp a fifty-centime piece in his chubby hand, after refusing anything herself for her good-natured pose of a quarter of an hour opposite our carriage. [87]

But Antonio's eloquence on the subject of Corsican docility rather lost its effect upon me, owing to the peculiar character of one of our new relay of horses. He was a great raw-boned brute about sixteen hands high, who reared upright at starting, and showed a strong disposition to bolt

the first few miles—a disposition only checked by the extreme stolidity of his companion, who stumbled over his nose every few steps.

"N'ayez pas peur, mademoiselle," said the grave voice at my side, consolingly; "I know him well; he will do no harm. That fellow who rears is twenty-three years old; but he is much the best of the two. But the 'padron' should not have sent such horses for you."

In fact, with any driver less skilful or less careful than ours, I doubt if we should ever have reached Ajaccio that night; and we were reminded that it behoves travellers in Corsica to choose their horses before starting on a journey.

[88]

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TO VICO.

A few days' quiet at Ajaccio, was quite sufficient for us. The hotel, lately so lively, was now completely deserted, and even the white-capped chamber-maids had taken flight until next season. We had the large rooms completely to ourselves, and found them melancholy. The town, too, was hot and stuffy. Everybody was moving up to their summer houses, and the close air was depressing.

We were glad to arrange another tour to the north-west of the island, including the forests of Aitone and Valdoniello. The first night was to be spent at Vico, a village up amongst the hills, a favourite resort of the upper ten of Ajaccio in summer.

It was a good six-hours' drive to Vico, and, as we wished to see something of its surroundings, which we were told were very pretty, we started before eight o'clock in the lovely morning sunshine.

[89]

The carriage was a small one, for we took little or no baggage, and only two passengers. To No. 1, called away on a promised visit to Italy, we bade a melancholy farewell, and, with the faithful Antonio for charioteer, trotted through the blazing little town, down the dusty Bastia road, and under the handsome aqueduct along the flanks of the western hills, leaving the sea behind us glowing in vivid sapphire tints against the purple hills.

Toiling up the hot, rocky ascent, Monte Nebbio and Monte D'Or mocked us with cool, snow-mantled forms rising in our faces, and the large château on the top of a steep hill termed Monte Lisa, was pointed out to us as a favourite resort to many during the summer heat.

For miles, also, the great purple rock of Monte Gozo towered bleak and majestic before us, rising abruptly from the green plain, and reminding one, as it hung in cool blackness over the far-reaching glare, of a "great shadow in a thirsty land."

[90]

Corn-fields waved softly at its foot, the corn rising five feet high; and the village of Appiето nestled in its shade behind green knolls.

Glimpses of the western sea began to greet us as we mounted, and at the summit of the steep Col San Sebastiano, a splendid panorama lay before us, in many a range of blue and purple hills, backed by glittering walls of snow.

Then, descending to Calcatoggio, the magnificent Gulf of Sagona suddenly burst upon us, dazzlingly blue, and stretching far away in its many indented bays, with Carghese, scarcely visible, lying between the two furthest headlands, far out to sea.

Calcatoggio, on the side of a steep hill, backed by woods and facing this glorious bay, has a most perfect position, but enjoys the reputation of being a remarkably dirty village. It boasts, however, a fountain of delicious water at its entrance, where we and our horses by turns regaled ourselves.

A more exquisite day I never saw, and sea and sky were dazzling in their sunny brilliancy as our little carriage ran merrily down the green hill-sides, overlooking the purely green water, and then for miles passing along beside its translucent, sparkling little waves, as they danced upon their sandy floor.

[91]

The Gulf of Liamone was too tempting to pass; and, leaving the carriage, we wandered along the fine white sands, seeing every weed and pebble in the wonderfully clear water. No shells, however, were to be found, and the hot sand burnt our feet and hands as we flung ourselves down to rest.

On clambering up the bank again and returning to the carriage, No. 3 found Antonio extended upon the box, face downwards, wrapped in heavy slumber, that even her advent did not disturb; and he only sprang up hastily, seizing his reins, at the sound of her voice.

Antonio had shown signs of nodding ever since the mid-day halt, and an unworthy suspicion of drink had seized upon our minds.

[92]

"You are sleepy to-day," remarked No. 3, severely.

"Si, mademoiselle," was the curt reply.

"Is it the heat?" she demanded, without abating the severity of her tone.

"Si. And being up all last night."

"Up all last night!" she repeated, mollified at once. "How did that happen?"

"A party in Ajaccio had to be driven into the Campagne late last night, and I only got home at six this morning. Then I got a message from the padron to tell me you wanted me for half-past seven. So I had to see after your carriage and horses at once."

Poor Antonio! No wonder he was sleepy. We soon became convinced that he was the most abstemious of men; but it was no rare event for him to be out driving all night, and at work again all day without rest.

"They give the horses more rest than you," I said.

"Yes; but night and day work would injure the horses, and I am strong." [93]

"Do you have your Sundays free?" I asked.

"But no. Sundays and week days are all the same to us."

"Have you no holidays?"

"None, mademoiselle. I have been at this work driving now for nine years, ever since I was fifteen, but I have never had more than an hour or two to myself at a time. If I had time to study and raise myself," he continued wistfully, "I should seek some better *métier* than this."

"Well," said No. 3, "it is, at any rate, a very pleasant and healthy occupation; and a man who has grown accustomed to the open air would not be happy at sedentary work."

Antonio's white teeth gleamed as he smiled affirmatively. "It is the best occupation in the world for happiness," said he; "a man cannot quarrel or get into trouble by himself; and one feels always light-hearted in the open air. But one may have too much of anything."

Sagona, which we passed soon after, is a tiny village, boasting two or three eucalypti, and a little quay the size of a sixpence. [94]

Near here, the river Liamone, one of the most considerable in Corsica, throws itself into the sea, after its many tortuous windings among the intricate maze of hills around Vico.

Leaving the sea border soon after passing Sagona, we struck inland through cistus-covered hill, bright poppy-sprinkled corn-field, and willows whispering and sighing among a sea of giant bracken fern; here and there, underneath a bit of grateful shade, where myrtle, laurestinus, and arbutus edged the hot wayside; then on, amongst wild and rugged hills, where lizards, green and black, with bright eyes and supple tails, glided rapidly up the face of yellow rocks, and where a long black serpent was sunning himself in the grass by the roadside. On—until suddenly the reins were flung down, and, with a quick leap, Antonio was off his box, and mutely pointing to a pretty fern-shaded fountain close beside us, a fountain boasting three spouts, under which three human heads were instantly bending, to emerge a minute afterwards, dripping and refreshed. [95]

If any one wishes to gain a notion of the divine nectar of Olympus, let him travel on a hot June day under a Corsican sun, walking up a few of the steepest hills; and then let him apply his thirsty mouth to one of the mountain rivulet-fed fountains placed here and there along the wayside by a philanthropic government.

It is a nectar to be found only in Olympus; the valleys know it not.

And now, as we drove on up the steep ascent, we were looking down into a deep close valley where a long, low, red-roofed building, strangely isolated, marks the springs of Caldonelli, formerly much thought of for their medicinal qualities, but whose wretched accommodation and low-lying situation are now deserted for the more genteel and convenient baths of Guaguo on the heights above.

Grand rocks and richly wooded hills, the resort of the wild boar, the deer, and the moufflon, surrounded us as we mounted higher and higher, towards a cloudless sky, where, over stony heights, looked down the splendid range of Monte Rotondo's white heads, until at length we reached the summit of the Col St. Antoine, nearly five thousand feet high, with Vico at our feet, and a cool wind blowing over the heads of mountain ranges innumerable below, and from the skirts of the white-robed monarchs all around. [96]

Just behind Vico, lying amongst its green and ilex-covered hills, rose the fine rocky range of Monte Libbio, full of queer pointed peaks, "La Sposata," the hooded wife, conspicuous amongst them.

Up the road came many a Vico proprietor, bowing to us courteously, and reining up his terrified mule on the very edge of the steep precipice with the most perfect unconcern.

The hill was terribly steep, and the turn at the bottom very sharp, but we drew up in style before Pozzo di Borgo's "Hôtel de France." The title was very grand, but the inn was neither above nor below the usual average of Corsican inns. It was not appallingly dirty; neither, on the other hand,

was it agreeably clean.

A short rest during the terrible heat was necessary, and then we sallied forth to spy out the land. [97]

Feeling the sun still too hot for walking, we sat and sketched by the roadside, finding plenty of amusement.

Up and down the road, to and from the forests, came the heavy charrettes laden with pine-wood, and drawn by sure-footed patient mules decorated with high spikes of wood on either side of the collar, and a pointed hood of leather, of Capuchin shape, between; then a flock of pretty goats, then some smiling women with laden heads, men on mule-back, and finally, a little girl, who, after regarding us with curiosity for a minute or two, ran back and presented us with her nosegay.

Soon afterwards, sauntered up a big, black-eyed, black-bearded man, dressed very poorly, but with a keen intelligent face, who, after wishing us good evening, sat down on the wall beside us for a good chat.

This man was very dirty, and his beard appeared to have a tendency to run down his chest where the ragged open shirt left it bare; but he was a good talker, and had plenty to say for himself. [98]

As usual, he opened the conversation by inquiring our nationality and our destination, asking also the name of our coachman, and approving of our choice of Antonio, dubbing him "un charmant garçon," and a friend of his.

The friendship, however, appeared unreciprocated, as Antonio, next morning, on being questioned about some of the affirmations of our new acquaintance, remarked, with his usual brevity, and with a somewhat scornful lip, "Ah! *he* said so? Voilà! he is a blagueur!"

But we speedily diverged to more important topics, and it appeared that our companion was a literary and patriotic character. Corsica, he said, was in a bad way, but the abolition of the Jesuits was the best thing that had ever been done for her. He himself had laboured night and day to get a Protestant priest for Vico. He was not a Protestant himself—no; but that was not of so much account. What they wanted was some one who would preach to the people about the evils and necessities of their daily life; some one who had common sense and religious feeling, not a man who could do nothing but beg, and talk about the infallibility of the Pope. He had written a letter to the *Patriot* newspaper on the subject: he often wrote letters for the papers. In fact, our friend evidently belonged to the liberal party of more advanced thinkers in the island. His remarks were full of shrewdness, not unmixed with conceit and a little bombast; and he was a very different specimen from the ordinary Corsican. He boasted that he was the best guide in Corsica; and pointed out to us a high conical hill rising just above, where he said the wild boar would now be disporting themselves in no mean numbers, and where, last season, he had escorted one or two German gentlemen to first-rate sport. [99]

Below this wooded hill, on the slope of the lower one, hanging above the gorge where winds the silver thread of the Liamone, stands a picturesque white convent, now disused, but making a lovely picture against its background of circling hills and groves of pines. [100]

Leaving this expedition for the morning, we bade adieu to our communicative friend, and turned in the opposite direction, passing through the village, and descending the hill past the tall wooden cross which guarded its entrance, through most lovely scenery. In every direction rose forest-covered hill, snowy Alp and rocky height, while far below, two rivers shone and gurgled through the bastioned valley. The sun was setting over mountains of every hue and form, and casting deep shadows on the rocks below; birds were singing in all the groves, and little mountain streams ran from mossy bed and ferny hollow across the roadway.

The path before us was like some vision of patriarchal times.

Flocks of goats and kids were coming home to shelter, none driven, but all following the master's footsteps, coming to his voice, many a one running alongside like a dog, or putting up a soft nose to be caressed, little kids of every colour danced in and out amongst them, skipping up into the air, or standing playfully on their hind legs to butt at each other. [101]

Every man, as he passed, offered his salutation with the same grave politeness, and only the younger ones so far forgot their manners as to stand still a moment to stare at the strangers.

It was almost dark and quite cool when we returned to our inn, and to a dinner which is worthy of record.

It commenced with some good chicken broth, after which followed an *entrée* of half a boiled fowl. This was succeeded by the third course, made up of the other half of the fowl, nicely stewed; and, after some boiled peas, the meal closed with the *pièce de résistance* of a whole roast fowl!

Broccia and dessert succeeded, whilst our minds were engaged in a melancholy cogitation as to whether the three courses of the immortal Gladstone bore any resemblance to these.

But we had not yet solved this perplexing question, when the anticipation of a seven-o'clock breakfast and early walk on the morrow, sent us to bed amid serenades of countless nightingales; varied by the less agreeable concert of two poor children in the agonies of hooping-cough on one side,—two or three snoring women with cast-iron lungs on the other,—and, overhead, a lively family, consisting of a squalling baby (whose long-suffering mother found it necessary to walk it [102]

up and down incessantly), and a man whose chief nocturnal occupation appeared to be throwing his very heavy hobnailed boots from one end of the room to the other (whether to intimidate his offspring or the numerous rats I could not decide). I would willingly have strangled that baby, and put corks down the mouths of those snoring women (for the partitions of a Corsican inn are terribly thin); but the power was not mine. The varying torments had to be borne until the twitter of birds and the rosy sunlight came creeping in through the open window to bid me rise, sadder and wiser by one more experience of the comforts (?) of a night's rest in Corsica!

[103]

## CHAPTER IX.

### EVISA AMONG THE HILLS.

Before eight o'clock next morning we were descending the gorge opposite the house, in order to mount it on the other side, and visit the picturesque convent.

Our coffee and dry bread had been served to us at half-past seven by the "chamber-maid."

This important person was represented by a pretty rosy-cheeked girl of twelve, who combined her chamber duties with those of waitress, and who, at this stage of the morning, was attired in a *déshabille* of nightdress body and coloured petticoat, with bare feet. Later on, when we returned from our walk, she was in full dress, having added a white head handkerchief, black jacket, white stockings, and shoes.

This Vico walk was one of the loveliest we enjoyed in the island. The steep road that climbed up the hill-side was shaded by oak and ilex trees; numberless sparkling streams dashed down from above and beneath us, and brilliant cyclamen nestled everywhere lovingly amongst the ferns—bracken, *felix mas*, parsley, walrue, maidenhair, and polypodium—luxuriating on this damp hill-side.

[104]

Below us writhed the serpentine Liamone; before us rose the great brown walls of the Monte Libbio rocks; and each corner that we turned, showed new gorges, fresh wooded hills upon one side, and more exquisite ranges of steepest rocks and purest snow mountains on the other.

The convent, old and grey, its walls encrusted with damp and half hidden by clustering weeds, was a strongly built edifice, overlooking the very edge of the precipitous slope, and bearing the usual mixed likeness to a church and a fortress.

It looked sad, silent, and deserted now; and was a strange contrast to a gaudy but handsome little family chapel in course of erection a few yards off.

[105]

This was built of black and white marble, Florentine fashion, with an enormous crucifix inside, and family shields outside the walls, with here and there niches for the coffins of its owner's family.

A little lower down the road is a rough-looking farmhouse, where lodgings are let in summer to those of the Ajaccio *élite* who care to rough it in this lovely scenery.

As we turned homewards, the shadows were retreating from the roadway, and the sun's power was growing intense.

We were glad to rest upon the low stone bridge, where arbutus overhung the way, and where the cool moss beneath was dripping under the spray of the little river.

A cuckoo was calling through the tree-tops merrily, while the mother goats, creeping into the shade, cried to their wandering kids; and a woman, standing on a rock above us, shading her eyes from the glaring sun, beckoned to her children playing in the valley far below, shouting, "Maria! O Maria! O Santo!" in her sing-song, chant-like voice across the sultry air.

By ten o'clock we were in the carriage for Evisa, a village nearly 2800 feet above the sea level, where we were to spend the next night, and which is the best starting-point for the forests of Aitone and Valdoniello. The ascent to the top of the Col Sevi, 1600 feet high, was long and steep, with grand views, lying through many a wild and rugged hill varied by chestnut groves, through which gleamed the everlasting snow barriers on every side.

[106]

Then through ilex woods, soft and shady, with many a sylvan glade between their gnarled, huge, moss-hugged trunks; past the village of Renno hanging overhead, and other hamlets, to more barren hills, and on to the summit of the Col, where a new range of snow mountains lay before us, glistening in the hot sun and cool puffs of sudden wind.

The descent from here into the valley of Christianiccia is singularly wild and beautiful. Our gallop down, accomplished, as it could have been, at such a pace, only by Corsican horses and a Corsican driver, was all too short to drink in the beauty of varying views, of grandest perpendicular rocks, and of graceful ilex woods interspersed with castellated boulders, overhanging the roadside. Such a gallop, however, is delightful and inspiring over a soft, park-like road, with snow cones peeping out of a blue curtain, with aromatic odours flying by, and with beasts that never lose their footing. It is a dream of cool enjoyment that one would willingly

[107]



lengthen.

The entire population of the village of Christianiccia appears to consist of boys; and as we drove quickly up the stony street, pursued by scores of these yelling and hooting inhabitants, Antonio's whip was in unaccustomed requisition, and one of Mr. Lear's grasshopper pigs, the first we had seen in the county, narrowly escaped being ran over.

From Christianiccia to Evisa is an arduous mount, somewhat resembling the side of a house; but now, on the left, appears the glorious blue rock called the Capo dei Signori. On the summit of this great rocky wall once stood a castle belonging to one of the old feudal lords of Corsica; hence its name. But not a vestige of ruin is now visible upon the majestic purple peak, which seems to brave the fickle elements, looking over many an intervening mile of hill and vale to the distant sheet of western sea. [108]

And as we turned the abrupt corner of the road to enter Evisa, other glorious blood-red rocks came in view, only half hidden by the nearer hillocks—the rocks of Porto.

The situation of Evisa is bleak and unprotected, and in winter it must be bitterly cold.

Bare rocky mountains surround it on every side, and not even a chestnut-tree relieves its wild nakedness.

Even now, a cold frosty air was blowing, and, although the sun was hot, a thick jacket was agreeable.

M. Carrara's house is still the resort of travellers. He is a polite wood-merchant, and it is supposed to be a private house; but, except for the fact that there is rather less to eat and a little more to pay than elsewhere, it is the same as other inns.

Praise, however, be given where praise is due. We could get neither butter, honey, nor soup for lunch, and the fare altogether was economic; but the young lady of the house, who condescended to wait upon us, was both pleasant to talk to and to look upon, and spotless cleanliness reigned in the little bedrooms. [109]

As soon as we had eaten our omelette, supplied to our hungry appetites on the principle of the acute preacher, who always stopped before he had satisfied his audience, we strolled out down the road towards the rocks of Porto.

About three quarters of a mile from the village, we came to a little break in the road, where a pathway had been beaten down over the brow of the hill.

This pathway led over an old cemetery, lying close beside the road, without palings or protection of any sort. A little rough stone building, a few yards from the road, and not more pretentious than an ordinary cottage, was the now disused cemetery chapel; and numberless little wooden crosses, black and white, but none laying claim to any artistic value, were scattered all about—some standing, and some ruthlessly uprooted and crushed beneath the cart wheels—to mark the now desecrated resting-places of the poor villagers of Evisa. [110]

The church of Evisa stood below, half a mile away, and no doubt was now the fashionable burial-place; but had I been a native of the village, I would have chosen this exquisite hill-side for my last resting-place.

Of all the beautiful scenes witnessed in Corsica, perhaps this was the wildest and the grandest. On one side, the grey and purple rocks of the Capo dei Signori; in front, twelve miles away by road, the wide stretch of blue sea, casting up a thousand sparkling dew-drops to the bluer sky; and, on the other side, rising up from a fathomless gorge just below us, the blood-red rocks of Porto. These rocks are impossible to describe; their grandeur can only be felt, as—from many a shuddering abyss, where the lonely sea-gull circles with faint shrill calls among misty horrors—they rise almost perpendicularly to their fearful height, seamed and notched by many a primeval tempest, but calm, and cruel, and forsaken-looking in their homeless inaccessible solitudes. [111]

Leaving the little path, we clambered down the rocks a short way, and sat in the silence opposite these glorious, fearful rocks.

Not a sound was to be heard but the gulls' cries, and the stream far away, and, close to, the gentle rustling of the countless little lizards among the green rocks beside us.

We sat so still that they grew quite tame, and played around us unsuspectingly. One couple especially amused us. They had a lizard game of romps, chasing each other round our rock with incredible swiftness, whisking out of each other's way, and gently biting each other's tail when caught.

Rain at last drove us home; and we were glad of a good wood fire to sit over in the chilly evening, whilst the clouds dropped below the village, hanging in thick white opaque swathes across the hills before us, or chased each other, far beneath, hiding the valley in rain, whilst we were enjoying a passing gleam of sunshine. [112]

The evening was clear again; and, for the first time in Corsica, we heard the national singing, which continued long after we had retired. It was not musical, nor beautiful, but was the weirdest, strangest vocalism I ever heard. For more than an hour, a party of young men slowly paraded the village street, singing the same melancholy-sounding chant, sometimes in unison and

sometimes in parts, but always ending in the same prolonged note.

The tune, such as it was, seemed always to be in a minor key, and would well have suited one of the national *voceri*, or dirges, but I have no idea of the words accompanying it.

This final note is a characteristic of Corsican singing, and rarely omitted; and it is wonderful to what an extent they will prolong it. Even mothers, singing lullabys to their babes, indulge in it, and its effect is wild and uncommon.

[113]

## CHAPTER X.

### GIANT FORESTS.

The day fixed for our forest expedition to Aitone and Valdoniello was wet and cloudy, and it was with many misgivings that we breakfasted at 7 a.m., and before eight o'clock started for our long day.

The carriage, Antonio informed us, could take us the first five or six miles; but after that, the road became too much out of repair for anything less than a waggon, and we must continue our way on mules. We had already, the evening before, seen the guide who was to escort us into the forest, and engaged him and his two mules. This guide was to meet us with his steeds at the forestier's cottage where our carriage was to be left.

Ignoring the gentle spotting of raindrops and the general confusion of earth and sky, caused by the clouds resting in patches over the path before us, we turned our backs towards the rocks of Porto, and ascended the steep hill above the village, entering the inland intricacies of grand and barren rocky slopes, and, before long, creeping into the forest of Aitone. As we did so, the sun began to shine forth, throwing innumerable iridescent globules from every hanging branch, sweeping away clouds from before us, and rolling off mists from the white peaked range rising from the other side of the gorge.

[114]

Aitone is composed of mixed pines and beeches; but it has been terribly mutilated, and is now chiefly filled with young trees, the older ones having been nearly all cut down for sale. The pine-wood is of course very valuable for ship-building purposes; but Corsica has taken so little pains to raise her reputation in the wood market, that these splendid trees are often sold in Italy, and even sometimes in the island herself, as of continental growth.

Aitone is comparatively a small forest, and, although its views are lovely, as in every Corsican forest, it is not so interesting, nor are its trees so imposing, as in many others.

[115]

There is scarcely any break between it and Valdoniello, and it is, in effect, only a continuation of the latter enormous forest.

In less than two hours we had reached the baiting place, and, dismounting from the carriage, proceeded to mount our two lanky mules. One bore the only side-saddle of which Evisa boasted, and the other an ordinary man's saddle. We had been informed the night before that one of us would be expected to mount this, and when we demurred, were told that otherwise we could not see the forest, as it was too far to walk.

The guide, a big, fine-looking man, stolid as one of his own mules, appeared much perplexed by our hesitation—and no wonder, seeing that such was the invariable style of riding in fashion amongst his own countrywomen; but, after a moment's contemplation of the inevitable, No. 3 made a flying leap upon the back of her steed, arriving quite safely, and astonished to find how comfortable was the situation.

[116]

For the next two or three miles we jogged on through ever-increasing depths of shade and thickness of trees, the sunlight only peeping in here and there across the cone-scattered path. The forests of Corsica, however, rarely lie upon a level. They grow generally upon the sides of hills so steep, that neither light nor view is for long hidden; and wherever a tree grew thinly, or a little group had been cut down, spreading great arms across the road, there, through the gap, rose the perfect, glistening snow peak of Monte Cinto, the highest mountain in Corsica, close beside us, steeply precipitous, and clothed with fir-trees on every ledge. Below, to the very edge of the deep valley, we looked over the forest tree tops; while up above us, avenues of straight tall stems rose to a giddy height.

The Pir Larriccio flourished here in abundance, a lovely variety of the ordinary fir—its bunch of dark green foliage only on the top, and its tall branchless stem often over 100 feet high. Many of these trunks, when felled, have been measured to be from 150 to 200 feet high; and one or more have exceeded that height. The trunks are perfectly straight, and of great girth at the bottom; and, as they are very tough to fell, they are usually burnt to a certain degree first. This custom is an unfortunate one for the beauty of the forest, as, when a strong wind blows, the smoke and flames will char and blacken many noble trees on either side. The forestiers, too, are careless in their work, and kill and injure ruthlessly many a noble monarch of the glade whose life is not required for the charettier.

[117]

The Bocca di Vergio, or highest part of the forest of Valdoniello, is 4760 feet above the sea-level, and the main road across it was reported by the guide to be now indistinguishable and unsafe from the deep snow which covered it; so he led us by what he politely termed a lower route. This route consisted of a hill like the side of a house, covered with loose stones and fragments of broken timber, and up which was no vestige of any path whatsoever. Looking up its almost perpendicular face, one would have said that nothing less light and agile than a goat could possibly have scaled its surface. But we soon found that our mules were intended to do so, and that we must stick on as best we could.

[118]

We must have rolled, with concentrated force of the action of gravitation, down the hill had they slipped; but, fortunately for us, they did not; and by wriggling their bodies, eel-fashion, and occasionally leaping over a stout trunk or standing erect upon a small pointed boulder, they managed at length to reach the top in safety.

A few more yards of easy climbing brought us to the summit of the Vergio,—treeless, bleak, cold and bare, rising nakedly out of its warm fringe of forest.

Here we ate our bread and cheese, thankful to leave our rough-paced beasts, lying on the short dry turf, with snow on every side of us; the big guide, a few yards off, face downwards, enjoying a heavy snooze.

This man, who wore a velveteen coat and *one* wellington boot, boasted the historical name of Colonna. Historical names abound among the poor herdsmen and villagers of Corsica, and many a ragged loafer has the blood of a grand old family in his veins.

[119]

I remember one wayside friend whose clothes would scarcely hold together, whose cognomen was Pozzo di Borgo, and who, when I told him it was a good name, said, "Yes, he had heard that the first of his family was a count."

The capability for extemporaneous slumber possessed by Colonna was something extraordinary. If we did but stand still for a moment to admire the view, or stoop to gather some flowers, our heavy friend would promptly drop upon the side of the road like a log, generally with the cloaks he carried for us bundled under his head in a comfortable pillow.

He was communicative, too, after his slow fashion.

"Do you find many 'continentale' ladies who will ride upon this man's saddle?" we asked him.

"Yes. I have taken one lady on it this year beside you. She was German, however, not English. They were a large party; four gentlemen and one lady. She was stout—oh, very stout. At first she was frightened, and said she could not ride thus; and, indeed, it was difficult to get her on. She had great fear at first; but she soon got used to it, and said she liked it."

[120]

"Better than the mule did, perhaps?" we asked.

Colonna looked at us stolidly. The comprehension of a joke, however mild, was not in his nature.

But having finished the last scrap of bread and cheese, and searched our pockets for the last raisin, for the frosty mountain air made us hungry, we called to our recumbent friend, and leaving the two poor mules dinnerless, and fastened by their bridles to a felled trunk upon the lonely plateau, we commenced our descent upon the other side.

The view was magnificent; we were surrounded on all sides by precipitous walls of snow rising abruptly from the lofty valley into which we were entering. Monte Cinto was on the one side, and Monte Artica on the other; and dense forest clothed the slopes on either hand, and on into the valley far below for many miles.

[121]

The main road here was again completely blocked up by snow, so the guide led us across the valley by a short cut, to emerge lower down where the route would be clear.

Our descent, however, though shorter, was covered by deep snow, whereas the Bocca from which we started above was free. As it was also excessively steep and invaded by one or two treacherous little streams, burrowing underneath false snow arches, our steps were somewhat eccentric, and we had some difficulty in keeping up with the guide's long strides, as, at almost every footstep, we buried ourselves in snow up to the knees.

We had just reached the little clearing at the bottom, preparatory to turning aside to the now clearer main route, when it began to rain.

"Will you turn back?" asked the guide promptly; "it is going to rain all the rest of the day."

"It is only a mountain shower," said we; "why should we turn back? It will clear up directly."

[122]

"No," said Colonna, shaking his head solemnly, "the clouds are very low. It will rain now all day."

This was depressing, as a mountain guide ought to be expected to know his own mountains; nevertheless we refused to return, and all took refuge under the wooden balcony which ran along one side of a deserted garde forestier's house.

The forest keepers live in pretty little wooden houses surrounded by small gardens, in every direction. They are superior, well-educated men, acting as overseers for Government over the timber clearings and fellings. Their position, in the heart of some lovely forest, surrounded by the

most exquisite though lonely beauty, must be charming enough in summer; but, in winter, all but blocked up by snow, and environed by miles of stern leafless sentinels, through whose bare and shuddering boughs a cutting wind incessantly moans and whistles, the life must be a very dreary one.

The rain came down in bucketsful; all nature was a vapour-bath, and the hills had totally disappeared; and for some time it appeared as if Colonna's opinion was a correct one. More than once he reiterated his suggestion of returning, without, however, moving our determination. We had not come a three-days' journey from Ajaccio, to spend two or three hours only in Valdoniello, and be frightened by a sweep of mountain rain. [123]

Poor Colonna, resigned at last to his fate, had but just closed his eyes comfortably, as, with folded arms, he leant against the earwig-covered house, seated upon the balcony—before the sun suddenly peeped forth again, the heavy clouds rolled away, and the rain-drops that yet fell became each a liquid opal.

In another moment we were crossing over to the hill on our right, and entering the forest of Valdoniello. The sun was now brilliant, but it could penetrate but dimly through the thick veil of trees on either side. The road wound along the mountain-side, with the precipitous fall of the hill above and below us, and boulders forcing their way between the trees above. Pines and firs, mixed with here and there a sombre cedar or a gay larch, were the trees, the size of whose trunks far exceeded those of Aitone or perhaps Vizzavona. [124]

The steep slope of the mountain-side beneath us, however thickly clothed, prevented the density of a level forest; and wherever a break occurred in the fringe by the road-side, there appeared, on our left, a wonderful wall of red or grey granite, rising from the opposite side of the gorge like a huge rampart.

The summit of this precipitous wall was draped in snow, and it looked as close as if a stone from us could have reached its hoary sides; but the long lines of diminutive fir-trees, which ran up every available ledge on its frowning flank, showed its real distance. This great snow-covered pinnacle was Monte Cinto, over 9000 feet high.

For miles we wandered on in this enchanted forest, down a rutty road, worn away by heavy waggon wheels, and impassable for a carriage, but soft with fir tendrils, and sweet with the delicious scent of pines. [125]

The solitude was perfect: the birds were taking their noon-day siesta, and the wind which soughed gently among distant pine-tops, and the torrent which gurgled at the foot of the gorge, played out their peaceful music, undisturbed by other sounds.

At last we came to a sudden turn in the road, and the forest opening out a little, we looked down far below into the large valley of the Niolo, famed for its fertility and the industry of its inhabitants. Far as the eye could reach it stretched away, with hills on either side—on one side clothed with dark forests; and with the Golo, Corsica's largest river, running in silver windings from its source among the hills above. The river Tavignano, probably the next in size, also rises in this district, and the two lakes of Ino and Creno are situated in Monte Artica, close by. The people of Niolo are reputed to be the finest in Corsica, strong and intelligent, and alike famous in poetry and in arms.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, their sturdy patriotism caused them to be almost exterminated by their tyrannical foes, the Genoese; and, since then, the valley of Niolo has given birth to many a troublesome and adventurous bandit. [126]

The majority of the national voceri now in print appear to have been composed in the Niolese dialect, over Niolese bravos.

This corner the guide evidently considered the correct turning-place, and suggested that we should retrace our footsteps. But as we had hired him and his beasts by the day, and the day was not yet nearly half over, we informed him firmly but politely that we intended to see a little more of this lovely forest. At the same time, we told him that, as we could not now possibly lose our way, he might rest and await our return at this corner, if it so pleased him.

Colonna was rather disgusted; he evidently considered that we had now walked as far as anything in the way of petticoats *should* walk. The fat German lady and her friends, he informed us, had turned before this; and, with a look of dissatisfaction, he flung himself down on the sunny bank of rock facing the valley, whilst we continued on our way. [127]

The forest soon closed up again, and the Niolo was past; but far above the tree-tops rose snowy peak and pinnacle, belonging to the Artica range, glittering in dazzling sunlight, and fringed almost to their summits by ridges of pines. We were rejoiced that we had persisted in going on, for the forest here was more beautiful than ever, and we agreed that Valdoniello, if anything, carries off the palm of exquisite forest scenery in Corsica.

Quantities of mistletoe hung from the tree-tops, and troops of fat, shiny beetles, round and black, walked in procession down the road before us. Among the trees, peeping out of the patches of snow that still clung to the mountain-side above us, were sheets of delicate black-veined purple crocuses, but a dearth of other flowers. A large number of trees here had their bark sliced in two places, and a rich stream of turpentine poured from most of the wounded trunks.

After wandering on another hour or two, we returned to find Colonna still sleeping, outstretched, upon his warm but stony couch, the lizards playing round him, and his rough head comfortably reclining on No. 3's red shawl. [128]

He woke up at the sound of our footsteps, however, and seemed as anxious as ever to go on, scarcely allowing us to rest a few minutes after our long walk.

For some time we returned on the grande route, but presently were led up a side ascent, as the shortest road back to the Bocca di Vergio.

This ascent was at an angle of about fifty degrees, and was nothing but the rough, pathless side of a hill, clothed often with thick brushwood, through which we had to fight our way with many slaps in the face. There was no shade, and we began to melt away, as we strove, panting and exhausted, to follow the guide's pitiless strides. I fancy he wished to pay us out for our walking proclivities, or perhaps fancied that, as we were so energetic, no pace could kill us; anyhow, he showed no mercy, and only paused once or twice in that dreadful hour's climb, to permit us to rest our weary limbs and gather up exhausted breath, on some mossy giant, lying felled across the way. [129]

The last bit was the worst of all. It was little better than an upright wall of snow, up which we tacked, mounting painfully, more or less of us disappearing at every footstep.

At its conclusion, however, we found ourselves once more on the desolate Bocca, our patient, hungry mules still standing where we had left them. Even a man's saddle appeared luxurious to such weary wayfarers; and we began to jog joyfully down the incline.

We had mildly but firmly informed the guide that we preferred not descending by the vertical stone-strewn path up which we had come in the morning; so we were to return by the "grande route," notwithstanding its snow.

Very soon after leaving the wind and rain-swept Bocca, we came to a deep drift of this, and had to dismount hastily.

The snow was only half frozen, and the mules plunged in up to their stomachs, whilst Colonna groaned reproachfully, "Ah! my beasts will break their legs! I told you the road was not passable!" [130]

However, they did *not* break their legs, and, as anything short of a fly must infallibly have broken its *neck* upon the other path, we did not take blame to ourselves for the slight risk.

We, not being so heavy, got on a little better, but not without many ridiculous plunges into the yielding snow, as we emerged from this drift into another, and yet another.

We were descending, however, the whole time rapidly, and presently the snow became patchy, and by degrees disappeared; and we mounted our unharmed beasts, and finished the last three or four miles to the forestier's house, riding. It was only about four o'clock, but the sun had already set behind the high mountain peaks surrounding us on every side; and, as we returned in single file, a silent procession along the narrow path, the forest voices sounded ghostly in the early grey of evening; whilst through the dark lines of stately pines, the solemn mountains, bathed in mist below, raised each his cold blanched peak of snow on high, like the face of a corpse surrounded by its shroud. [131]

At the forestier's, the faithful Antonio was in waiting for us, and in a few minutes we were speeding down the steep and winding road through Aitone and on to Evisa.

We parted the best of friends with Colonna, regaining his good opinion by a *douceur* of three francs, which, in addition to the stipulated charge of three francs for man, and seven for mules (including one for the hire of the side-saddle), brought the extra expenses of Valdoniello for two people to the not exorbitant amount of thirteen francs. On the other hand, we calculated that we had walked fifteen miles and ridden on mule-back about nine; and, as we only walked where riding was impossible, it would be as well for those who cannot manage much upon their own feet, to put off going to Valdoniello until summer has melted the snows from off the "grande route." [132]

## CHAPTER XI.

### PORTO, LA PIANA, AND CARGHESE.

The next day, after our long expedition, we rose late, and with depressed spirits watched the sheets of rain that came driving across the valley, hiding the mountain tops, and pelting against our sitting-room windows. However, at eleven o'clock there were signs of a slight improvement in the weather, and we hastily got under way, and bidding adieu to our polite and smiling mademoiselle, started on the drive to Carghese.

We had been warned against Carghese as the dirtiest place in Corsica; and, after the experiences from which we had suffered, this was no mean warning. But, on the other hand, we had been told

that the rocks of Porto and those of La Piana were the noblest sight in the island, and we felt that to return home without seeing them would be unbearable. [133]

And, unless we sat in the empty carriage all night, or encamped out among the rocks, there was no method of seeing this route save by sleeping at Carghese.

The event justified us in our final decision, for Carghese was quite bearable; whereas, to have missed that day's excursion would have been an irreparable loss. I consider those Porto and Piana rocks the most beautiful sight in Corsica. They must be overwhelmingly magnificent on a clear day: even surrounded by mist clouds, and devoid of sunshine, they were wonderful to see.

For the first three or four hours of our drive, the rain kept off; and taking the opposite road to that of yesterday, we struck off to the left towards the coast line, and right among the rocks of Porto.

The road at first was cut out of barren mountain flanks, winding amongst bleak savage scenery, and Scottish-looking trout streams, with very Scotch mists rising from their banks, and veiling the hill-tops; with the village of Marignana on one side, and the desolate red heads of Porto gazing down over intervening hillocks on the other. [134]

Presently came a few wooded hills to break the bare austerity of the scene, with boulder rocks, red and green and orange, beside the roadway; and, hanging right over our heads, the frowning and majestic Capo dei Signori, looming out of the mist in purple shadows.

One or two more windings led us into the narrow gorge, walled in on either side by the Porto rocks.

It is impossible to imagine anything more sublime than these blood-red precipices—more wonderful, more perpendicular, and more lofty here than where we had first seen them—almost shutting out the sky from our sight, and again falling beneath us in an unfathomable gorge that made one shudder to look into. The heads of these rocks were like a succession of Rhenish castles, so turreted, and tower shaped, and peaked were they; and Speloncato, with its three-pinnacled summit, was more striking in appearance and crimson in hue than any other. [135]

This extraordinary blood-red colour is not enhanced by sunshine or peculiar lights; it is the real colour of the stone, of which broken bits lie about the road. The Corsican rocks are usually very vivid, and especially the red granite and the porphyry.

There was not a gleam of sunshine as we passed amongst the Porto rocks; and I do not know that I regret it. The savage beauty and desolate grandeur of such a scene is perhaps best seen under the chill of grey sky and distant thunder clouds.

Passing, after a time, out of this wild region, we emerged once more among more barren-looking hills, past the village of Asta and along a boulder-strewn brawling torrent, shaded by its fringe of foliage.

Here were some most extraordinary hollowed rocks. One, like a huge eggshell in shape, lay upon the gravel beside the stream. It was completely hollow, like a blown egg, the shell being only a few inches thick, with a natural opening at one side, about four feet high, and would have made a comfortable shelter for eight or ten men. Another, half-way up the hill-side, and something the same shape, only with a flat bottom, was called "La Petite Maisonnette," having been adopted by a wise shepherd as his home, and a little brick wall with a door, built on the open side. [136]

A few more minutes brought us to the top of a hill, whence we looked down once more upon the sea. The Gulf of Porto lay, wide-stretching, at our feet; the sun, which had now come out for a short gleam, lighting up the many picturesque promontories which ran out into the blue distance, and sparkling on the yellow line on an opposite hill, marking the route to Calvi. A Genoese round tower lay upon the little headland beneath our feet, and, behind it, two or three houses. Antonio pulled up his horses for a moment at our request, and No. 3 took a hasty sketch.

"There, mademoiselle," said he, pointing with his whip in the direction of the round tower, "is the town of Porto."

"But where?" we asked. "We only see three houses."

Antonio smiled feebly. "There are only five in the town, I believe," said he. [137]

The peninsula of Porto is almost as red as the rocks which take their name from it, and is in a most lovely situation. It was formerly a much larger and more important place than now, and at one time was a favourite resort of visitors. But, built in a corner as it is, on the sea-level, and surrounded by stagnant pool and slow river, it has now a dangerous reputation for fever, and in summer the heat is something intolerable to the few inhabitants.

The sun still kept out as we began to ascend towards La Piana, on a road surrounded by richest herbage, shaded by pale green chestnuts, through groves of arbutus and myrtle, and scattered crags of fairest form, getting peeps of bluest sea below, and distant purple coast lines. For about two hours we ascended, often over queer high bridges spanning a rushing cascade, until we entered the winding mountain defiles, walled in on either side by the perpendicular rocks of La Piana.

The first, seen for long before entering this defile, was most peculiar in form, bearing an exact

resemblance to a triple crown. Anything more beautiful than these rocks it would be impossible to conceive, but it was a beauty very different from those of Porto.

[138]

Brilliant was their colouring, rosy red, pale green, and soft grey, but upon and between their detached castellated heights grew luxuriant shrubs and waving larch-trees; and, although they often literally overhung the road from a great height, there was neither frowning precipice nor gloomy gorge beneath our feet.

On the sea side, the spaces between these rocky piles, rising in wildest and most fantastic shapes to heaven (often in spikes and high cathedral spires), was filled in by fairy peeps of sea and circling sandy bay, a thousand feet below.

No place can be imagined more perfect for a mid-day halt than here among these perfect rock towers and grottoes; and here we had intended to rest and eat our modest lunch; but, with a steady downpour of rain beginning to shut out distant hill and even overhanging crag, and running in little rivers along the stony road, we had no choice but to go on to the uninviting village, two miles further on.

[139]

On one of the last of the La Piana rocks we were amused to see a happy family of six or seven goats clustered, taking refuge from the storm of rain. The rock, which was high but narrow, was intersected by a number of small horizontal shelves; and on these the goats, black and white and parti-coloured, had leaped, one on each, looking exactly like a collection of Swiss carvings on a tall bracket.

La Piana is a wretched little village, boasting, however, a situation that no doubt would have been lovely in less unlovely weather. The inn, a poverty-stricken looking hovel-cottage in the village street, appeared at first deserted; but, after Antonio had fished up its owners from the kitchen downstairs, opened its hospitable door at the top of a flight of dirty stone steps to receive us. We found ourselves in a small, dark room, lighted only by a window about two feet square, or rather, by a window hole, for glass there was none, and shutters, of which one was closed, kept out wind and driving rain.

[140]

As usual the inhabitants, consisting of an old man, two women, and a baby or two, came in to stare at us, smiling good-humouredly, and full of curiosity; but unable to speak a word of anything better than Corsican patois.

We managed, with some difficulty, and by careful docking of the terminations of our words (which is the chief characteristic of the national dialect), to make our small stock of Italian serve to express our wants; and at length, after the usual offer of raw ham, sat down to a very good omelette mixed with broccia, and a box of London-marked sardines.

We then petitioned for a fire; and presently our smiling hostess brought us an apron full of fir cones, and placing them on some chips upon the large open stone hearth, we had a brisk crackling blaze, over which to warm and dry our damp garments.

The next two hours, in the very dark grimy little room, with onion odours from below, and no view from the window-hole but equally grimy houses opposite, and ceaseless sheets of driving rain, were not enlivening; and our only amusement consisted in listening to the strange jargon of patois going on amongst the commonalty in the kitchen underneath, and in watching the picturesque effects made in the fire by the fir cones, as they panted and swelled their glowing orange bodies like living things incandescent. At four o'clock we could stand it no longer, and started anew for Carghese in rather better weather.

[141]

A little more than two hours' driving brought us there; first, through fine mountain scenery, but very soon through a tame and uninteresting route, surrounded by grassy hills, and across a long marshy tract, well cultivated and planted with wheat and vineyards, but malarious in looks and in fact. The gulfs of Chioni and Pero lay before us, and more than one round tower kept watch upon the neighbouring headlands.

Turning a corner, we suddenly came into view of Carghese, lying little above the sea-level, just before us, and presently drove up the main, tolerably wide, street, to the dirty looking Hôtel de l'Univers.

Carghese is a town of some size for Corsica, but is uninteresting and odoriferous. None of the population appear over civil, and the boys are scarcely *safe* for ladies walking alone. They followed us, not only with mischievous hoots, like other gamins, but with scowls and mutterings, and more than one stone was furtively thrown unpleasantly near our backs after we had passed a corner, and without the slightest provocation, except that of an unaccustomed sight,—which provocation we sometimes see rousing our British youth to stone a squirrel or an escaped monkey, or condemns a tame-bred canary to get pecked to death by its untamed neighbours.

[142]

Carghese has an interest of its own from the fact that it is a Greek colony of very ancient date, which, until quite lately, has kept up its exclusive nationality, and shunned intermarriage with the sons and daughters of its adopted country.

Both in physique and in manners they differ, even yet, very considerably from the other islanders.

There seemed, from our cursory acquaintance, to be a great number of very dark and good-looking faces amongst them; and the children are decidedly handsomer than elsewhere; although in manliness of appearance and pleasantness of expression the Corsicans have the advantage.

[143]

Every one sings and whistles in Carghese; and the songs of the young men, as, for two or three hours after dark, they marched, arm in arm, up and down the village street in front of our hotel, were far less dismal and more tuneful than elsewhere, and only towards midnight did they collapse into the national minor howl.

There is little to be seen in Carghese, except the Greek priest, who is certainly worth a glance, as, with long white beard almost to his waist, black cassock and square cap, the tall stout old man parades the streets with no little dignity.

There is a fine round Greek church, lately built, and considered handsome, in this land where good architecture is conspicuous by its absence; and a Romish church, less fine,—but nothing else to interest, either natural or artificial.

During our walk through the town, we were followed by fifteen or twenty children, all greatly excited, who, for some minutes after we had re-entered our inn, remained crowded round the door without, shouting, "Inglese! Inglese!" with about the same amount of enthusiasm and common sense as the Ephesian silversmiths of old; and it was impossible to glance out of one's window without a corresponding rush from the juvenile crowd, who tumbled over one another in their eagerness to see the two surprising foreigners. [144]

(N.B.—Next time I go up to London, and meet a Chinaman in Bond Street, or an African in Piccadilly, not so much as to glance out of the corners of my eyes at him.)

As No. 2 remarked, with her usual placidity of tone, to No. 3 on this occasion, "Couldn't you imagine we were two Christy Minstrels going down the street?"

After a very tolerable dinner, we sought our rooms with many misgivings. We had telegraphed our coming three days beforehand, so as to give our landlady plenty of time to scrape off a little of the natural dirt of the establishment before we arrived, if so disposed; but had been warned of the improbability of such a disposition on her part, owing to sheer ignorance on the subject of that rare Corsican virtue—cleanliness. [145]

Even the taciturn Antonio would hold out little hope to us, and said he feared our accommodation would not suit us.

Our rooms were not re-assuring.

One led out of either end of the low dark *salle à manger*. They were small, with uneven, dirty, wooden floors, and almost destitute of furniture.

Mine boasted one broken chair, upon which it was unsafe to sit, whilst the washing apparatus was placed on the top of the only other piece of furniture in the room except the bed—a high chest of drawers, where a corner had with difficulty been cleared of its multitude of penny Madonnas and broken shells.

There was, of course, no looking-glass at all; and the jug and basin in both rooms consisted of an old green wine-bottle filled with dingy brown water, and placed in a species of shallow slop-basin. The windows were full of ventilating holes, and strips of filthy carpet adorned the floor by the bed-side, which strips we carefully took up and placed at the extremest corners of the rooms. All this was not inviting; and we discussed the advisability of sitting up all night, and getting a siesta next day; but finally braved the horrors of the little rooms, and found them far less horrible than their appearance warranted, and in all serious matters, fairly clean. [146]

Great was our astonishment and proportionate our hearty gratitude to our bright-eyed hostess, when, next morning, she brought us in our hot coffee, and sour bread (apparently made in equal proportion of flour and sand), and eaten dry, perforce, as neither butter nor honey are attainable luxuries in inland Corsica. [147]

## CHAPTER XII.

### FROM CARGHESE TO AJACCIO.

When we left our rooms next morning, the skies were black with rain, and the downpour obliged us to put off our start till 11 a.m.; when the pelting had turned into a gentle spattering, such as travellers in Corsica must learn to despise.

From Carghese to Calcataggio was a steep mount, for some time following the windings of the sea-shore, and then hanging above it, but never out of sight of the blue waters.

The promontories were low and uninteresting; but, through the gleams of sunshine dancing in and out of light showers, the rough sea, unrivalled in its tideless purity of colour, green and opal, threw great arching rollers on the white beaches and outlying red rocks. [148]

The Mediterranean never looked more lovely to us than it did this stormy day, the wind blowing sheets of foam across the narrow bays, and blue and purple shadows flinging their changing hues across the heaving mass of dark green waters.



The surf was still roaring out of sight beneath our feet as we passed among steep grassy hills, and lanes brilliant with white and purple vetch, marigolds, borage, sweet peas, poppies, and large-eyed daisies, nestling all amongst long bending grasses, that swayed gracefully at the wind's behest.

Corn-fields and general cultivation were to be seen here; and as we neared Sagona Bay the coast-line suddenly opened out grandly, and showed us fine outlying capes and promontories, two ranges stretching out together.

Passing a polite group of Sagona inhabitants, who, seated outside the little village inn, in defiance of spotting rain, nodded to Antonio, and removed their hats to us, we mounted the old route to bleak and stony San Sebastiani, its ugly chapel peering from the summit; and thence cantered down, in one long descent, towards Ajaccio, by degrees exchanging the frosty air of the Col for the warm bright sunshine of the long plain. [149]

It was only five o'clock when we reached Hôtel Germania; and, during the last half-hour, we had hastily resolved, being somewhat pressed for time, to start anew next morning on our last tour to the forest of Sorba, and the famous precipices of L'Inzecca.

So it was our last evening in Ajaccio; and as I walked through the little town for some final commissions an hour or two later, it seemed gayer and more attractive than ever. The sun was shining brightly over the blue sea, although the streets were all in shadow, and the roads looked as if they had never known a drop of rain in their lives.

Out beyond the town, down the green avened road, the mountains were blushing rosy pink with purple shadows, and the descending sun threw long golden lines across the hot sea, here quite calm and peaceful; and on the Place Napoléon beside the shore, the better end of the population sauntered slowly up and down, and a little boy, dressed in the newest French style, was taking his black pet lamb for a walk, ornamented by a pink collar, to which the blue ribbon was tied. [150]

In the town, drums were beating, and gay chatter filled the air, as men and women all sat out to enjoy the cool air, almost blocking up the street. Stalls of fruit and oranges lined the road, and round them the gamins chased each other merrily.

The little tables, under their awnings outside the cafés, were surrounded by quiet smokers in straw hats, sipping coffee as they lounged; and soldiers, in blue and scarlet uniforms, civilians in striped blouses, and women in gay jackets jostled each other good humouredly on the narrow pavement. Two or three female heads looked out of almost every window in the high, many-storied houses; and, from two neighbouring ones, a couple of women were having a vituperative but innocuous fight, which provided no little amusement for the grinning saunterers below. [151]

By the fountain, further on, women were pausing to gossip, with every conceivable shape of picturesque jar in every conceivable position on their heads; and on the benches opposite the glorious sea and the Place Buonaparte, recumbent figures lay, face downwards, full length, and fast asleep.

Every now and then, across the hum of voices and the drumming, came the sharp crack of a whip, and a musical "Guarda!" from some coachman, as he steered his way amongst the crowd. Up in the Cours Grandval a tiny, rosy-cheeked, white-capped "bimbo" stood crying for "maman" in the middle of the road, stopping with wide-open eyes of astonishment to gaze at the Inglese lady who spoke to her. Then on to the hotel, where, in the wood behind the house, the nightingales and thrushes had already begun their usual concert; and into the salle à manger, now silent and deserted, where sweetbread and other dainties, served by a waiter whose delight in a patron this out-of-season time was quite touching, formed the unromantic but not unpleasant conclusion to a long walk. [152]

Coming home this evening, I had met with the second beggar I had seen in Corsica. We never encountered any but these two during our stay.

Antonio had been very eager, in his dignified way, upon this point. "Mademoiselle," said he, solemnly, "there are no beggars in Corsica. No man begs, unless he has lost the use of his limbs, and cannot work."

Oddly enough, the only two beggars I saw in the island both belonged to the category of cripples. The first was an old man whose leg had been amputated, and who sat by the road-side at Sartene. The second was the one I met this night. There was something wonderfully unprofessional about his begging, as he just touched his cap, and made a movement with his hand, as we passed the doorstep on which he was sitting.

My hands were too full to give him anything just then, but, after putting down my purchases in the hotel, I returned the few yards down the road to where he still sat.

He said nothing as I came up this time, but as I put the sous into his hand, looked up with a pleasant smile and a simple "Thank you," totally unlike the manner of the English or Italian beggar. [153]

One arm had been cut off, the stump being still bandaged, and I asked him how it was done. In some machinery works, he told me, three months ago only; but his patois prevented my understanding the details.

"Before that, I worked," he said, with a little pride (as he might well have of his occupation in this indolent country).

"It must be hard for you now to do nothing," I said.

He looked up with a pathetic smile in his brown eyes. "Yes. And my family are too poor to keep me."

"And so you beg?"

"Si, mademoiselle."

So far, at any rate, his new trade did not seem to have destroyed the self-respect of the wistful-looking young fellow, who seemed to regard it in the light of a necessary though uninteresting duty; and the intelligence of his countenance led one to hope that before long he might find some more worthy occupation.

[154]

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BOCOGNANO BUGBEARS.

After an affectionate farewell to Hôtel Germania, its comforts and its cleanliness, bearing each of us a sweet-smelling bouquet of rosebuds, geraniums, and heliotrope, presented by the young waiter to his last customers with a mournful air, we left sunny little Ajaccio for the last time, accompanied by our old friend Antonio, for whom we had been careful to bargain.

It was a heavy thundery-looking day, though rainless, and, underneath their white snow caps, the shadows of Monte Nebbio and Monte d'Oro loomed purple before us as we drove up the flat Bastia road.

After three hours' driving, we reached the little village of Fiasco, where we baited and lunched; and Antonio, who had many friends but few intimates, and who generally preferred gravely listening to answering the remarks of his acquaintances, retired to the stables for a good gossip with his particular confidant, young Bella Coschia.

[155]

Meanwhile, No. 3 stood, leaning her back against the wall of the little inn, taking the portrait of a charrette mule outside; and, by degrees, a little group of five or six men and women sat down on the neighbouring doorsteps, watching with curious eyes.

By-and-by, the tidily-dressed, grey-haired landlord of the inn, with a twinkle in his eye, approached, and opened conversation. "If you would like to buy that mule, mademoiselle, the owner says he will sell him for a fair price."

"Thank you," returned No. 3; "but he would be rather a troublesome piece of goods to take to England, I am afraid."

"Oh, you are English, mademoiselle?"

"I am."

"Perhaps you would like to buy some of my land hereabouts?"

"Why should I want to buy your land?"

"Oh, because all the English are so rich; they don't know what to do with their money."

[156]

"I am not rich."

"Oh yes, you are, mademoiselle. You know you have lots of property in England. Why not buy a little of my land? It is very good land, and I have a great deal to sell round these parts."

The wink the old fellow again gave his companions roused the indignation of No. 3.

"How very rich *you* must be, monsieur!" she exclaimed sardonically.

"I, mademoiselle? Why so? I am a poor Corsican."

"To have so much good property to sell. Whereas *I* do not possess a rood."

The old fellow grunted, and passed on to the carriage, to continue his inquiries of No. 2; whilst his companions laughed good-humouredly at his discomfiture.

At half-past two, we started again, up the steep ascent to Bocognano, through wooded hills and fine crags, every minute more closely enwrapped in the grand overhanging mountains, and Monte d'Oro growing steeper, bluer, and more furrowed on our left.

[157]

The diligence to Corte was not far behind us, lumbering up the dusty ascent slowly; and a few miles from Bocognano, we passed a woman lying on the grass by the roadside with a harnessed horse cropping beside her.

At the sound of our carriage wheels she raised herself up, and smiled and nodded to Antonio with some laughing remark in a deep bass voice, to which Antonio returned his usual grave nod, without response. She was a huge bony woman, with a rough, coarse face, and manly gait and voice, and, Antonio told us, had, until the last few years, been one of the regular coachmen on this diligence route, driving her horses from here to Bocognano, of which village she was a native. Now, however, male coachmen having become fashionable upon the public diligences, she was degraded to her present occupation, which consisted in bringing an extra horse to this spot for the last and steepest pull up to Bocognano, and undertaking the post of additional whipper and shouter to the exhausted horses. As she was a drunkard, a great swearer, and a most violent character, the change was, perhaps, as well for the diligence passengers; and when at the entrance to the village Antonio pointed out to us a little crippled man as the father of this Zantippe, we glanced at the diminutive little fellow with pitying eyes. [158]

"He looks frightened," I said. "How often does his amiable daughter beat him?"

"Pretty often, mademoiselle. But he drinks, too, and they are always quarrelling. All the family are coachmen; the old man used to drive the diligence, then his daughter took it, and now his son goes on the same stage."

We turned our heads once more, and, at the last turn of the road behind us, could see this female postilion standing on one of the *shafts*, brandishing her long whip, and displaying a wonderful dexterity in preserving her lofty and difficult position.

"Are there many drunkards in Corsica?" asked No. 3.

"The love of drink is growing, mademoiselle. There are many more now than there used to be a few years ago." [159]

"What are the causes?"

"Idleness, and the fashion of strangers, and the cheapness of drink."

"What do they drink? Nothing but the country wines?"

"Little else but red wine. It takes a good deal to make a man drunk on that: but again, it costs little."

It does indeed. Good claret was often put before us in the village inns, charged fivepence a bottle.

"Is it true, mademoiselle," asked Antonio presently, "that the English are a nation of drunkards? I have heard it said."

"It is horribly true," said No. 3. And it was impossible not to feel a sense of humiliation in the discovery that the national disgrace had even reached the ears of this little out-of-the-way island in the Mediterranean. "But in England, too, there is now a large band of total abstainers, formed for the sake of helping the drunkards. Have you any in Corsica?"

"No," said Antonio, thoughtfully; "we have not heard of that in our country. But we see that many of the English who come over to Corsica are great drinkers." He then spoke of an English gentleman, with whose name we were well acquainted, whose passion for drink was the astonishment of Corsicans since he came to live amongst them. "Poor man," he said, "he is no man's enemy but his own; he is kind and amiable, but, voila! he will go on now till he kills himself. The English are terrible people to drink when they begin. They drink more than our people do; and they drink brandy. I remember, a short time ago, taking an English party several tours. There were a lady and a gentleman, both quite young, and a little boy; and we drove about to see some of the forests. All the time he was drinking: he never stopped it. Once we stayed a day or two at a village up amongst the hills; and he could not walk in the evenings when he came out of the public-house. I drove him at last to Ajaccio. I knew he could not live long, for he had chest disease, and could not stand the drink. I was only away a few days with another party into the country, and when I returned I asked after the Anglais, but he was already dead." [160] [161]

About a mile before reaching Bocognano we passed a rough pile of broken wood, lying by the road-side. This was where yesterday, a charrette, laden with forest trunks, had upset and broken upon the sharp turn, fortunately, however, without killing either mules or drivers, as is too often the case in these waggon accidents.

Often during our drives we noticed that, in the most precipitous places, at the most awkward turns of a mountain road or of a narrow bridge, the slight protecting parapet had been knocked down and destroyed by the heavy wheels or long timbers of these over-loaded carts.

It is said that the Corsicans know much better how to load a waggon than we English. But certainly, the number and size of the pine-trunks carried down in these charrettes from the mountain-side, drawn by the four or six mules, looked appalling to our eyes.

The charrettiere, or drivers, of the waggons, who work for some contractor on the plains, are badly paid and hardly worked, and their occupation is one of considerable danger. Accidents are frequent upon the narrow bad roads, some of which are made so slightly, of planks jutting out from the steep hill-side, that you can see daylight through to the precipice underneath. [162]

These, of course, often break down. But a still more common misfortune is the upsetting of the charrette at a corner, by the long pieces of timber catching the side of the hill, or by the simple

overbalancing of the waggon on the uneven road. In either case, immediate destruction to both waggons and horses is the infallible consequence, as they lurch over into the descending precipice. In some cases, of course, the drivers, walking along beside their waggons, are saved; but, as they are nearly always stretched on the top of their timber, and sometimes have so far forgotten prudence as to fall asleep, they constantly share the fate of their horses, and are hurried to a speedy and certain death. Antonio pointed out to us, near Ghisoni further on, a little awkward wooden bridge at a precipitous turn, where, the last few years, no fewer than five charrettes have fallen over, in every case killing the poor beasts, and in many cases, their drivers. [163]

Bocognano is in a most exquisite situation, completely under the lee of Monte d'Oro, stupendous and purple,—and surrounded on every side by groves of delicate chestnuts, and by picturesque hill and ravine; but it is a hopelessly dirty village, and looked as uninviting in that respect in today's sunshine, as it did in the mud and mist of our former visit.

Hôtel Mouvrages, a filthy-looking broken-down tenement in the centre of the village, was the worst in appearance of any we had yet seen. The staircase, dark and ruinous, was redolent of various horrid smells, and both the greasy little *salle à manger* upstairs, and the two stuffy bedrooms, were most unpleasant to view.

"This is dreadful, Antonio," said I, as he followed, laden with our wraps, into the small foul sitting-room, where a few half-washed garments hung out of the grimy window-sills and assisted to import a general richness to the atmosphere; "we can never stop here. What shall we do?" [164]

"I know not where else you can go, mademoiselle," he replied, raising a grave disturbed face; "the horses are done up, and there is no inn within many kilometres of this."

"Well, then, I suppose we must abide."

And Antonio withdrew with a distressed countenance; for, although eloquence was not his forte, it was a cause of dejection to him to think that the ladies under his care should be uncomfortable.

As for us, leaving our belongings behind us, we hurried out of the inn as fast as possible, and into the village street, to hunt for the telegraph office, which exists in every little village in Corsica.

Having at last, followed by the eyes of a quantity of lounging, velveteened men, and can-carrying busy women, and the feet of a little crowd of excited children, found it up a stone entrance a little further down the street, we made our way up the wooden ladder (which did duty for staircase) from the ground floor to the first story, where, imprisoned in a sort of wooden cage, a young woman transmitted our telegram to Ghisoni, at which place we were to spend the next night. [165]

But as, contrary to custom, she either could not or would not understand French, and required a great many directions regarding our message, a bearded man or two and another young woman were all called in to interview us, under the excuse of explaining matters. These desired to know where we came from, how long we were stopping, and whither we intended going, taking the greatest interest in our answers, and evidently mentally making a detailed inventory of every article of our dress and feature on our face.

When at length we escaped, they all pursued us to the top of the wooden ladder, and put out three or four curious heads to peer after us; whilst our juvenile friends waited for us at the bottom.

We soon shook them off, however, walking briskly up the *Corte* road,—as beautiful a walk as one could well take.

After going about two miles, we came to a sharp turn in the hill-side, from which Monte d'Oro rises in its grandest, steepest, closest proximity. [166]

Tremendous heavy blue thunder-clouds hung over our heads and glowered over the purple shadows and white snows of the great Alp, rising from the gorge just beside us; on the other side were steep *maquis*-covered and craggy hills.

All along the road, and upon each hillside, we had passed the great chestnut trunks, gnarled, knotted, and twisted; some splendid ruins, black and mossy, some in the prime of life; and now, looking back upon the village, it seemed embosomed in chestnuts, part of it hid by the richness of the pale green leaves, just in leaf.

Bocognano is a very straggling village, there being four or five distinct little hamlets straying among the embowered hills.

It is famous for being the abode of chestnut trees and of bandits.

A fine stone bridge spanned the wide torrent of the *Gravona* river about a mile from the village, shaded by trees; and here we sat and rested, watching the passers-by.

They were all shy and retiring, wanting village audacity, even the boys. [167]

Two pretty little fellows were catching lizards, and talked in whispers until we were some yards beyond them, regarding us with awe-struck eyes; and some little girls, laden each with a basket of wood from the hill-side, and who sat likewise to rest upon the stone coping, utterly refused to be sketched, dodging my pencil successfully, and occasionally covering their faces with their hands.

Then came past a group of bare-footed merry-voiced women, strong as horses, and upright as poplars, each carrying her load of wood upon her head, and hurrying on to the village with only a glance in our direction; and lastly, a sweet-faced girl of about fifteen, with a look of patient depression upon her olive-coloured face touching to see.

She was carrying a heavy load of wood upon her head; her dress was neat, and tucked up almost to her knees, showing the pretty brown legs and round feet; and the white handkerchief over her shoulders, as well as the one upon her head, was clean and tidy. She seemed very tired, and flung down her load beside the bridge hastily, sitting down; but immediately her busy fingers took some knitting out of her pocket, not allowed for a moment to be idle. She had no objection to our trying to sketch her, but when we spoke to her, raised her serious pathetic brown eyes to ours with a puzzled shake of the head; and it was impossible to hold a conversation with her.

[168]

The thunder was rolling grandly overhead as we turned homewards, passing on our way a small cottage, before the door of which stood a sulky, evil-faced boy. Apparently this youth objected to the intrusion of foreigners on his native soil, or the storm had soured his temper; for we had not gone many yards further, before a good-sized stone came after us, hitting No. 3 pretty sharply on the shoulder. As might have been expected, our assailant was a coward, and retired within his doorway on our looking back.

The next day as we passed the cottage I related the incident to Antonio with some indignation.

[169]

"Que voulez vous?" he said, with the usual shrug. "Voila, mademoiselle, there are forty boys in this village. Among so many, must there not be one vaurien anywhere?"

And sundry visions of refractory ragamuffins, and hours of anguish spent in Sunday schools, forced us to admit that, even in our own land, the percentage of vauriens was probably no less.

It was dusk in the *salle à manger* when we re-entered for our dinner, which, to give every one their due, was far from a bad one.

As soon as it was accomplished we blew out the lights, and leaning out of the windows, whence we had previously had the family linen removed, found plenty of amusement in watching village life in the little street below.

It was lively in the extreme, and swarmed with men and women, children and animals. Little groups of three or four men lounged slowly up and down, whilst women stood at the doors knitting,—or hanging their heads out of an upper window. The children chased each other shouting, across the narrow street, tumbling over innumerable pigs, dogs, and kids. Cows and mules occasionally strolled in and out with a reflective air, as being quite at their ease, and accustomed to the liberty of their evening saunter; and some magnificent goats, one coal black and the other snow white, lay on the pavement beneath our window, regarding the merry scene calmly, whilst chewing the cud of contemplation, and receiving the caresses of many of the passers-by with a proud indifference.

[170]

Occasionally, a couple of dogs got up a fight for the general amusement; and as it grew darker the kids became more lively, standing on their hind legs to waltz with each other.

We were sorry when darkness and late hours compelled us to close the windows, and retire to our uninviting chambers. But we scarcely anticipated the miseries of that horrible night. In point of discomfort, the rooms were much the same as at the other smaller inns.

An old wine-bottle and pudding-basin again did duty for washing apparatus; soap, of course, there was none, and the one towel was a bit of coarse canvas about a foot square. The luxury of a looking-glass we had almost forgotten, and its want distressed us but little.

[171]

But what afflicted us chiefly was the number of old chests and boxes, and of family petticoats, hung up in every direction; and the general dirt of the wooden floors and plaster walls.

The good woman of the house explained to me that they had but one guests' room, and that mine had been vacated by herself and spouse for my use. When I heard that dreadful piece of intelligence, I knew what to expect.

The horrors of that night are not to be described. Animated nature of every description abounded in all the rooms; and, although No. 3 had her window open all night, it was necessary to burn incense (fortunately taken out from England) every half-hour or so; whilst No. 2 never retired to rest at all, but spent the dark hours in pacing up and down, reflecting on the humbug of fine scenery combined with filthy inns, and registering a vow never again to set foot in this wretched village, or any like it, for the sake of any natural beauties whatever. In this nocturnal pacing she was accompanied by a regiment of rats overhead, who played high jinks in the men's attic, undismayed by the occasional boot flung at them by some disturbed sleeper.

[172]

Bocognano is situated at some height amongst the hills, and its nights are no doubt considered cold by the inhabitants. This doubtless accounted for the fact that, after instituting a search (to explain the extraordinary warmth of the bed) No. 3 found two large fur rugs, or rather undressed sheepskins, carefully laid upon the top of the mattress, wool upwards.

With an inward groan, these receptacles for fleas were dragged across the room, and transferred to the window, whence, in company with the dirty quilt and the only strip of carpet in the room, they hung outside for an unaccustomed airing.

But enough of such like tortures, which are but described for the edification of future travellers, who are warned that they had far better sit the night out in their carriage, if a miserable fate brings them to Bocognano, than spend it (for I will not use the ironical word "sleep") at Hôtel Mouvrages.

[173]

I would warn them, too, to beware of printer's errors.

In Mr. Roden Noel's account of Corsica, given in a late *Temple Bar* number, he mentions a filthy place called Borognano, warning travellers to avoid it.

This account we studied carefully, but, unfortunately, were induced, by the differing letter, to imagine it a distinct place, or we should scarcely have had courage to go thither. I have no doubt now that Mr. Noel's Borognano was our Bocognano.

"With quaking hearts we watched them come,  
From curtain, carpet, rug,  
In countless hordes, half-famished brutes—  
That Bocognano B—!

"Another room we sought in haste,  
And thought to rest now, snug;  
But lo! again those marching troops—  
The universal B—!

"The bed-legs next we seized, and placed  
Each in a water-jug;  
But then he dropped down from above—  
That persevering B—!

"With Keating's dust we covered us,  
And many a nauseous drug;  
But never turned that army back—  
Th' indomitable B—!

"We pulled the bedclothes round our ears  
With many a hasty tug;  
But quick he burrowed underneath—  
Each enterprising B—!

"In vain to turn and twist us round  
With many a frantic shrug;  
We failed to ease the throbbing pang,  
Caused by each busy B—!

"O traveller in Corsica,  
Flee this domestic Thug;  
Brigands are myths; but, sure as death,  
Is Bocognano's B—!"

Travellers who have visited Bocognano will hear with sympathetic interest of a legend found amongst a certain tribe of Kurds living on Mount Sindshar.

Noah's ark, say these worthies, having struck upon a rock in this neighbourhood, and he and his large family being in danger of drowning, the serpent came to the rescue, craftily promising assistance in return for Noah's pledge, thenceforth (that is to say, after the cessation of the deluge) to feed him upon human flesh. According to the Kurdish opinion, Noah's faith, at this period of his life, was not strong. Either he doubted any ultimate cessation of the flood, and so thought to evade his promise; or present necessities made him close his eyes to the future. Anyhow, he acceded to the proposition, and the serpent, coiling himself up promptly, filled up the hole, and stopped the leak.

[175]

At the abatement of the deluge, the serpent demanded his promised reward. Noah, in despair, acted upon the advice of the angel Gabriel, and flung the serpent into the fire.

Then, casting forth its ashes, from them rose up immediately a swarm of bugs, fleas, and all such noxious vermin, which hastened to fulfil their destiny by the enjoyment of that unnatural food which the patriarch had so rashly pledged to allow their progenitor.

Such is the Kurdish legend; but the English transcriber adds that, no sooner had this been done, than Noah prayed for a return of the deluge!

[176]

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FOREST OF SORBA.

When at last cold dawn had passed away, and given place to rosy morning, such a view was gleaming in through the little open window as seemed almost to compensate for horrors past.

What mattered it now, in the clear brilliant sunshine, that a monstrous black beetle, overcome by slumber or reflection, was looking down serenely from the wall just above; or that, on lifting a shoe from the floor, two more hopped out merrily?

A pure cone of glistening snow was rising from a belt of pines and chestnut woods from the valley in which stood the inn, and blocking up the little window with a dazzling vicinity of beauty.

The blue sky behind it shone like a sapphire, and everything seemed sparkling in the glorious pure early sunshine; snow girdles above, and dewdrops from green branches below, whilst larks were thrilling the air with their mysterious hidden song:— [177]

"What thou art we know not;  
What is most like thee?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

"Like a glowworm golden,  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering, un beholden,  
Its aerial hue,  
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view.

"What objects are the fountains  
Of thy happy strain?  
What fields or waves or mountains?  
What shapes of sky or plain?  
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?"

After an early breakfast we left Bocognano, and proceeded on our way to Ghisoni before nine o'clock.

For two or three hours we followed the Corte route, mounting up the Foce Pass, where before we had descended in the diligence. But two months had made a vast difference in the nature of the views. Where all had been bleak and bare before, pale feathery beeches now hung over gorge and ravine, shading the hot ascent, and chestnuts in full leaf bent above many a foaming cascade as it rushed down the hill-side. [178]

Snow mountains still surrounded us on either side, but rich groves of trees filled up the valley beneath, and clothed the opposite slope with a warm mantle, out of which rose the white conical peak of Monte D'Oro at a great height into the burning blue sky.

The forest of Vizzavona was far more beautiful than at our first visit. There were no naked trunks or bare branches now: both beeches and pines were in full luxuriance, and everywhere was richest foliage and most grateful shade, showing only occasional peeps of the grand snowy ranges through the avenue breaks. Descending again, we baited, for our mid-day rest, under a frying sun but a frosty atmosphere, on an exposed plateau just beyond the forest, beside a lonely and deserted cantonnier's house, where the ground was bare, but where snow, on grandest hills, hemmed us in on every side. [179]

After washing down our bread and raisins with a draught from the delicious mountain spring that ran before us, we descended the hill a little farther, to investigate a little pine wood just above the road-way.

It was fringed by gigantic Mediterranean heath trees, and the ground was carpeted by cyclamen and fir cones, out of which the lizards darted at our approach in hundreds, some only an inch or two long, and evidently mere babes of their tribe.

Almost at the same moment, my companion and I started two large snakes.

Mine was black, and about four feet long; hers green, and somewhat shorter. The black fellow sprang almost from under my feet on the narrow pathway, and wriggled away rapidly, swimming across a dyke just beside it, and then hastening into concealment up the side of the opposite bank.

The other one started out in the same way just before my companion, but took refuge in the hollow of a neighbouring tree-trunk, putting out his pretty green head and bright green eyes every other minute cautiously, to see if the coast were clear, but always retiring when he observed us watching. [180]

I have no doubt that wood, and every wood and forest in Corsica, is more or less full of such snakes; but their timidity makes them little formidable, unless one should happen to place a bare hand or foot by accident upon them.

Starting anew, we continued our descent through thick chestnut woods, and beside mountains, apparently steeper and nearer; until at length, just above the village of Vivario, we left the Corte

road and struck off to the right towards the forest of Sorba.

This forest is situated upon the summit of such a high hill that, when Antonio pointed it out to us, it seemed quite impossible that we should have time, or the horses strength, to reach it that day.

It proved, however, to be only a very toilsome mount of about three hours. This ascent to the Col is certainly the most steep and precipitous of any forest we had yet seen in the island; but the road is fairly good, and the views, near and far, are exquisite. [181]

As we entered the outskirts of the forest, young firs bent over the large boulders around us; then the numerous thin-stemmed pines crowded more closely together, growing at each turn larger, handsomer, and bigger of girth, until, near the summit, the trees that lined the path on either side were the finest we had ever seen for height and circumference. Many of these trees were of vast reputed ages; which, however, could not be computed until, after being felled, their rings were counted. Some of them, however, sent to the Paris Exhibition of 1867, were proved to be four hundred years old.

The path mounted so rapidly that we could see over the heads of nearly all these forest giants, except those immediately on the road level; and through every break loomed the magnificent head of D'Oro, now some distance, but looking grander and larger than ever, hanging like something unearthly between sky and plain, with a wide belt of clouds round his base, but with his head clear and cloudless. [182]

The road which we had passed over seemed to lie under our very feet, and, as we mounted, the boulders grew more and more gigantic and imposing. At one place we had a very narrow shave to get past. A great block of rock had become detached from the mountain-side above, and fallen across our path at a remarkably steep point. We all got out while the horses wormed themselves round the corner, and Antonio half lifted the empty carriage after them, leaving only the wheels on one side on mother earth, and supporting the other side himself.

"If this had been night, and we had been descending," asked No. 3, "what would have become of us then?"

Antonio shook his head with a silent smile. He was too wise to commit himself to any opinion on such a point.

"But no one would come down such a place at night, I suppose?" she remarked.

"Yes," said Antonio; "the very first time I ever drove out into the country, when I was a boy of fifteen, was down this very road. A party had to go to Ghisoni and back in haste, and we returned down here by night; and there was no moon." [183]

"And you had no mishap?"

"No, mademoiselle," was the grave reply; "I have never had a mishap yet."

As we neared the lofty summit of the Col, shifting clouds ran across our path, and broke about us, dividing us alternately from heaven and earth; but, as at length we reached the top, we found ourselves enveloped in a dense fog of cloudland.

We stood for a moment on the pass to rest the horses, and, as we looked down into that abyss of white vapour, into which we were to plunge in another minute, its trackless desert appeared appalling, and it seemed as if we were going to throw ourselves into a bottomless pit of misty horror. It was almost impossible to believe that land and hill and valley lay beneath that horrible veil.

But Antonio knew every turn of the sharp descent as we flew down the mountain-side; and presently dim misty forms of hills, bleak and bare, with here and there fir woods, but no snow mountains, broke through the thinning clouds. [184]

Ere long they cleared away, and, after passing through lines of magnificent chestnut trees, many scorched and blackened by ruthless forestiers, we looked down upon Ghisoni, situated in a valley closely shut in on all sides just above a foaming river.

It was an ugly village, even for Corsica, and its inn was not cheering in appearance, although more cleanly looking than Bocognano of unsavoury memory.

As it proved, however, this little inn was by no means uncomfortable, and one of the cleanest we had met with.

Whilst waiting for dinner, we took a walk, followed by some twenty or thirty children, and made our way up to the cemetery hill, looking down upon the noisy torrent.

The children were very friendly and not disagreeable, although rather pressing in their attentions, most of the boys taking off their caps, and all of them offering us nosegays of flowers. [185]

We were quite reconciled to them before we returned to the village, and had grown so used to our usual triumphal procession of juvenile admirers, that it astonished us to see one of a group of men, who had all politely bowed as we passed them, dart into the centre of our train with a torrent of angry words, and an energy of threats that dispersed the tribe at once and left us free.

Strolling on in the opposite direction, we went to see the famous crag of Christalisione. This is a



magnificent cliff of perpendicular grey rock rising from the opposite side of the gorge, and overhanging the wild torrent foaming through it, about half a mile from the village.

Some men were mending the road, which was in sore need of repair; and, as they rested on their pickaxes and shovels to gaze after us, we spoke to one or two of them, and found them, as usual, pleased to be talked to, and exceedingly polite and intelligent.

The great crag looked very noble, with a band of white clouds encircling his middle, from which the grey head and greyer base emerged at top and bottom. [186]

At six o'clock we returned to our inn, to find dinner laid at the small round table for half a dozen people.

The *salle à manger* was, as usual, a long low room, rather dark; but it seemed clean, and there was no smell worse than ancient tobacco smoke. The walls were covered with gay frescoes, representing rural scenes.

It was a little embarrassing to wash one's hands for dinner under the curious scrutiny of some eight or ten pairs of eyes. My little bedroom window faced the village street, and as it possessed neither blind nor shutters, I found myself an object of increasing interest to the heads that gradually gathered at the opposite windows, and protruded themselves to an alarming extent in the excitement of commanding my movements.

Returning downstairs, we found that our three fellow-diners consisted of a Frenchman, called by his companions "M. le General," and occupying the civil post of "Garde General" of the neighbouring forests; and two Corsicans, one a plain "garde forestier," and the other the master of the inn himself. [187]

It is a little peculiar to sit down to dinner with one's innkeeper; but, except for the sentiment of the thing, we had little to complain of, as mine host was most agreeable and well-behaved. His conversation was amusing, and he had arrayed himself in semi-evening costume in honour of our presence. His knowledge of the culinary resources of the household, too, did us many a good turn during dinner, as he sent his daughter, acting as waitress, for first one thing and then another, out of the family cupboards.

The garde forestier was a tall good-looking man of about thirty, dressed in brown velveteen and hessians, and seemed a clever man. Both he and mine host spoke French with great rapidity, if not with the same idiom as the Parisian garde general.

M. le General was a very fine gentleman indeed. He was thoroughly French, both in appearance and conversation, and his exalted rank evidently accounted both for his tone of good-tempered patronage in addressing his two male companions, and the *persiflage* with which he favoured us. [188]

"Flowers!" he exclaimed, when the forestier made some remark about the floral richness of his country; "why, you haven't a garden in the whole of this little island of yours!"

"I have some astonishing roses in my garden behind the house, which I will show you after dinner," said the host.

"Roses, mon cher! Why, you Corsicans don't know a rose when you see it! You gather a few miserable little worm-eaten buds, and call them a bouquet of roses. There isn't a man in Corsica who understands how to make a garden."

The two Corsicans took this rebuke very meekly, perhaps owning its truth in their hearts; and presently the conversation diverged to the subject of bandits.

"Do you know, mesdemoiselles," said the General, "that you are now in the heart of the bandit country?"

We testified our knowledge of the formidable fact. [189]

"Probably, mesdemoiselles, you expect these bandits to be very terrible fellows? You would not know them from other people; in all probability you have met one or two in the street this evening," continued our French friend, who evidently wished to create a "sensation," and was not particular about the use of the long bow. "Ma foi! they are 'charmants garçons,' and 'braves hommes,' these bandits—they would behave to you with every civility."

"Possibly," said we. And the two Corsicans assented gravely, seeing nothing in the subject to joke about.

"Yes, mesdemoiselles," went on M. le General, warming with his topic, "you may sleep safely in your beds to-night, here as elsewhere. You need not fear the bandits."

"We do not fear them," we remarked, unable to help laughing.

"Ah, poor fellows! They are often ill-used men, and forced into their way of life. Is it not so, my friends?" he asked, turning to his companions. [190]

"They are brave men," said mine host gravely.

"They may be ill-used," remarked No. 3; "but they are not brave when they lay wait for their enemy and shoot him concealed in the maquis. It would surely be more manly to give him a chance."

"Yes," said the big garde forestier, "you are right, mademoiselle. The man who fires upon his foe from the maquis is a lâche. He should shoot him in the open street."

"Quite so, mon cher," said M. le General, "always provided that his enemy has not a pistol with which to return the compliment!"

But the Corsicans looked grave at this levity; and the versatile General had soon found another topic of conversation.

"Is it true, mesdemoiselles," he asked, as he poured a half-pint of sweet oil over his salad, "that you meditate going to the Inzecca precipices to-morrow?"

"We do," we replied.

"You had better not go, ladies. Ah! mon Dieu! *there* are precipices indeed! It is terrible. Such a road! One slip of the horse's foot—one stone rolling—and vous voilà perdues!" [191]

"We mean to risk it, monsieur."

"Ah, you English ladies are rash; you fear nothing. Have you a good driver?"

"A very good one; and one we can trust perfectly."

"That is well; for it is a terrible place, an expedition of horror. Precipices six hundred feet high—a wall of rock overhanging—ah, ciel! And a steep and narrow road, where one false step may cause destruction! Think of that, mesdames!"

We had thought of it, and enjoyed the prospect; but, as these three men shuddered sympathetically over the horrors of the place, we began to wonder faintly whether the Inzecca would indeed prove our romantic and early tomb. [192]

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE INZECCA.

After a comfortable night in our clean, though poverty-stricken little rooms, we started before 8 a.m., on a cloudy morning, for the Inzecca.

The road wound above the torrent bed, and past Christalisione, descending rapidly, and gradually becoming enclosed on either side by steep rocky crags of great height. Behind us rose a distant fine range of snowy peaks, soon, however, shut out by the surrounding walls.

The road was exceedingly bad and rutty, and after we had passed our cantonnier friends of the day before, who smilingly recognized us, became so uneven that we both flew up and down on our seats like India-rubber balls, with an apparent possibility of landing ultimately outside our carriage, and with an absurdity that almost interfered with our appreciation of the view, and made even Antonio, who was driving slowly and carefully, turn round occasionally with a sympathetic smile. [193]

On first entering the defile, the view was lovely. Far away was a peep of the distant sea, before which stretched two ranges of blue and purple hills, set in a frame of steep grey rocks, green gorge, and foaming river.

As we advanced, the gorge become narrower and the rocks steeper. The Orbo literally churned itself in its fury, so that we could scarcely hear each other speak, and the opposing crags, some decked with brilliant verdure, and all dotted with pines and ilex, reared their weird pointed ridges yet straighter into the brilliant sky, in strata of the most vivid colours—blue, grey, yellow, green, and even puce pink. The two latter colours were the porphyry and red granite, abounding in Corsica. In places, the rocks were hollowed out like the trunks of trees; and everywhere scored and cracked and seamed.

On the road-side at one point, standing out from the hill behind them, rose two great square towers of grey rock, reminding one strongly of the city gates of Florence. [194]

At last we reached the particular precipice par excellence, without having had reason as yet to desert our carriage, or fear any fulfilment of M. le General's terrible prophecies; and here we got out and sat down on the broken wall, to drink in the beauty of the scene.

The morning sun was now shining brightly, but the great walls of curving rock on either side completely shut out the sunshine, and concealed great part of the sky.

On the opposite side of the gorge, precipices about six hundred feet high looked down perpendicularly upon the Orbo, as it rushed towards the sea, throwing up sheets of dazzling foam, and diving under and leaping over the great green boulders that lay across its narrow path.

On our side, the road overhung the torrent about a hundred feet, whilst red rocks bent over our heads to a height of some hundred feet more.

Just at the turn, the road, which was without defences of any kind, and which had hitherto not been too broad, widened out a little; and here we followed Antonio over the little green slope, to look down into the seething waters below.

[195]

Antonio had seated himself upon an out-jutting ledge of rock, and, with feet dangling over the precipice, employed himself in tearing up young boulders and sending them for our edification, with a noise of thunder, over the edge into the depths below. One rocky crash succeeded another, making echoes amid the wild din of the torrent, until the young Corsican was crimson in the face with his exertions, and seemed so much inclined to throw himself over with his heavy missiles, that we had to represent to him the serious inconvenience it would be to us were we to be left to make our way driverless back to Ghisoni.

This had the desired effect; and shrugging his shoulders, with a smile, he desisted, pulling down the pink and white calico smock that he always wore, when on duty, over his waistcoat, and returning to his horses.

[196]

Meanwhile we walked on, down the gorge. For about another three-quarters of a mile the precipices continued fine; then the rocks opened out, the road flattened, and all things began to look commonplace. We decided to return the way we had come, by Ghisoni and Sorba, instead of following this flatter and less interesting route to Vivario.

Coming home, we watched a boy crossing the Orbo torrent. It was here about a hundred yards wide, and rocky, although not so angry as in its narrower channels.

The bridge was primitive, and consisted merely of a long pine log, balanced across the river, and over which the boy went, frog fashion, fearing to be swept off by the stream.

Having paused to see this juvenile accomplish his awkward passage in safety, we returned to Ghisoni, where the rain forced us to bait, instead of eating our lunch halfway up the Sorba Mountain, as we had intended; and where we again had the privilege of M. le General's polite conversation and congratulations on our safe return from what he persisted in considering our dangerous expedition. For my own part, I must confess that I was a little disappointed in the Inzecca. They were exceedingly striking, and the gorge most beautiful; but I do not think they are to be compared with the Porto rocks for sublimity. Perhaps we had heard too much of their beauties beforehand.

[197]

It is said that there are some precipices in the valley of the Niolo steeper and higher, and in all respects grander, than the Inzecca; but we had not time to find out these, nor even to discover if there was any practicable route to them.

It rained more or less all the afternoon, as we wound slowly up from Ghisoni to the top of Sorba, and down again to Vivario; and yet, even in rain, the forest was magnificent.

The road now was covered with the caterpillars whose bags we had before seen hanging above us from the branches of every tree. It was now time for them to burst, and their living contents to fall upon the ground; and our carriage wheels unavoidably became a juggernaut to numbers of these hairy black creepers.

[198]

One bagful, passed by us, still lay, in a compact writhing ball, five or six inches high, upon the path. The inmates had evidently only just fallen, and not, as yet, had time to arrange their movements. But all others were slowly serpentine along the ground in single file, holding tight on to each other's tails, in one long black string.

It is a popular delusion to suppose that the sting of these little animals is injurious and even dangerous. I myself held one in my hand without harm; whilst our driver stirred them up carelessly with his finger as they lay upon the ground.

We reached Vivario about four o'clock, and found a bright sun ready to welcome us in the village, and a rainbow lying across the smoking hills.

The streets, as we picked our way through them, were thick with mud, and the numerous pigs looked even dirtier than usual, as we crossed the redolent stable-yard to the ladderlike, outside staircase leading to the comfortable little inn of Madame Dausoigne.

[199]

Wandering beyond the village, we picked up an amusing acquaintance.

This was an old lady, of a shrewd bright face and brisk walk, neatly dressed in the usual black jacket and skirt, and black head-gear. She was well-to-do looking, and evidently belonged to the bourgeoisie class. As we came up behind her, she slackened her pace; and, after a friendly nod and word of salutation, walked beside us.

"Well ladies, you are visitors here, I suppose, and came by diligence?"

"No, madame, we came in our hired carriage."

"Oh, indeed. And how do you like my country?"

"Very much indeed, madame. We think it lovely."

"Better than England, ladies? You are English, are you not?"

"Corsica is much more beautiful than England, madame."

"Ah! you should come here in September. You should see the vineyards then—the grapes are magnificent."

[200]

"It is too hot for English people then, madame."

"Not at all, mademoiselle. It is most beautiful then: no rain like now—and such fruit everywhere. The finest grapes in the country are cultivated in these parts, and all the vineyards round here belong to me."

"You are a large propriétaire then, madame?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, I have a great deal of property. But it has given me much trouble."

"How so, madame?"

"I have had a long lawsuit over it. My sister disputed it with me. My father left me all his property here; but after his death, my sister's husband tried to get it, and we had a lawsuit for years. I won the suit, of course; but now my sister will not speak to me. And I have to come over here and look after the estate."

"Why, where do you live, madame?"

"In Paris, mademoiselle. Oh, there is no place in the world like Paris! It is paradise!"

[201]

"Is your husband a Frenchman then, madame?"

"Yes, and he has a post in Paris, and lives there; and so does my only son. Oh, he is a *bel homme*, my husband, a splendid man, ladies! I wish you could see him. He married me when he was stationed over here in Corsica, years ago; and stayed here some time. When he returned to Paris, I went with him; but I have crossed the sea from Marseilles three times to visit my country, and now I have been here two years."

"You are quite a traveller, madame."

"The sea is nothing to me now, ladies. The first time, I thought I and all on board would never see land again; but now I have no fears, and no illness. But I wish I could see my man again; he must want me back terribly!"

"He is very fond of you?" inquired No. 3.

"Mais oui, mademoiselle," said the pretty, laughing old woman. "And you, am I right in calling you mademoiselle? Are you not married?"

[202]

"No, madame, I am not married."

"Nor you?" she asked, turning to No. 2.

"Nor I either, madame."

"But, neither of you married! How is that, mesdemoiselles?" she inquired, shocked at this terrible state of affairs.

"It is sad that no one will have us, is it not, madame?"

"Ah, mesdemoiselles, I do not believe that! You are rich, and you are charming. You would find plenty of suitors in Corsica."

"If we were married, madame, perhaps our husbands would not let us run about the world like this!"

"True, mademoiselle. But it is better to be married, if you can find a good husband. Why don't you come and settle down here, and marry Corsican propriétaires? The Corsicans make good husbands."

"They might shoot us when they were angry, madame."

"Ah bah, mademoiselle! Corsicans don't shoot their wives. A Corsican would think himself lucky to get an English wife. They are all so poor, my countrymen."

[203]

"For shame, madame! Would you have them seek a wife only for her money?"

"Ah, no, mademoiselle. They would be charmed with you too, because you are so agreeable," replied this flatterer.

"Which do you like best, madame, France or Corsica?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, I love my own country, but it is 'triste'—France is the country to be happy in."

It was clear our old friend was more than half wedded to the land of her adoption, although still keeping up the dress and appearance of her girlhood's home.

We parted with mutual friendliness, and returned to our inn to eat a tidy little dinner, in company with six pet cats, and a gentle little lump of canine obesity called "Jeannette."

Then retiring to neat little bedrooms, refreshing to the view in their dimity curtains, deliciously soft clean sheets and blankets, two usable towels, and a *bonâ fide* basin and jug.

[204]

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE LAST OF ANTONIO.

The breakfast next morning at Vivario was so deliciously and unwontedly clean and refined in appearance, as to tempt us to linger over its luxuries, and almost to forget the rain sweeping against the windows outside.

The loaf on a plate (instead of on a dirty, sticky, American-cloth table-cover), toast in a rack, sugar-tongs, honey, and, greatest of all delights, a tiny pat of goat's butter, just made, and laid upon a little green china leaf, like a large pearl!

After all our vicissitudes of food and lodging, these refinements, served up in the snug, well-furnished little sitting-room, quite intoxicated us, and we began to feel once more that we were civilized beings, and not barbaric nomads on the tramp. [205]

At ten o'clock we bid a fond adieu to the six cats, Jeannette, Madame Dausoigne and her bright-faced daughter, and started for our short two hours' drive to Corte—the last of our expeditions in our snug little carriage behind the two immaculate bays, and our old friend Antonio.

There was an air of softness about our driver to-day, which denoted that he himself remembered this fact and was sorry for it. The three weeks' daily contact between Antonio and his fare had considerably strengthened the liking we all conceived for him at first sight, and had established a mutual respect and regard between us and the young Corsican. He was always careful of our comforts; but to-day he was more than usually solicitous, in his quiet taciturn way, over the arrangement of our cushions and wraps, and about the rain which, in defiance of his twice offered hint, we allowed to stream over us and the little carriage as we went along. Travelling in the open air all day long soon makes one hardy, and neither of us could bear to shut out what view was visible on this lovely road. [206]

Gleams of sunshine, too, occasionally glinted through the trees, and lit them up with dewdrops, like a fairy garden of diamonds; and, for a moment, the heavy clouds would clear away above us, and the rocks hanging overhead would show steep, turret-shaped spires rising into little oases of blue sky, with snow mountains beckoning from the other side.

Not far from Vivario, we noticed coloured stakes driven into the ground to show where the projected railway across the island was to pass. This railway is to run from Bastia to Ajaccio, and will be a most expensive work, as there will be a great deal of tunnelling necessary, through the Foce Pass, and between Vivario and Corte. Some attempts have been made for its commencement at both the capitals, but it is now delayed, partly on account of the difficulty of obtaining funds. It will probably have to be undertaken by the French Government, and for some time, no doubt, will not pay. At Corte, two Corsican gentlemen were warmly discussing the point whether it would be most advisable to employ native or foreign labour. [207]

"The people of Corsica are starving for want of employment," said one; "you would not deprive them of a piece of work that would employ thousands, and take some years?"

"Would they take the work if it were offered them, monsieur?" inquired No. 3.

"Some would, mademoiselle. Some of our men wish for work and cannot obtain it."

"Only a small proportion—a very small minority," said the other Corsican. "If foreign labour were employed, the work would be finished in two years; if native, probably not in six. And it is more than possible, that even this small proportion of our people would not be found willing to work."

"You are a lazy people, monsieur."

"It is true, mademoiselle. And meanwhile capital will be idle. It is better for the capitalists, and better even for the country itself that the work should be done as quickly as possible."

The three villages of Luco, Serraggio, and San Pietro, were now completely embowered in lovely chestnuts, fully out; and brilliant fields of flax were passed, in masses of light-blue flowers. [208]

Ponte Vecchio looked more beautiful than ever, in a passing gleam of sunshine; and as we got out for a farewell to our favourite spot, we discovered the remains of the ancient Pisan bridge lower down the gorge side—a narrow arch, unparapeted, thrown across from bank to bank for foot passengers, but now lying in scattered blocks down the hill-side, or making another boulder or two to vex and rouse the roaring torrent.

Meanwhile, the rain ran in a stream from Antonio's wideawake, and our concern was awakened that he still used his overcoat for a cushion, and not for its normal purpose.

"When do you wear your overcoat, Antonio?" at length one of us asked. "Is it intended for rain?"

Antonio turned round with his grave smile. "Yes, mademoiselle, it is for rain. But to-day is not much rain for Corsica."

"Not much rain?" we repeated. "Why, it has been pouring for three hours."

"It has rained a long time, but not heavily, mademoiselle." And Antonio bent his wideawake into another convenient little spout to let off the superfluous water. [209]

Corsica is very rarely so wet as this year when we visited it. It is not generally considered a rainy country; but the rain, when it does come down, is often quite tropical, and falls with a pelt that is really appalling, upon the house roofs. To-day the rain was English-like—soft summer showers, refreshing to plants, and reminding of April.

When we entered Hotel Pierracci, after driving down the steep hill into the red-roofed street, we were streaming with water from every garment, and made large pools in the *salle à manger*.

But the air of Corte nearly choked us. It was indescribably hot, muggy, and breathless, and felt like the innermost chamber of a Turkish bath. The oppression was fearful, and although the weather had cleared up, we could not walk, and soon returned from an attempted stroll back to our hotel, to lie panting in our chairs before the open windows and closed shutters. [210]

Meanwhile Antonio had brought in the last of our possessions, and came to receive the money for his master. His brown face was full of colour and friendliness, as he bade us good-bye; and, with extreme shyness, shook our proffered hands, wishing us a safe and happy return to our own country. We felt once more the chill of our position, as strangers in a foreign land, as our good, honest little driver disappeared, remembering that we should now have to look after ourselves.

It was a misfortune that we could not leave the next day, for Corte, though lovely, was unpleasant; but it was impossible to face the idea of a ten hours' journey in the breathless interior of a small diligence, and there was no diligence with *banquette* until the Monday morning.

So we had to console ourselves with such French novels as the small library opposite could furnish, and with staring out of our windows at the incessant stream of strollers up and down.

The men have the French practice here, which we never noticed elsewhere, of kissing each other, when on terms of intimacy, on both cheeks in the public street. [211]

Towards evening, awnings were run out from the hotel, from beneath which rose the sound of lively voices discussing native politics, and the clinking of glasses and teaspoons. Here, the upper class of Corte regaled themselves with tobacco, chat, and refreshment, to a late hour; whilst their well-dressed but poorer compatriots were content to wander up and down in front, in groups of threes and fours, pipe in mouth, with grave step and conversation.

Until past midnight this incessant pacing up and down the centre of the road, and the quiet hum of voices, continued through the hot, streaming, night-air. Two things struck me, both on the Saturday and Sunday night: the first was the absence of drunken shouts, and the second the absence of female voices.

Drunkards are undoubtedly to be found in Corsica, but apparently, a sense of the national dignity of demeanour remains even to them, and they do not shout and rave and misbehave like a Briton in drink. [212]

As for the women of Corsica, they never join in the public promenades; and, unless it is in Bastia or Ajaccio, the rude laugh and loud voice of a bold girl seem unknown quantities.

It is a puzzling problem to guess how the Corsican young women ever get married, for courtship seems a rare thing, and you never meet a young couple walking out together in the cool of evening, through the flower-scented lanes.

Either matrimony is conducted in a very business-like fashion in the island, or the love-making is entirely confined to the house, and kept rigidly private. [213]

## CHAPTER XVII.

### TO BASTIA FROM CORTE.

It was seven o'clock on a tremendously hot sunny morning when we started for our last day's journey, to Bastia. Our lofty *banquette* was shared by the driver, and was a veritable perch, ten or twelve feet from the ground, into which the only feasible way of climbing was by seizing hold of some ropes depending from the diligence top, and swinging oneself up, acrobat fashion.

A large group of gamins had assembled to witness our departure; and, notwithstanding the handsome rooms and clean accommodation with which Madame Pierracci had this time supplied us, we bade a last adieu to Corte without any sentiments but those of relief; and wound up the steep hills, through the blazing sunshine and pure morning air, with increasing exhilaration. [214]

Our perch had its drawbacks.

We found that this diligence was altogether immensely inferior to the Ajaccio one, both in its steeds and its drivers. The horses were poor, stiff, worn-out brutes, that could scarcely get their exhausted limbs along, despite the incessant cracking of the long whip, and the discordant cries of their driver; and the men were all, without exception, the lowest specimens of Corsicans we had met with.

They were one and all good-natured, but dirty and unpleasant, and had no tongue save their own *patois*. Their tobacco was an alarming mixture, and their cries to their angular beasts astonishing, both in nature and in shrillness.

"Hoi! osera! you assassin! Get on, you thief!" "Ar-r-ch, oisé! you son of a drunkard, will you move on!" These, and sundry other epithets, were used with astonishing rapidity to the poor, patient, insulted horses, as we followed the somewhat barren and mountainous road, with its occasional fine views.

For nearly two-thirds of the way to Bastia, the diligence road winds closely above the bed of the foaming Golo. It is a handsome river here, dashing along, green and wide, over grey boulders, and washing the feet of pretty wooded hills. [215]

Butterflies, blue, white, brown, and peacock, filled the air about us, and sheets of blue borage, crimson poppies, and golden spurge, almost hid the fern-covered bank upon one side.

The drive would have been charming, if it had not been for the little annoyances of the dirty driver, and of the overcrowded condition of the diligence.

We had, in ignorance, timed our journey to Whit-Monday; and now found, to our cost, that the Fête de Pentecôte is an equal holiday with English and Corsicans.

There was apparently no limit to the number that might be stowed away in every nook and corner of the creaking vehicle; and, at every turn of the road, we picked up a new wayfarer.

These were chiefly men, dressed in velveteen holiday attire, every man having his gun strapped behind his shoulder, and gourd under his left arm. [216]

Twelve was the original number intended by the coachmaker as the fare—viz., six inside, three in the coupé, and three on the coachman's box, or banquettes; but, before we had done picking up stray passengers, our number was twenty-five! The tarpaulin cover had been taken off the top of the diligence, and twelve persons were drawn up here, precariously lodged where the luggage only should have been.

Among the velveteened men, were two fat women, and several soldiers; and all were as merry as possible, chaffing and joking good-humouredly, and the soldiers occasionally starting a song.

The diligence swayed unpleasantly with its heavy load, and the poor horses lagged more than ever; whilst we were nearly ousted from our elevated seats, and sent flying over their heads into the road below, by the pressure of stout forms behind us.

Some hard substance in the coat pocket of the man behind me caused me considerable annoyance, running ruthlessly into my back; and at last I ventured to lodge a complaint on the subject. [217]

"Monsieur," I said, nudging the muscular owner of the brown velveteen coat with my elbow (in the only fashion possible in our circumscribed position); "Monsieur, you have something *very* hard in your pocket!"

The man, and the woman sitting beside him, turned to stare; but regarded me with stolid curiosity without replying.

"But, monsieur," I said, goaded to indignation by his want of sympathy, "excuse me if I ask you to remove it. Whatever it be, it is uncommonly hard, and it hurts me."

Again the stolid stare, and the astonished silence, broken at length by the woman's voice.

"Tiens!" she exclaimed, with a laugh, "c'est ton pistolet!"

"His pistol!" I said, with considerable animation. "Do you carry your pistol loaded, monsieur?"

The big Corsican looked at me with a quiet scorn.

"Mais oui," he replied, coolly; "certainement!" And he gave it a tug, shrugging his shoulders, that brought its muzzle into rather closer contact with me than before. [218]

"I hope you won't shoot me," said I; whereat they all laughed.

"Mademoiselle," said a merry young soldier, in bright blue, in the next row, "do *you* never carry a pistol when you are travelling?"

"Not in Corsica," said I. "It is unnecessary, as no one is ever uncivil to ladies in this country."

At which innocent little bit of flattery they all grinned benignantly.

But for the next three or four hours there that pistol remained, with its muzzle pressed firmly against my back. I don't know what would be the sensation of most people under similar circumstances; but for a few minutes mine were novel, and I found but a semi-consolation in the reflection that to be shot through the heart is a comparatively painless end.

In half an hour, however, I had forgotten the fact. And, fortunately, Corsican pistols appear to have stiffish triggers; for, notwithstanding several grand jolts, it kept its contents to itself, and forbore to deposit them between my shoulder-blades. [219]

Meanwhile, the little army of guns were placed on the top of the hood over our heads, from whence a stiffer jolt than usual would occasionally bring one or two flying down, to be caught in mid-air by the passengers, before they had perpetrated any mischief.

All travellers are not equally fortunate in escaping gun accidents under like circumstances. Only a short time before, on this very road, a passenger, sitting in the coupé, suddenly discharged his loaded gun by accident, and its contents were lodged in the heart of another man above, who died instantaneously. Both murderer and murdered were poor men; and eighty francs was all that the former was able to pay as compensation to the widow of the poor fellow killed by his carelessness.

Such accidents are by no means rare; but it would take a vast number of them to teach Corsicans that the carrying of loaded firearms is not essential to their dignity and their comfort. [220]

At about noon the diligence stopped at a wayside inn for déjeuner; but having, for certain reasons, our suspicions of the food provided therein, and also preferring the lovely, hot, outside air to the foul, hot, inside air, we walked on down the road, beside the roaring river and the sloping rocks. We had not gone far before we came upon a bank, forty or fifty feet long, composed of a mass of the most magnificent maiden-hair fern, growing in fronds more than a foot long, and wonderfully luxuriant. Here we passed a solitary man sitting by the wayside, who eyed us attentively, and saluted us as we came up. After a minute or two he came after us (curiosity getting the better of the native pride for once), and walked alongside, plying us with the usual questions. He was particularly delighted with our praise of his country, and tried to persuade us to pay it a longer visit. He remarked that he had been puzzled as to our nationality, as he had never seen any Englishwomen before, and the French ladies did not walk after our energetic fashion. [221]

But, in truth, after we had parted from our communicative friend, our energy soon faded, and we toiled slowly up the steep hill under a perfectly broiling sun, glad at last to creep into a scrap of shade a foot or two square, which was all a lengthened scrutiny could discover on the blazing roadway. It was the hottest sun we had felt since our arrival—a sun against which the combined protection of leaves inside the hat, pocket-handkerchiefs as puggerees, and thick umbrellas were of but little avail.

As we rested, at length, on the summit of the hill, an elderly Corsican gentleman joined us, also waiting for the diligence. He seemed very much amused at the independence of English ladies, but said it was perfectly safe in Corsica, where no native would act otherwise than courteously to a stranger; and that he wished it was the fashion for his countrywomen to move about a little more. He had never been out of his own land himself, but was extremely curious about English manners and customs, and thought he must come some day to England. He inquired about the expenses of travelling in England, as he had heard that they were excessive. [222]

What seemed to horrify him most was the price of horses in our country. He said he could buy a capital horse in Corsica for three hundred francs (£12); and he could scarcely credit the fact when we told him that one thousand francs (£40) would purchase but a poor beast in England. He did not think much of the French rule in his island, and hoped for but one benefit from the fusion of the two races, viz., the rousing of his own people from the lethargy regarding domestic pursuits, with which centuries of warfare had impregnated them. Our friend was a most polite and agreeable companion, and it was interesting to converse with him, for he represented the older Corsican type, before the native character and sentiments had been obliterated by French education, and mimicry of French thought—as is the case now with most of the younger and more travelled Corsican gentlemen.

At last the diligence lumbered up, and up every one climbed—soldiers, gendarmes, sportsmen, fat women, and ourselves—to our perches, to descend the long white dusty road still skirting the river side, and occasionally passing little groups of women and girls down by its brink, engaged in gathering into baskets the hard grey pebbles, which they then placed in heaps beside the path for its mending. [223]

The long flat road to Bastia continued monotonously for ten or twelve miles; but about seven or eight miles from the town a sudden turn brought before us the most extensive and magnificent view. For miles on every side extended a vast unbroken plain, and the east coast lay before us spread out in sweeps of pale green marshy land, bright blue sea, and intersecting salt lakes. A little further on, Bastia herself came into view, standing white and picturesque against her brown rocks, and over her sunny sea, on which lay many a white-sailed vessel, unmoved by breath of wind or sway of tide in the hot calm of the June day, whilst the large village of Furriano, on an adjacent hill, looked greyly down from its cool green nest of foliage. [224]

For the last few miles before reaching Bastia, the banks by the wayside were hedged with the most splendid pointed-leaved cactus in the island, growing eight or ten feet high, and varied by sheets of rich blossomed flowers.

The road was gay with holiday makers, in carts, on mules, and on foot—chiefly men, with a few women; and we noticed, as we neared this side of the country, the increasing brightness of the costumes of both men and women, and the relief from the universal black of the interior.

The men wore gay sashes and coloured caps, and even the women ventured on a striped headkerchief.



Between three and four o'clock we entered Bastia, having deposited most of our holiday passengers at the entrance to the town; and were not sorry to jump down from our stifling banquette on to the blazing road before the diligence office. Here we said good-bye to our elderly friend, who introduced a nice-looking boy whom he had just embraced, as his son; and finding two strong-armed women to carry our boxes down the street, once more entered the Hôtel de France, and greeted our friends, including the gentlemanly old proprietor, his son, and the conceited little waiter, who, with his three or four companions, seemed genuinely pleased to welcome us again. [225]

A stroll up the shady side of the streets filled up the time till table d'hôte, when we again found ourselves the only ladies amongst a lively party of twenty or thirty French and Corsicans.

The Leghorn boat was to leave at 10 p.m., and at 9.30 we started for the dock side, kindly escorted by M. Valéry himself, the head of the shipping firm. It was a good boat, with a deck saloon and upper deck—in every way very superior to the one in which we had arrived.

So was the weather. Not a breath of wind disturbed the utter stillness of the atmosphere, and the moon was rising in golden glory against a deep blue sky. Had it not been for the intense heat, it would have been a perfect night; but as we paced slowly up and down beside the dock it was almost difficult to breathe. [226]

When at length the last bell rang, and we were all on board, and pushing out to sea, the scene was exquisite.

Bastia, with her many lights, moving slowly away into soft haziness; above, the unclouded moon, and three or four brilliant stars; and, on the water, lying just across our track of foam, a golden sheet of glory stretching across from horizon to deck.

The heat made it impossible to enter even the saloon cabin. We, at any rate, thought so, although the foreign passengers all managed to bear it; so we camped out for the night on a high coil of ropes, which presently, in the soaking dews, became a perfect mass of sponge.

The damp, however, notwithstanding the evil prognostications of the steward, proved harmless; and it was, at any rate, a choice of evils, between possible fever and almost certain asphyxia.

The swell increased as we got into mid sea, but the calm and the clear light continued; and we could see the shapes of Elba's hills as we passed under their lee—the very lighthouse on one of them, and even the figures of the sailors on the deck of the slower-going vessel which was bound upon the same route as ourselves. [227]

And so, in the romantic stillness of the summer night, and the glorious moonlight, fitly faded away the dim outlines of the little island; and Corsica became a beautiful dream of the past.

As Corsica is, comparatively speaking, an untravelled country, it may be as well to add a few particulars for the benefit of tourists.

There are two principal routes from London. One is by the direct line through France from Paris to Marseilles; thence, by sixteen hours' steaming, to Ajaccio. The other is through the Mont Cenis tunnel, from Paris to Turin; thence by Genoa to Leghorn, and by seven hours' steam to Bastia.

The first route is undoubtedly the best and shortest for any but the worst of sailors. The Marseilles steamers are larger and better than those of Leghorn, and the whole journey from England can be done in a little more than three days; whereas the Italian route cannot well be done, by ladies at any rate, in less than four. [228]

By the former journey, too, the annoyance of three custom-house visitations is reduced to one; and, for those who have no particular wish to cross the island, a two days' journey in diligence is avoided—which journey is often unsafe and unpleasant in winter, on account of the heavy snows on the mountain passes near Corte.

As regards expenses, Corsica is by no means a dear country. About nine francs a day will pay for all expenses of food and lodgings—sometimes less; and, as a rule, the better hotels are quite equally inexpensive with the wretched country inns.

As there are no railways, travelling, of course, has to be done exclusively by driving; and there are no comfortable vehicles to be found elsewhere than at Ajaccio and Bastia. At the latter place, their number is extremely limited.

A nice open carriage, with hood, and pair of horses, is charged at the rate of twenty francs a day, and two francs a day at least is expected by the driver. Thus, whilst on a driving tour, if shared, as it usually is, with a companion, the travellers' daily expenses will be a little more than doubled, or about twenty francs, including everything. [229]

This, I think, is a far cheaper rate of travelling than in any other European country; besides being a most agreeable and efficient mode of seeing the beauties of nature.

Corsicans are first-rate drivers; and their steeds, though unsightly, very sure-footed.

The climate is delicious in early spring, and the flowers and trees in their glory in April and May. The lowland towns become hot and unhealthy for visitors, in June, if not before; but for those who do not mind roughing it, or who are anxious for sport, the higher villages and mountain forests afford health and enjoyment all the summer.

The east coast of the island is to be avoided by travellers. It has few beauties to offer, and is rife with malarious fever nine months out of the twelve. Corsican fever is remarkably unpleasant and clinging, and has been known to return year after year to its victim, ending in dropsy. [230]

Consumptive patients, coming for the winter months to Ajaccio, will find every comfort there; but those who come to see the island must not be too particular regarding the luxuries or even necessities of life.

A good dinner at sunset (without garlic and nicely cooked), they will obtain without difficulty, even at the tiniest villages; but that will probably be the only eatable meal in the day,—and sour bread and coffee for breakfast, and sour bread and cheese for lunch, will leave them in a condition to appreciate its delights.

As regards the cleanliness or uncleanness of the accommodation in the country inns, the opinions of tourists in Corsica differ so widely that one is slow to pronounce a strong verdict upon the subject.

I can only say that we found few pleasant, and many disgusting, on this point; but I must add that this opinion is considered uncharitable by more than one friend who has travelled as much in the country as we did.

At the Ajaccio, Corte, and Sartene hotels, we found perfectly clean accommodation, and the same could be said of the village inns at Propriano, Vivario, Evisa, Ghisoni, and Belgodere; Bonifacio was not bad, and Carghese might have been worse in some respects. [231]

Enough has been said to warn the traveller from visiting Bocognano or Calvi; and Zicavo and Solenzara bear likewise an exceedingly bad reputation.

At Propriano, Vivario, or Evisa, a pleasant stay might be made. Propriano is on the sea level, and has not much to recommend it except its sea, its shells, and its lovely views; but Vivario and Evisa are situated in the midst of exquisite mountain scenery, and would make suitable summer halting-places. [232]

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HISTORY OF CORSICA.

The history of Corsica, from the earliest times down to the middle of the eighteenth century, is an unparalleled history of bloodshed, misery, and heroism.

As far as is known, the first colonization of the island was the work of Phocæans; but, about 260 B.C., it fell into the hands of the Romans. The conquest of Corsica, even in these early days, and attempted by so formidable a power as that of Rome, was, however, no light matter; and for about one hundred years the brave little island kept her conquerors at bay.

Finally, however, she succumbed, remaining in their hands for several centuries; in fact, until the fall of the Roman Empire. [233]

From this time until the close of the eleventh century, the story of Corsica is nothing but a series of contests, external and civil.

One foe after another attacked and devastated the unhappy island. Greeks, Saracens, Tuscans, and others in turn attempted to possess themselves of it; fighting over it like dogs over a bone, or handing it unscrupulously from one to another.

The natives, meanwhile, were engaged in an incessant heroic struggle with their foes, to whom they never willingly submitted, at the same time that they were resisting the cruel tyrannies of their own feudal aristocracy.

Trade was unknown, and cultivation neglected; the coasts, harassed by marauders, were deserted; the inland villages, a prey to the lawless exactions of the barons, were impoverished; and many of the poorer people took refuge among the fastnesses of their mountains, carrying with them little but their weapons and their freedom.

In the tenth century, however, notwithstanding the confusion and warfare that reigned around, we hear of the first constitution framed by the Corsicans, under their legislator Sambuccio. [234]

This democratic republic was the foundation of all the later constitutions in the island, even including that of Paoli, and bears a strong testimony to the intelligence and the self-respect of a people whose patriotism could not be denied even by their enemies, but who were considered on the continent as a semi-barbarous race.

The head of the constitution consisted of a Council of Twelve, chosen by the podestas, who comprised the lower legislative body. These podestas, or magistrates, were the presidents of their respective provincial assemblies, each formed of a certain number of scattered parishes, or pieves; and, associated with them, were certain "Fathers of the Community." These men were probably elected for a year, and were to have a special eye to the interests of the poorer or more

defenceless portion of the community. They, again, had the right of choosing their own president, termed the Caporale, who was expressly intended as the people's representative in the highest council and elsewhere. [235]

In 1098 Pope Urban (who, without any fair title, laid claim to the ownership of Corsica) installed the Archbishop of Pisa as feudal lord over the island.

For about a hundred years, the Pisans kept possession of it, or at least parts of it, never wholly subduing the warlike and determined inhabitants; and, during this time they governed wisely and well, building towns and making roads, and encouraging, as far as they were able in the disturbed condition of the island, industry and agriculture. But the moderate government of Pisa was not long to remain unmolested. The Genoese were beginning to cast covetous eyes upon Corsica; and, in the beginning of the twelfth century, persuaded the See of Rome to bestow upon them about one-half of the territory she had, rather more than a century before, given to Pisa.

The Pisans, naturally resenting this action, prepared to defend what they considered their property; and, for the next hundred and fifty years, an almost incessant contest was kept up between the two parties, some of the natives remaining neutral, but for the most part joining one side or the other. [236]

The great hope and support of the Pisans was a noble Corsican of the name of Guidice della Rocca, who had lived for many years in exile at the court of Pisa, but had not ceased to love his country with a burning ardour, and who foresaw, in the rule of Genoa, a cruel taskmaster, and the extinction of the growing prosperity of his country. He was brave, determined, and wise; and, for a long time, his efforts against the Genoese, in command of the Pisan troops, were attended with success.

But both Bonifacio and Calvi were not only garrisoned, but to a great extent colonized by natives of Genoa, and with these *points d'appui* and the superior power of Genoa to back him up, General Doria could not but, after a time, get the better of his opponents.

When blind and very old, Della Rocca, the noble patriot and just judge, was treacherously betrayed into the hands of his enemies by a son of his own, and ended his days, deserted and uncared for, in a wretched dungeon in Genoa. [237]

From that time until the middle of the eighteenth century, Corsica remained writhing beneath the scourge of the Genoese power; sometimes, however, shaking off the yoke and chastising the enemy, and never, for more than a few years at a time, remaining quiescent beneath the tyranny they loathed.

Crushed but not quelled, ruined but not disheartened, decimated but never terrified, the Corsican nature, strong and simple, remained true to its universal instinct, the principle which was their very life and being, and which they imbibed with their mother's milk—love of country and love of liberty.

During that time, the land literally bathed its plains in the blood of martyrs, and no Corsican thought it too much to give up home and life for the sake of that suffering country which was so dear to him in her suffering, or that freedom which was to him more than life itself. [238]

The castle of Guidice della Rocca, who was the first Corsican of mark to lose his life in disputing the invasion of Genoa, is situated on a lofty rock above Monticelli, a mountain village about half-way between San Fiorenzo and Isola Rossa. It is now, of course, in ruins, but still commands the road below with stern grey walls that are not the less grand for the decaying touch of age.

About seventy years after the death of Guidice, another of his family rose up, Arrigo by name, who, until he was poisoned in the year 1401, did good service for his country, vanquishing the Genoese, driving them for some years almost entirely from the island, and winning the friendship of the king of Spain.

But Arrigo, although wise and brave, was cruel; and he soon raised up a strong home faction against himself by his remorseless measures. This was headed by some of the barons, who ultimately drove him from the country. But only for two months; after which time, Arrigo della Rocca re-appeared, defeated the Genoese, and regained his power in the island. [239]

But Genoa had not now to learn for the first time the use of poison, nor to seek far for assassins to carry out her infamous designs. In the history of Corsica, treachery and murder on the part of the Genoese republic play a conspicuous part, and they were foes with which the devoted heroism and the ceaseless energy of their opponents were unable to cope. As fast, however, as one patriot of note disappeared, another rose up in his place to take the part of leader among his distracted countrymen; and Vincentello d'Istria, reared an exile, and serving in the army of the king of Aragon, but by birth belonging to the same noble family as Arrigo, was the next to make his name famous in his country's cause.

For more than fifteen years he led his countrymen, with varying success, against the Genoese forces; at one time even wresting from them Calvi, their great stronghold, and going near to possessing himself also of Bonifacio, which, however, after a brave resistance by its Genoese garrison, was relieved at the last moment. [240]

But at length force and intrigue together proved too much for D'Istria, his enemies cunningly sowing dissensions in every available quarter, and rousing up against him the antagonism of

some of the proud and lawless seigniors, or barons. He left Corsica to entreat the assistance of Spain, but was taken prisoner on the voyage, and ended his days by decapitation at Genoa in 1434.

For the next twenty years greater confusion than ever reigned in the unhappy island.

Here and there a noble-minded patriot was to be found amongst the barons, a man who loved his country better than rank or wealth, and who could merge his own interests uncomplainingly in those of his suffering countrymen; but as a rule, the seigniors were selfish and proud, fighting more for their own supremacy than for the freedom of their land, and the nobler spirits were to be found amongst those of less noble birth.

During these twenty years half a dozen barons kept up petty civil wars in their country, each striving after the position of chief or king of Corsica; whilst the contest with the Genoese troops never flagged; and the king of Aragon likewise put in a claim to the island. [241]

In 1453, by the consent of the puzzled and distracted people, whose blood had been shed unavailingly in every direction, and whose foes were as numerous as the hydra-headed monster, it was resolved to accept the "protection" or supremacy of the Bank of St. George of Genoa, a company of capitalists, useful to the Genoese court, which ceded its Corsican claims to them. The Bank accordingly commenced its process of "farming" Corsica, which, save for an interregnum of about twenty years, when the Milanese and Piombinese took their place, was continued for nearly three hundred years. But not unchallenged.

A large proportion of the people had never consented from the first to this change of masters. They had no greater faith in the Bank of Genoa than in the Court of Genoa, and preferred death, starvation, and ruin to any foreign master. And by degrees the cruel exactions and boundless injustice of the new governors brought over to their opinion the small remnant who, in their despair, had agreed to the new arrangement. [242]

Another Della Rocca appeared on the scene at this time, and for many years he and a rival nobleman, Giovanni Paoli da Leca, with their retainers, fought with equal spirit against each other and against the common enemy.

In 1501, Da Leca was driven from his beloved country, never to return; but the dauntless Renuccio della Rocca continued his efforts for many years longer. Constantly defeated and chased from the island, he as constantly returned again to harass his bitter foes, sometimes accompanied only by a few followers.

Twice he was forced to come to terms, and was carried as a prisoner to Genoa; but his spirit never failed, and each time he managed, after a short space, to escape from prison, the Genoese on the first occasion revenging themselves for the loss of the father by the execution of his eldest son. [243]

In 1510 this determined man returned for the last time to his native land, with only eight followers. The peasantry were exhausted and decimated by ceaseless wars, and the leader for whom they longed was the exiled Da Leca.

They knew the cause was hopeless; and Della Rocca, the declared enemy of their favoured Da Leca, had not their confidence. They pitied him, but they would not follow him; and Renuccio became a wandering bandit amongst the western hills. His previous unsuccessful risings had been followed by the most remorseless cruelties on the part of Andreas Doria, the Genoese commander, who had tortured the inhabitants and laid waste the villages which had given countenance or shelter to their fellow-countryman.

And now, once more resolved to free itself of this unpleasant enemy, the Genoese Bank recommenced its usual course of cruel persecution.

Renuccio was sought for in every direction by bands of Italian soldiers, whilst the unhappy villagers around were put to the torture to force them to discover his whereabouts. [244]

This no man was found capable of doing. They would not deliver the man who had fought for them and for their country into the hands of his enemies; but, overcome by their miseries, they slew him themselves, and his dead body was found at length among the fastnesses around Ajaccio, in May, 1511.

For now nearly forty years, there was a temporary lull in the active resistance of the Corsicans to their masters; and during this time the Genoese Bank mitigated a little their severity, and ruled their ill-gotten possession with some apparent benevolence.

Many of the higher nobles migrated to other lands, and entering foreign service, distinguished themselves in continental warfare. The people, meanwhile, were suffering from national exhaustion consequent on the incessant destructive warfare of centuries, and perhaps also waiting to see if the present promise of a paternal government were likely to be fulfilled. [245]

They had not long to wait. The fair pledges of the Bank soon faded away—the reality of cruel exactions took their place—and once more the indefatigable people rose to arms. The period of apparent calm had but been the moment's lull before the storm, the gathering up of fresh forces for renewed contest. And those few years had matured perhaps the greatest man ever produced by Corsica—a man whose heroism and whose devotion were equal to Paoli's, but who possessed

besides a savage grandeur of nature peculiar to himself, his country, and his age.

This was Sampiero, the truest friend, the most implacable foe, and perhaps the most iron-nerved man the world has ever known.

His youth was spent abroad, and he served with equal distinction amongst the Medici Black Bands at Florence, and subsequently with the French army, where he became colonel of a Corsican regiment under Francis I., and won the friendship of Bayard.

It was not until Sampiero was nearly fifty years old that he took any active part in the struggles of his country. [246]

Some two years before, he had visited his native land in order to woo and win the beautiful Vannina Ornano for his wife.

The Ornano family was, in point of nobility, far superior to Sampiero's own, but the Corsican colonel's fame in courts and in the field was already too widely spread for him to be considered an unworthy son-in-law to any noble; whilst he himself, we may well believe, was of an appearance well fitted to succeed in winning the affections of any woman. He was a tall man, with the carriage and piercing eye of a soldier, and with dark curling hair and features of a stern nobility, that harmonized well with his character. His nature was simple and self-denying, his life spotless and engrossed with noble aims, and his depth of affection great; but his anger was terrible, and his scorn for weakness or dishonesty almost cruel.

The history of his marriage is a terrible romance, ending in tragedy.

He was already, at the time of his marriage, dreaded by the masters of his country as one likely to be a formidable foe; and they only followed their usual illegal system of tyranny, in falling upon him so soon as he set foot in his own land, and thrusting him into prison. He was soon liberated again, owing to the interference of the French ambassador at the Genoese court; but the incident cannot fail to have deepened his determination to be his country's deliverer when occasion offered. [247]

An opening soon occurred in the project of the French king to lead his troops against Corsica, both as an injury to Genoa, with whom he was at war, and also as a menace to their ally and his enemy, the emperor of Germany.

In the year 1553, a French fleet, joined by some Turkish vessels, and having on board Marshal Thermes, and Admiral Paulin, and Sampiero himself, together with many other exiled Corsican patriots, sailed for the island.

An emissary had already been despatched thither some time before by Sampiero, and the greater part of the nation were awaiting their arrival with eagerness, prepared to welcome the French as friends, and to assist them against the common foe. [248]

The gates of Bastia were immediately thrown open to the invaders. The Genoese garrison and bastion walls of Calvi and Bonifacio proved for some time too strong for Turkish and French vessels; but San Fiorenzo was made to capitulate to Thermes, and the impregnable Corte, and the fortress of Ajaccio, both threw wide their gates to welcome Sampiero.

Presently Bonifacio, after a heroic resistance by the Genoese garrison, surrendered to the Turks; and the Genoese, routed in every direction, had no single fortress left to them save Calvi.

For about three months these successes continued; when the Genoese Bank, terrified at the loss of all their possessions, sent Andreas Doria to the rescue. Doria was now an aged man, but his good fortune remained true to him, and he succeeded in wresting back some of the victories obtained by the French.

Sampiero being also about this time incapacitated by a severe wound, he defeated the Corsicans in the battle of Morosaglia. This defeat, however, quickly brought the sick hero from his bed, again to turn the fate of war; and for five years the contest continued with varying success. [249]

Then followed a cruel stroke to the poor deluded islanders, who had fancied that France was for ever to be their protector and ally. The king of France, tired of war, and ungenerously forgetful of former promises, concluded a treaty with his continental enemies, by which he again surrendered Corsica to her old tyrant Genoa. Decimated and discouraged, the Corsicans saw their six years of bloodshed and impoverishment wasted by the political selfishness of their stronger neighbours, and the independence for which they had so willingly laid down life, and laid desolate home, toyed with as a plaything, and bartered by the monarch in whose good faith they had trusted.

But, if their power of resistance was not crushed, much less was Sampiero's. Throwing up his old employment, he now travelled from court to court, seeking assistance for his beloved country in this her last and most treacherous stroke of fortune. [250]

Whilst engaged in this occupation, a terrible domestic calamity suddenly reached his ears—a calamity which, to his half-savage, wholly-noble mind, engrossed with love of country and a passion for that country's freedom, seemed the cruellest and basest disgrace that had ever befallen a man.

His wife Vannina, who had not lived much, in these troublous times, with her stern and warlike husband, was now residing with her two boys at Marseilles, under French protection. The

Genoese, hoping to injure Sampiero through her weakness, surrounded the lonely woman by friendly seeming spies, who at length persuaded her credulous nature that the cause of her husband was one useless to his country, prejudicial to his own interests, and that it was the duty of a true wife to dissuade, rather than to abet this madman in his lawless endeavours.

Sampiero was in Algiers seeking the assistance of the celebrated Barbarossa, when news was brought him that Vannina was about to escape to Genoa. [251]

Scarcely able to credit the terrible idea that his own wife could desert the cause that to him was more sacred than life, he yet refused to leave the work on which he was engaged, and sent a friend instead to Marseilles to follow and intercept the fugitive.

Vannina was overtaken at Antibes, and took refuge in the bishop's house.

The prelate, however, afraid perhaps of Sampiero, soon ejected the miserable woman, who proceeded to Aix. The Parliament there offered her its protection.

But Vannina, though weak, was of Corsican blood, and sprung from a race of heroes, and she refused to be protected from her husband. "I have sinned," she said, sadly; "I am his wife; let him do to me what he pleases."

And she waited for his arrival in the castle of Zaizi, near Aix, where, after concluding his more pressing business, the stern patriot came to fetch her.

Silently the two travelled back together to the deserted home at Marseilles; the heart of one full of bitter pain and shame and anger, the other of a sad realization of her treachery. [252]

What was the tempest raging in the mind of Sampiero, we know not; but it is impossible to believe that one of his nature contemplated murder beforehand.

As he crossed the threshold of the house, where he had left Vannina a beloved and trusted wife, now empty and tenantless owing to her desertion of her country's cause and her want of faith in him, the realization of the disgrace she had brought upon herself and him, and the disloyalty she might even have instilled into the hearts of their children, suddenly roused the demon of passion in his breast, and possessed by madness, he turned upon her and plunged his dagger in her heart.

It was fifteen years now since the rugged Corsican had married his beautiful bride, and his love for her had never cooled. The very fierceness of his affection, however, only added a sting to the frenzy of his outraged feelings; and if Sampiero ever repented him of his cruel deed, none knew of that remorse, further than believing they could read its signs on the sterner, sadder features of the old man's face. [253]

In 1564 Sampiero landed in Corsica with a little band of about fifty men, French and Corsicans.

He had been courteously treated by one and all of the courts he had visited, but he had failed to obtain any help for his country more substantial than promises.

In accordance with his chivalric spirit, he burnt, on landing, the vessel in which he had arrived, that the means of return might be closed to his followers and himself.

As he advanced into the country the people everywhere rose and joined him; and, defeating the Genoese before Corte, he took possession of that important citadel.

The victory of Vescovato soon followed; and the Genoese, trembling for their cause, sent Stephen Doria with a superior force to oppose the skilful patriot.

One of Doria's first actions was a puerile and ignoble one. Marching to Bastelica, the birthplace of the great Corsican, he burnt the village, and destroyed Sampiero's house. [254]

But Sampiero's house and his possessions were little to him, compared to the sufferings of his country; and he was far more deeply touched by the cruelties inflicted on the harmless and the innocent by his unfeeling foe. For three years he carried on the warfare, more or less successfully, against the very superior forces of Genoa; and during this time was not merely the military leader of his people, but also their statesman, convoking national assemblies, which he guided by his far-seeing wisdom to prudent measures, and in every way endeavouring to lay the seeds of a constitution that, when peace should come, might be a blessing to his country.

But the patriot was doomed at length to fall by treachery. Since the fatal act of passion which resulted in his wife's death, the family of the Ornano had naturally become his bitterest foes; and, to abet their terrible vendetta, they deserted their very country and offered to assist the Genoese by stratagem.

The old warrior was decoyed by forged letters, with but a small party of followers, into a narrow defile, where his enemies, rushing suddenly from their ambuscade, swarmed upon him, eager for his blood. The old lion fought hard for life, but was at length overcome, and his head cut off and carried to Doria. [255]

It was in the year 1567, when Sampiero was in his sixty-ninth year, that this greatest of Corsicans thus fell, by the sword of his fellow-countrymen.

For two years his eldest son Alfonso continued the war with considerable success; and then a

treaty was concluded with Genoa on favourable terms for the brave little island.

For the next fifty years Corsica remained inactive; depressed and miserable under renewed Genoese exactions and tyrannies, but too exhausted to resume hostilities.

In 1729, however, fighting again broke out, suddenly roused by one of the many private wrongs then pressing upon the lower orders, and the rebellion soon spread over the whole island.

It was well organized under two leaders of energy and ability, and was more determined in its measures than ever. Internal reforms had been effected, a general oath of resistance to the death against Genoa was adopted, and the very clergy, who had sometimes shown themselves but lukewarm friends to their country's cause, were at length roused by the dishonesty of the republic, to take part with their fellow-countrymen, and to declare the war a sacred one. [256]

Genoa had recourse to the emperor of Germany, from whom she bought several thousand mercenaries, who were sent across the sea to try their skill upon these unconquerable islanders. Genoa paid high for her assistance: thirty thousand gulden monthly for the force of eight thousand men; and for every man killed or deserting, a compensation of one hundred gulden.

The Corsicans, who knew of this arrangement, and who, half armed and half clothed, half starved and unaided, had nothing but their own natural skill in warfare, and their heritage of heroism upon which to depend, were in nowise intimidated by their new antagonists; but, when they struck down a German, were in the habit of shouting scornfully, "A hundred gulden, Genoa!" [257]

Meanwhile, the courage and chivalry of his insular foes had won for them the regard of the opposing General Wachtendonk; and, chiefly through his mediation, a treaty, supposed to be favourable to the islanders, was concluded between Genoa and the Corte legislative assembly in 1732.

Wachtendonk remained in the island another year to see the treaty carried out, and in June, 1734, the German general returned to his own country, carrying with him the regard of his enemies, who would fain have had to deal with him instead of the republic that had hired him.

But he had scarcely retired before the treaty was broken. Genoa began anew her system of illegal arrests and attempted assassinations; and, once more, the people rose under Hyacinth Paoli, an obscure native of the little village of Morosaglia, but a man of spirit and talent, and a scholar.

Under the direction of this man, and of Giafferi, his colleague, a democratic constitution, in the highest degree prudent and practical, was framed for the Corsican people; whilst the popular enthusiasm in the continued war found vent in standards representing the Holy Virgin and her Son, implying that, unassisted as they were, and unreachd by human sympathy or compassion, they placed themselves beneath the guardianship of Heaven. [258]

Early in the next year occurred a strange and romantic adventure in this adventureful country.

A man, handsome and well-dressed, surrounded by obsequious courtiers, and attended by every luxury, landed in the island from a vessel well-furnished with gold, ammunition, and arms.

This man was a German adventurer, Baron Theodore von Neuhoff, who, after a romantic youth, had suddenly conceived a desire to become king of Corsica.

He was a man of great talent and personal fascination, of good judgment, and enthusiastic disposition.

He had fallen in love with the bravery and determination of the Corsicans, and longed to head such a nation. [259]

He had put himself into communication with the leading islanders; and, having really some little influence at the continental courts, persuaded them that he had much more.

He offered to obtain such assistance from foreign potentates, by his persuasions, as should effectually oust the Genoese; and, in return, requested the crown of Corsica.

His genius and his enthusiasm were so great, and his promises so dazzling, that, after some hesitation, the poor Corsicans, in their despair, seized upon this last straw; and in March, 1736, Theodore was crowned king.

His exertions for the good of his country were untiring. He established manufactures and promoted with all his power art and commerce, at the same time that, with all the force of his genius, he endeavoured to persuade foreign powers to lend their assistance to his new subjects in the field. His style of living meanwhile was regal and sumptuous, and a contemporary Italian historian tells us that he was incessantly surrounded by a state guard, and that his meals were served to him from the richest silver dishes. [260]

But, alas! the fleet which he had promised his new subjects never arrived.

The foreign princes declined to assist him; and presently the Corsicans became dissatisfied, and began to demand something more convincing than reiterated promises. Towards the conclusion of his first year of sovereignty, Theodore left Corsica on a continental tour, with the avowed object of hastening the promised succour. In two years he returned, bringing with him three large and several smaller war vessels, handsomely laden with ammunition, which had actually been raised by means of his talents and persuasive faculties, chiefly amongst the Dutch.

But, meanwhile, the Corsicans had had other affairs to which to attend. France had interfered at the request of Genoa; and negotiations were actively going on, which the arrival of the pseudo-king could only interrupt.

Theodore, although now so well attended, found himself unheeded and disregarded; and after a few months was forced to leave his new kingdom to its fate, and to return to the continent. [261]

Five years later, in 1743, he again returned, again well equipped, this time with English vessels, but with the same ill success. Convinced now that his chance was over and his dream of royalty destroyed, Theodore returned to England with a sore heart, spending his remaining years in this asylum for dethroned kings and ruined adventurers. His tomb may be seen in Westminster Abbey.

For the next five and twenty years the war continued between Corsica and Genoa, still fought out on the blood-deluged plains of the unhappy little island.

But the republic of Genoa was now long past her prime, and her energies were fading into senility; and, had it not been for the ever-increasing assistance of France, her intrepid foes would long ere this have got the better of her.

In May, 1768, a treaty was signed between Genoa and France, by which the republic ceded her now enfeebled claims on Corsica to her ally, and left her long-oppressed victim to fight the contest out with the French troops. [262]

During this time, first Gaffori, then Pasquale Paoli, were the leaders of the people. Gaffori, a man of refinement, and a hero of skill and intrepidity, was murdered in a vendetta in 1753, and in 1755 Pasquale, youngest son of the old patriot Hyacinth Paoli, left his position as officer in the Neapolitan service, and landed, by the general desire of his own people, at Aleria, to undertake the command of the Corsican army.

Pasquale was quite a young man at this time, but was well known to be a highly educated student of no mean abilities, and a soldier who had served with distinction in foreign active service.

He did not confine his services to the military affairs of his country, but endeavoured to put a stop to that terrible internal scourge, the vendetta, which was ruining a noble people.

Notwithstanding that he was now and then harassed by opposition from one or two of the inland nobles, he continued his good work, and effected many domestic reforms, at the same time that he fitted out a Corsican fleet, and successfully resisted the French attacks. [263]

From 1764 to 1768 a truce was concluded between the foes; and this time Paoli spent in preparations for future emergencies, and in a wise consolidation of the independent constitution of his country.

Militia were trained and banded, schools established, and crime punished; and law and order, under the wise administration of this great man, began everywhere to prevail.

In August, 1768, the truce was to expire; but, before the appointed day had arrived, an army of twenty thousand French suddenly swooped down upon the luckless island, and endeavoured by sheer force of numbers to crush out resistance at once and for ever.

It was a hopeless struggle for Corsica; but the heroism of the undaunted people moved all Europe to sympathy.

A company of Germans, and many other foreigners, joined their ranks and fought side by side with the patriots in the defence of their island. [264]

The French sent over their best generals to the small country; and Marboeuf, Chauvelin, and De Vaux in turn worked at its subjugation.

A short but desperate struggle ensued, which was distinguished by the wildest and most romantic deeds of valour; and, against the greatest odds, the Corsicans at first got the better of their formidable foe, at the Bridge of Golo, in the taking of Borgo, and in other lesser actions.

Boys, and even women, joined in the fight; whilst quarter was refused and unasked.

Marboeuf was wounded, and the garrison of Borgo, consisting of seven hundred men, forced to surrender, after the defeat of the entire French army.

Ten new battalions were sent for from France, and these again repulsed in Nebbio.

The Corsican troops were commanded by Pasquale Paoli and his brother Clemens. As Pasquale Paoli was undoubtedly one of the noblest and wisest men of his time, so was his brother one of the strangest and most romantic of characters. [265]

Pasquale, with the clear blue eye, the line brow, and gentle dignity of carriage, was at once the statesman, the general, and the philanthropist.

He was the most unselfish and the most upright of men; benevolence, simplicity, and patriotism endeared him justly to his own country, whilst his talents and his breadth of mind made his friendship valued by the great men of all countries. Frederick the Great, Alfieri, and Dr. Johnson may be named amongst their number.



Clemens was of a different character. With perhaps less breadth of intellect, and less diplomatic power, he was gifted with a passionate depth of nature that could scarcely have existed in less troublous times.

Having for many years served as a soldier—first at Naples, and then amongst his own people—he afterwards added the profession of a monk to his military occupations.

Entering the convent of Morosaglia, he emerged from it only to fight his country's battles, with a courage and a skill that seemed unparalleled. [266]

Burning with enthusiasm, at once for his religion and his country's cause, he spent the night in prayer, and the day in deeds of unheard-of prowess. His success was wonderful; his spirit never failed, nor was his hope quenched; and he constantly rescued his brother from difficulty and danger, gaining many a brilliant action over the foe.

He was said to be a dead shot, and to have an eagle eye, and instant judgment in battle; but in daily life to be gentle, grave, and melancholy.

The French, not content with their overwhelming forces, essayed the corruption of some of the national leaders by gold and by fair promises, and managed to sow distrust amongst the Corsican generals.

Meanwhile, the country was being destroyed, and the troops becoming exhausted; and none but Clemens Paoli could now believe in the ultimate success of the Corsicans.

The battle of Ponte Nuovo, on the 9th of May, 1769, at once and for ever annihilated the Corsican cause, and lost the brave islanders their independence. [267]

After this victory, the French rapidly gained possession of the whole island, and shortly afterwards the struggle was abandoned. Paoli foresaw the uselessness of protracting a bloody and hopeless contest; and, preferring the possible sneers of a few to the ruin of his beloved country, left Corsica with most of his generals for the continent.

In the same year, 1769, Napoleon Buonaparte was born in the house out of the Place du Marché at Ajaccio. "I was born," he said himself in a letter to Paoli, "the year my country died."

For some years exiled Corsicans of note endeavoured to resume the struggle, landing from the continent here and there on the shores of their own country; but none of these efforts were successful, and Marboeuf, who succeeded Count de Vaux as governor of the island, did much, by his wise and benevolent rule, to reconcile the people to their new masters, and to promote the prosperity of Corsica.

He died in 1786; and shortly afterwards the Revolution drew the two nations together, into relations which were at first friendly, and finally enthusiastic; so that, in the year 1789, Corsica, by her own desire, was incorporated in the new constitution of the French republic. [268]

Clemens Paoli had remained in Italy; but, for twenty years, Pasquale had now eaten the bread of exile in London, when he was invited by his own people and by the French National Assembly to return to Corsica.

Made much of on his way through Paris by Robespierre and the leaders of the people, at Marseilles Paoli was welcomed by a Corsican deputation headed by young Napoleon Buonaparte and his brother Joseph.

Reaching his own island, he became President of the Assembly and General of the National Guard, but soon roused French suspicion in these capacities.

Paoli was no bonnet-rouge or regicide, and sympathizing, as he did, with the French republican constitution, he hated the crimes and extravagances of the French communists. This was soon discovered, and a report being promulgated that Paoli intended to alienate his country from France, he was summoned before a court of inquiry. [269]

The result was party strife in every direction. The main body of Corsicans refused to consider their countryman guilty of high treason, whilst a few sided with France, and fighting soon broke out.

Paoli requested the assistance of the English, offering to place the island under their protection.

Admirals Hood and Nelson proceeded to Corsica, where they succeeded in completely routing the republicans, and in making themselves masters of the island.

After a good deal of misunderstanding, and some juggling on the part of the English, the Corsicans consented to be governed by a vice-royalty under Great Britain.

The whole island expected Paoli would be viceroy; instead of which, he was recalled in his old age from the country for which he had spent his whole life, and a stranger sent out in his place to govern his native land.

Clemens, more happy, had returned—after twenty years of monastic life at Vallombrosa, in Tuscany—to die in his own country, and had closed his weary eyes in his native village of Morosaglia; but Pasquale came back, a saddened and humiliated man, to England, dying in hopeless exile, after the gleam of hope had once more illumined his path. The bones of the last [270]

great patriot of Corsica lie in St. Pancras churchyard.

The British government was not successful. Sir Gilbert Elliot (afterwards Lord Minto) was ignorant of the country he had to deal with, and deficient in tact.

On one occasion, noticing the dirty condition of the streets leading to the citadel of Bastia, he ordered out a party of Corsican soldiery, to sweep them clean. When the men found out for what purpose they had been assembled, they were exceedingly indignant. Had the officer insisted, there would have been a mutiny. Throwing down the shovels and brushes, they dispersed angrily, remarking "that they had enlisted for soldiers, and not for scavengers."

On another occasion, when the viceroy was paying his first visit to Ajaccio, a ball was given in his honour by the inhabitants. A bust of Paoli adorned the hall; seeing which, the viceroy's aide-de-camp flung it down, exclaiming, "What business has this old charlatan here!" The bust was thrown into a closet and broken to pieces; and when complaint was made to Sir Gilbert, he refused to interfere, or to inflict any punishment on his aide-de-camp. [271]

By 1796, Sir Gilbert had alienated all the Corsicans, and quarrelled with most of the English in Corsica. And in the month of November, Napoleon Buonaparte, just victorious in Italy, found the sympathies of his country all on his side when he despatched a force to the island under two of his generals.

The English, on their part, already half-tired of their bargain, relinquished the country after the faintest resistance; and once more Corsica found herself united to France, through the means of her own compatriot.

From that time to this the country has remained a province of France; and now by degrees the national peculiarities are fading away, and French words, French thought, and French manners are slowly superseding the strong national characteristics of the warlike and singular people living on this little island, which was for so long the hunting ground of richer and more powerful, but less noble nations. [272]

THE END.

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**Transcriber's Note:**

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation in the original document have been preserved.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LADY'S TOUR IN CORSICA, VOL. 2 (OF 2)  
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