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Author: Samuel Butler

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ALPS AND SANCTUARIES OF PIEDMONT AND THE CANTON TICINO

by Samuel Butler

Author's Preface to First Edition

I should perhaps apologise for publishing a work which professes to

deal with the sanctuaries of Piedmont, and saying so little about

the most important of them all--the Sacro Monte of Varallo. My

excuse must be, that I found it impossible to deal with Varallo

without making my book too long. Varallo requires a work to

itself; I must, therefore, hope to return to it on another

occasion.

For the convenience of avoiding explanations, I have treated the

events of several summers as though they belonged to only one.

This can be of no importance to the reader, but as the work is

chronologically inexact, I had better perhaps say so.

The illustrations by Mr. H. F. Jones are on pages 95, 211, 225,

238, 254, 260. The frontispiece and the illustrations on the

title-page and on pages 261, 262 are by Mr. Charles Gogin. There

are two drawings on pages 136, 137 by an Italian gentleman whose

name I have unfortunately lost, and whose permission to insert them

I have, therefore, been unable to obtain, and one on page 138 by

Signor Gaetano Meo. The rest are mine, except that all the figures

in my drawings are in every case by Mr. Charles Gogin, unless when

they are merely copied from frescoes or other sources. The two

larger views of Oropa are chiefly taken from photographs. The rest

are all of them from studies taken upon the spot.

I must acknowledge the great obligations I am under to Mr. H. F.

Jones as regards the letterpress no less than the illustrations; I

might almost say that the book is nearly as much his as mine, while

it is only through the care which he and another friend have

exercised in the revision of my pages that I am able to let them

appear with some approach to confidence.

November, 1881.

CHAPTER I--Introduction

Most men will readily admit that the two poets who have the

greatest hold over Englishmen are Handel and Shakespeare--for it is

as a poet, a sympathiser with and renderer of all estates and

conditions whether of men or things, rather than as a mere

musician, that Handel reigns supreme. There have been many who

have known as much English as Shakespeare, and so, doubtless, there

have been no fewer who have known as much music as Handel: perhaps

Bach, probably Haydn, certainly Mozart; as likely as not, many a

known and unknown musician now living; but the poet is not known by

knowledge alone--not by gnosis only--but also, and in greater part,

by the agape which makes him wish to steal men's hearts, and

prompts him so to apply his knowledge that he shall succeed. There

has been no one to touch Handel as an observer of all that was

observable, a lover of all that was loveable, a hater of all that

was hateable, and, therefore, as a poet. Shakespeare loved not

wisely but too well. Handel loved as well as Shakespeare, but more

wisely. He is as much above Shakespeare as Shakespeare is above

all others, except Handel himself; he is no less lofty,

impassioned, tender, and full alike of fire and love of play; he is

no less universal in the range of his sympathies, no less a master

of expression and illustration than Shakespeare, and at the same

time he is of robuster, stronger fibre, more easy, less

introspective. Englishmen are of so mixed a race, so inventive,

and so given to migration, that for many generations to come they

are bound to be at times puzzled, and therefore introspective; if

they get their freedom at all they get it as Shakespeare "with a

great sum," whereas Handel was "free born." Shakespeare sometimes

errs and grievously, he is as one of his own best men "moulded out

of faults," who "for the most become much more the better, for

being a little bad;" Handel, if he puts forth his strength at all,

is unerring: he gains the maximum of effect with the minimum of

effort. As Mozart said of him, "he beats us all in effect, when he

chooses he strikes like a thunderbolt." Shakespeare's strength is

perfected in weakness; Handel is the serenity and unself-

consciousness of health itself. "There," said Beethoven on his

deathbed, pointing to the works of Handel, "there--is truth."

These, however, are details, the main point that will be admitted

is that the average Englishman is more attracted by Handel and

Shakespeare than by any other two men who have been long enough

dead for us to have formed a fairly permanent verdict concerning

them. We not only believe them to have been the best men

familiarly known here in England, but we see foreign nations join

us for the most part in assigning to them the highest place as

renderers of emotion.

It is always a pleasure to me to reflect that the countries dearest

to these two master spirits are those which are also dearest to

myself, I mean England and Italy. Both of them lived mainly here

in London, but both of them turned mainly to Italy when realising

their dreams. Handel's music is the embodiment of all the best

Italian music of his time and before him, assimilated and

reproduced with the enlargements and additions suggested by his own

genius. He studied in Italy; his subjects for many years were

almost exclusively from Italian sources; the very language of his

thoughts was Italian, and to the end of his life he would have

composed nothing but Italian operas, if the English public would

have supported him. His spirit flew to Italy, but his home was

London. So also Shakespeare turned to Italy more than to any other

country for his subjects. Roughly, he wrote nineteen Italian, or

what to him were virtually Italian plays, to twelve English, one

Scotch, one Danish, three French, and two early British.

But who does not turn to Italy who has the chance of doing so?

What, indeed, do we not owe to that most lovely and loveable

country? Take up a Bank of England note and the Italian language

will be found still lingering upon it. It is signed "for Bank of

England and Compa." (Compagnia), not "Compy." Our laws are Roman

in their origin. Our music, as we have seen, and our painting

comes from Italy. Our very religion till a few hundred years ago

found its headquarters, not in London nor in Canterbury, but in

Rome. What, in fact, is there which has not filtered through

Italy, even though it arose elsewhere? On the other hand, there

are infinite attractions in London. I have seen many foreign

cities, but I know none so commodious, or, let me add, so

beautiful. I know of nothing in any foreign city equal to the view

down Fleet Street, walking along the north side from the corner of

Fetter Lane. It is often said that this has been spoiled by the

London, Chatham, and Dover Railway bridge over Ludgate Hill; I

think, however, the effect is more imposing now than it was before

the bridge was built. Time has already softened it; it does not

obtrude itself; it adds greatly to the sense of size, and makes us

doubly aware of the movement of life, the colossal circulation to

which London owes so much of its impressiveness. We gain more by

this than we lose by the infraction of some pedant's canon about

the artistically correct intersection of right lines. Vast as is

the world below the bridge, there is a vaster still on high, and

when trains are passing, the steam from the engine will throw the

dome of St. Paul's into the clouds, and make it seem as though

there were a commingling of earth and some far-off mysterious

palace in dreamland. I am not very fond of Milton, but I admit

that he does at times put me in mind of Fleet Street.

While on the subject of Fleet Street, I would put in a word in

favour of the much-abused griffin. The whole monument is one of

the handsomest in London. As for its being an obstruction, I have

discoursed with a large number of omnibus conductors on the

subject, and am satisfied that the obstruction is imaginary.

When, again, I think of Waterloo Bridge, and the huge wide-opened

jaws of those two Behemoths, the Cannon Street and Charing Cross

railway stations, I am not sure that the prospect here is not even

finer than in Fleet Street. See how they belch forth puffing

trains as the breath of their nostrils, gorging and disgorging

incessantly those human atoms whose movement is the life of the

city. How like it all is to some great bodily mechanism of which

the people are the blood. And then, above all, see the ineffable

St. Paul's. I was once on Waterloo Bridge after a heavy

thunderstorm in summer. A thick darkness was upon the river and

the buildings upon the north side, but just below I could see the

water hurrying onward as in an abyss, dark, gloomy, and mysterious.

On a level with the eye there was an absolute blank, but above, the

sky was clear, and out of the gloom the dome and towers of St.

Paul's rose up sharply, looking higher than they actually were, and

as though they rested upon space.

Then as for the neighbourhood within, we will say, a radius of

thirty miles. It is one of the main businesses of my life to

explore this district. I have walked several thousands of miles in

doing so, and I mark where I have been in red upon the Ordnance

map, so that I may see at a glance what parts I know least well,

and direct my attention to them as soon as possible. For ten

months in the year I continue my walks in the home counties, every

week adding some new village or farmhouse to my list of things

worth seeing; and no matter where else I may have been, I find a

charm in the villages of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, which in its way

I know not where to rival.

I have ventured to say the above, because during the remainder of

my book I shall be occupied almost exclusively with Italy, and wish

to make it clear that my Italian rambles are taken not because I

prefer Italy to England, but as by way of parergon, or by-work, as

every man should have both his profession and his hobby. I have

chosen Italy as my second country, and would dedicate this book to

her as a thank-offering for the happiness she has afforded me.

CHAPTER II--Faido

For some years past I have paid a visit of greater or less length

to Faido in the Canton Ticino, which though politically Swiss is as

much Italian in character as any part of Italy. I was attracted to

this place, in the first instance, chiefly because it is one of the

easiest places on the Italian side of the Alps to reach from

England. This merit it will soon possess in a still greater

degree, for when the St. Gothard tunnel is open, it will be

possible to leave London, we will say, on a Monday morning and be

at Faido by six or seven o'clock the next evening, just as one can

now do with S. Ambrogio on the line between Susa and Turin, of

which more hereafter.

True, by making use of the tunnel one will miss the St. Gothard

scenery, but I would not, if I were the reader, lay this too much

to heart. Mountain scenery, when one is staying right in the

middle of it, or when one is on foot, is one thing, and mountain

scenery as seen from the top of a diligence very likely smothered

in dust is another. Besides I do not think he will like the St.

Gothard scenery very much.

It is a pity there is no mental microscope to show us our likes and

dislikes while they are yet too vague to be made out easily. We

are so apt to let imaginary likings run away with us, as a person

at the far end of Cannon Street railway platform, if he expects a

friend to join him, will see that friend in half the impossible

people who are coming through the wicket. I once began an essay on

"The Art of Knowing what gives one Pleasure," but soon found myself

out of the diatonic with it, in all manner of strange keys, amid a

maze of metaphysical accidentals and double and treble flats, so I

left it alone as a question not worth the trouble it seemed likely

to take in answering. It is like everything else, if we much want

to know our own mind on any particular point, we may be trusted to

develop the faculty which will reveal it to us, and if we do not

greatly care about knowing, it does not much matter if we remain in

ignorance. But in few cases can we get at our permanent liking

without at least as much experience as a fishmonger must have had

before he can choose at once the best bloater out of twenty which,

to inexperienced eyes, seem one as good as the other. Lord

Beaconsfield was a thorough Erasmus Darwinian when he said so well

in "Endymion": "There is nothing like will; everybody can do

exactly what they like in this world, provided they really like it.

Sometimes they think they do, but in general it's a mistake." {1}

If this is as true as I believe it to be, "the longing after

immortality," though not indeed much of an argument in favour of

our being immortal at the present moment, is perfectly sound as a

reason for concluding that we shall one day develop immortality, if

our desire is deep enough and lasting enough. As for knowing

whether or not one likes a picture, which under the present

aesthetic reign of terror is de rigueur, I once heard a man say the

only test was to ask one's self whether one would care to look at

it if one was quite sure that one was alone; I have never been able

to get beyond this test with the St. Gothard scenery, and applying

it to the Devil's Bridge, I should say a stay of about thirty

seconds would be enough for me. I daresay Mendelssohn would have

stayed at least two hours at the Devil's Bridge, but then he did

stay such a long while before things.

The coming out from the short tunnel on to the plain of Andermatt

does certainly give the pleasure of a surprise. I shall never

forget coming out of this tunnel one day late in November, and

finding the whole Andermatt valley in brilliant sunshine, though

from Fluelen up to the Devil's Bridge the clouds had hung heavy and

low. It was one of the most striking transformation scenes

imaginable. The top of the pass is good, and the Hotel Prosa a

comfortable inn to stay at. I do not know whether this house will

be discontinued when the railway is opened, but understand that the

proprietor has taken the large hotel at Piora, which I will speak

of later on. The descent on the Italian side is impressive, and so

is the point where sight is first caught of the valley below

Airolo, but on the whole I cannot see that the St. Gothard is

better than the S. Bernardino on the Italian side, or the

Lukmanier, near the top, on the German; this last is one of the

most beautiful things imaginable, but it should be seen by one who

is travelling towards German Switzerland, and in a fine summer's

evening light. I was never more impressed by the St. Gothard than

on the occasion already referred to when I crossed it in winter.

We went in sledges from Hospenthal to Airolo, and I remember

thinking what splendid fellows the postillions and guards and men

who helped to shift the luggage on to the sledges, looked; they

were so ruddy and strong and full of health, as indeed they might

well be--living an active outdoor life in such an air; besides,

they were picked men, for the passage in winter is never without

possible dangers. It was delightful travelling in the sledge. The

sky was of a deep blue; there was not a single cloud either in sky

or on mountain, but the snow was already deep, and had covered

everything beneath its smooth and heaving bosom. There was no

breath of air, but the cold was intense; presently the sun set upon

all except the higher peaks, and the broad shadows stole upwards.

Then there was a rich crimson flush upon the mountain tops, and

after this a pallor cold and ghastly as death. If he is fortunate

in his day, I do not think any one will be sorry to have crossed

the St. Gothard in mid-winter; but one pass will do as well as

another.

Airolo, at the foot of the pass on the Italian side, was, till

lately, a quiet and beautiful village, rising from among great

green slopes, which in early summer are covered with innumerable

flowers. The place, however, is now quite changed. The railway

has turned the whole Val Leventina topsy-turvy, and altered it

almost beyond recognition. When the line is finished and the

workmen have gone elsewhere, things will get right again; but just

now there is an explosiveness about the valley which puzzles one

who has been familiar with its former quietness. Airolo has been

especially revolutionised, being the headquarters for the works

upon the Italian side of the great St. Gothard tunnel, as Goschenen

is for those on the German side; besides this, it was burnt down

two or three years ago, hardly one of the houses being left

standing, so that it is now a new town, and has lost its former

picturesqueness, but it will be not a bad place to stay at as soon

as the bustle of the works has subsided, and there is a good hotel-

-the Hotel Airolo. It lies nearly 4000 feet above the sea, so that

even in summer the air is cool. There are plenty of delightful

walks--to Piora, for example, up the Val Canaria, and to Bedretto.

After leaving Airolo the road descends rapidly for a few hundred

feet and then more slowly for four or five kilometres to Piotta.

Here the first signs of the Italian spirit appear in the wood

carving of some of the houses. It is with these houses that I

always consider myself as in Italy again. Then come Ronco on the

mountain side to the left, and Quinto; all the way the pastures are

thickly covered with cowslips, even finer than those that grow on

Salisbury Plain. A few kilometres farther on and sight is caught

of a beautiful green hill with a few natural terraces upon it and a

flat top--rising from amid pastures, and backed by higher hills as

green as itself. On the top of this hill there stands a white

church with an elegant Lombard campanile--the campanile left

unwhitewashed. The whole forms a lovely little bit of landscape

such as some old Venetian painter might have chosen as a background

for a Madonna.

This place is called Prato. After it is passed the road enters at

once upon the Monte Piottino gorge, which is better than the

Devil's Bridge, but not so much to my taste as the auriculas and

rhododendrons which grow upon the rocks that flank it. The peep,

however, at the hamlet of Vigera, caught through the opening of the

gorge, is very nice. Soon after crossing the second of the Monte

Piottino bridges the first chestnuts are reached, or rather were so

till a year ago, when they were all cut down to make room for some

construction in connection with the railway. A couple of

kilometres farther on and mulberries and occasional fig-trees begin

to appear. On this we find ourselves at Faido, the first place

upon the Italian side which can be called a town, but which after

all is hardly more than a village.

Faido is a picturesque old place. It has several houses dated the

middle of the sixteenth century; and there is one, formerly a

convent, close to the Hotel dell' Angelo, which must be still

older. There is a brewery where excellent beer is made, as good as

that of Chiavenna--and a monastery where a few monks still continue

to reside. The town is 2365 feet above the sea, and is never too

hot even in the height of summer. The Angelo is the principal

hotel of the town, and will be found thoroughly comfortable and in

all respects a desirable place to stay at. I have stayed there so

often, and consider the whole family of its proprietor so much

among the number of my friends, that I have no hesitation in

cordially recommending the house.

Other attractions I do not know that the actual town possesses, but

the neighbourhood is rich. Years ago, in travelling by the St.

Gothard road, I had noticed the many little villages perched high

up on the sides of the mountain, from one to two thousand feet

above the river, and had wondered what sort of places they would

be. I resolved, therefore, after a time to make a stay at Faido

and go up to all of them. I carried out my intention, and there is

not a village nor fraction of a village in the Val Leventina from

Airolo to Biasca which I have not inspected. I never tire of them,

and the only regret I feel concerning them is, that the greater

number are inaccessible except on foot, so that I do not see how I

shall be able to reach them if I live to be old. These are the

places of which I do find myself continually thinking when I am

away from them. I may add that the Val Leventina is much the same

as every other subalpine valley on the Italian side of the Alps

that I have yet seen.

I had no particular aversion to German Switzerland before I knew

the Italian side of the Alps. On the contrary, I was under the

impression that I liked German Switzerland almost as much as I

liked Italy itself, but now I can look at German Switzerland no

longer. As soon as I see the water going down Rhinewards I hurry

back to London. I was unwillingly compelled to take pleasure in

the first hour and a half of the descent from the top of the

Lukmanier towards Disentis, but this is only a ripping over of the

brimfulness of Italy on to the Swiss side.

The first place I tried from Faido was Mairengo--where there is the

oldest church in the valley--a church older even than the church of

St. Nicolao of Giornico. There is little of the original

structure, but the rare peculiarity remains that there are two high

altars side by side.

There is a fine half-covered timber porch to the church. These

porches are rare, the only others like it I know of being at Prato,

Rossura, and to some extent Cornone. In each of these cases the

arrangement is different, the only agreement being in the having an

outer sheltered place, from which the church is entered instead of

opening directly on to the churchyard. Mairengo is full of good

bits, and nestles among magnificent chestnut-trees. From hence I

went to Osco, about 3800 feet above the sea, and 1430 above Faido.

It was here I first came to understand the purpose of certain high

poles with cross bars to them which I had already seen elsewhere.

They are for drying the barley on; as soon as it is cut it is hung

up on the cross bars and secured in this way from the rain, but it

is obvious this can only be done when cultivation is on a small

scale. These rascane, as they are called, are a feature of the Val

Leventina, and look very well when they are full of barley.

From Osco I tried to coast along to Calpiognia, but was warned that

the path was dangerous, and found it to be so. I therefore again

descended to Mairengo, and re-ascended by a path which went

straight up behind the village. After a time I got up to the level

of Calpiognia, or nearly so, and found a path through pine woods

which led me across a torrent in a ravine to Calpiognia itself.

This path is very beautiful. While on it I caught sight of a

lovely village nestling on a plateau that now showed itself high up

on the other side the valley of the Ticino, perhaps a couple of

miles off as the crow flies. This I found upon inquiry to be

Dalpe; above Dalpe rose pine woods and pastures; then the loftier

alpi, then rugged precipices, and above all the Dalpe glacier

roseate with sunset. I was enchanted, and it was only because

night was coming on, and I had a long way to descend before getting

back to Faido, that I could get myself away. I passed through

Calpiognia, and though the dusk was deepening, I could not forbear

from pausing at the Campo Santo just outside the village. I give a

sketch taken by daylight, but neither sketch nor words can give any

idea of the pathos of the place. When I saw it first it was in the

month of June, and the rank dandelions were in seed. Wild roses in

full bloom, great daisies, and the never-failing salvia ran riot

among the graves. Looking over the churchyard itself there were

the purple mountains of Biasca and the valley of the Ticino some

couple of thousand feet below. There was no sound save the subdued

but ceaseless roar of the Ticino, and the Piumogna. Involuntarily

I found the following passage from the "Messiah" sounding in my

ears, and felt as though Handel, who in his travels as a young man

doubtless saw such places, might have had one of them in his mind

when he wrote the divine music which he has wedded to the words "of

them that sleep." {2}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

Or again: {3}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

From Calpiognia I came down to Primadengo, and thence to Faido.

CHAPTER III--Primadengo, Calpiognia, Dalpe, Cornone, and Prato

Next morning I thought I would go up to Calpiognia again. It was

Sunday. When I got up to Primadengo I saw no one, and heard

nothing, save always the sound of distant waterfalls; all was

spacious and full of what Mr. Ruskin has called a "great

peacefulness of light." The village was so quiet that it seemed as

though it were deserted; after a minute or so, however, I heard a

cherry fall, and looking up, saw the trees were full of people.

There they were, crawling and lolling about on the boughs like

caterpillars, and gorging themselves with cherries. They spoke not

a word either to me or to one another. They were too happy and

goodly to make a noise; but they lay about on the large branches,

and ate and sighed for content and ate till they could eat no

longer. Lotus eating was a rough nerve-jarring business in

comparison. They were like saints and evangelists by Filippo

Lippi. Again the rendering of Handel came into my mind, and I

thought of how the goodly fellowship of prophets praised God. {4}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

And how again in some such another quiet ecstasy the muses sing

about Jove's altar in the "Allegro and Penseroso."

Here is a sketch of Primadengo Church--looking over it on to the

other side the Ticino, but I could not get the cherry-trees nor

cherry-eaters.

On leaving Primadengo I went on to Calpiognia, and there too I

found the children's faces all purple with cherry juice; thence I

ascended till I got to a monte, or collection of chalets, about

5680 feet above the sea. It was deserted at this season. I

mounted farther and reached an alpe, where a man and a boy were

tending a mob of calves. Going still higher, I at last came upon a

small lake close to the top of the range: I find this lake given

in the map as about 7400 feet above the sea. Here, being more than

5000 feet above Faido, I stopped and dined.

I have spoken of a monte and of an alpe. An alpe, or alp, is not,

as so many people in England think, a snowy mountain. Mont Blanc

and the Jungfrau, for example, are not alps. They are mountains

with alps upon them.

An alpe is a tract of the highest summer pasturage just below the

snow-line, and only capable of being grazed for two or three months

in every year. It is held as common land by one or more villages

in the immediate neighbourhood, and sometimes by a single

individual to whom the village has sold it. A few men and boys

attend the whole herd, whether of cattle or goats, and make the

cheese, which is apportioned out among the owners of the cattle

later on. The pigs go up to be fattened on whey. The cheese is

not commonly made at the alpe, but as soon as the curd has been

pressed clear of whey, it is sent down on men's backs to the

village to be made into cheese. Sometimes there will be a little

hay grown on an alpe, as at Gribbio and in Piora; in this case

there will be some chalets built, which will be inhabited for a few

weeks and left empty the rest of the year.

The monte is the pasture land immediately above the highest

enclosed meadows and below the alpe. The cattle are kept here in

spring and autumn before and after their visit to the alpe. The

monte has many houses, dairies, and cowhouses,--being almost the

paese, or village, in miniature. It will always have its chapel,

and is inhabited by so considerable a number of the villagers, for

so long a time both in spring and autumn, that they find it worth

while to make themselves more comfortable than is necessary for the

few who make the short summer visit to the alpe.

Every inch of the ascent was good, but the descent was even better

on account of the views of the Dalpe glacier on the other side the

Ticino, towards which ones back is turned as one ascends. All day

long the villages of Dalpe and Cornone had been tempting me, so I

resolved to take them next day. This I did, crossing the Ticino

and following a broad well-beaten path which ascends the mountains

in a southerly direction. I found the rare English fern Woodsia

hyperborea growing in great luxuriance on the rocks between the

path and the river. I saw some fronds fully six inches in length.

I also found one specimen of Asplenium alternifolium, which,

however, is abundant on the other side the valley, on the walls

that flank the path between Primadengo and Calpiognia, and

elsewhere. Woodsia also grows on the roadside walls near Airolo,

but not so fine as at Faido. I have often looked for it in other

subalpine valleys of North Italy and the canton Ticino, but have

never happened to light upon it.

About three or four hundred feet above the river, under some pines,

I saw a string of ants crossing and recrossing the road; I have

since seen these ants every year in the same place. In one part I

almost think the stone is a little worn with the daily passage and

repassage of so many thousands of tiny feet, but for the most part

it certainly is not. Half-an-hour or so after crossing the string

of ants, one passes from under the pine-trees into a grassy meadow,

which in spring is decked with all manner of Alpine flowers; after

crossing this, the old St. Gothard road is reached, which passed by

Prato and Dalpe, so as to avoid the gorge of the Monte Piottino.

This road is of very great antiquity, and has been long disused,

except for local purposes; for even before the carriage road over

the St. Gothard was finished in 1827, there was a horse track

through the Monte Piottino. In another twenty minutes or so, on

coming out from a wood of willows and alders, Dalpe is seen close

at hand after a walk of from an hour-and-a-half to two hours from

Faido.

Dalpe is rather more than 1500 feet above Faido, and is therefore

nearly 4000 feet above the sea. It is reckoned a bel paese,

inasmuch as it has a little tolerably level pasture and tillable

land near it, and a fine alpe. This is how the wealth of a village

is reckoned. The Italians set great store by a little bit of bella

pianura, or level ground; to them it is as precious as a hill or

rock is to a Londoner out for a holiday. The peasantry are as

blind to the beauties of rough unmanageable land as Peter Bell was

to those of the primrose with a yellow brim (I quote from memory).

The people complain of the climate of Dalpe, the snow not going off

before the end of March or beginning of April. No climate, they

say, should be colder than that of Faido; barley, however, and

potatoes do very well at Dalpe, and nothing can exceed the hay

crops. A good deal of the hay is sent down to Faido on men's backs

or rather on their heads, for the road is impracticable even for

sledges. It is astonishing what a weight the men will bear upon

their heads, and the rate at which they will come down while

loaded. An average load is four hundredweight. The man is hardly

visible beneath his burden, which looks like a good big part of an

ordinary English haystack. With this weight on his head he will go

down rough places almost at a run and never miss his footing. The

men generally carry the hay down in threes and fours together for

company. They look distressed, as well they may: every muscle is

strained, and it is easy to see that their powers are being taxed

to their utmost limit; it is better not even to say good-day to

them when they are thus loaded; they have enough to attend to just

then; nevertheless, as soon as they have deposited their load at

Faido they will go up to Dalpe again or Calpiognia, or wherever it

may be, for another, and bring it down without resting. Two such

journeys are reckoned enough for one day. This is how the people

get their corpo di legno e gamba di ferro--"their bodies of wood

and legs of iron." But I think they rather overdo it.

Talking of legs, as I went through the main street of Dalpe an old

lady of about sixty-five stopped me, and told me that while

gathering her winter store of firewood she had had the misfortune

to hurt her leg. I was very sorry, but I failed to satisfy her;

the more I sympathised in general terms, the more I felt that

something further was expected of me. I went on trying to do the

civil thing, when the old lady cut me short by saying it would be

much better if I were to see the leg at once; so she showed it me

in the street, and there, sure enough, close to the groin there was

a swelling. Again I said how sorry I was, and added that perhaps

she ought to show it to a medical man. "But aren't you a medical

man?" said she in an alarmed manner. "Certainly not," replied I.

"Then why did you let me show you my leg?" said she indignantly,

and pulling her clothes down, the poor old woman began to hobble

off; presently two others joined her, and I heard hearty peals of

laughter as she recounted her story. A stranger visiting these

out-of-the-way villages is almost certain to be mistaken for a

doctor. What business, they say to themselves, can any one else

have there, and who in his senses would dream of visiting them for

pleasure? This old lady had rushed to the usual conclusion, and

had been trying to get a little advice gratis.

Above Dalpe there is a path through the upper valley of the

Piumogna, which leads to the glacier whence the river comes. The

highest peak above this upper valley just turns the 10,000 feet,

but I was never able to find out that it has a name, nor is there a

name marked in the Ordnance map of the Canton Ticino. The valley

promises well, but I have not been to its head, where at about 7400

feet there is a small lake. Great quantities of crystals are found

in the mountains above Dalpe. Some people make a living by

collecting these from the higher parts of the ranges where none but

born mountaineers and chamois can venture; many, again, emigrate to

Paris, London, America, or elsewhere, and return either for a month

or two, or sometimes for a permanency, having become rich. In

Cornone there is one large white new house belonging to a man who

has made his fortune near Como, and in all these villages there are

similar houses. From the Val Leventina and the Val Blenio, but

more especially from this last, very large numbers come to London,

while hardly fewer go to America. Signor Gatti, the great ice

merchant, came from the Val Blenio.

I once found the words, "Tommy, make room for your uncle," on a

chapel outside the walls of one very quiet little upland hamlet.

The writing was in a child's scrawl, and in like fashion with all

else that was written on the same wall. I should have been much

surprised, if I had not already found out how many families return

to these parts with children to whom English is the native

language. Many as are the villages in the Canton Ticino in which I

have sat sketching for hours together, I have rarely done so

without being accosted sooner or later by some one who could speak

English, either with an American accent or without it. It is

curious at some out-of-the-way place high up among the mountains,

to see a lot of children at play, and to hear one of them shout

out, "Marietta, if you do that again, I'll go and tell mother."

One English word has become universally adopted by the Ticinesi

themselves. They say "waitee" just as we should say "wait," to

stop some one from going away. It is abhorrent to them to end a

word with a consonant, so they have added "ee," but there can be no

doubt about the origin of the word. {5}

When we bear in mind the tendency of any language, if it once

attains a certain predominance, to supplant all others, and when we

look at the map of the world and see the extent now in the hands of

the two English-speaking nations, I think it may be prophesied that

the language in which this book is written will one day be almost

as familiar to the greater number of Ticinesi as their own.

I may mention one other expression which, though not derived from

English, has a curious analogy to an English usage. When the

beautiful children with names like Handel's operas come round one

while one is sketching, some one of them will assuredly before long

be heard to whisper the words "Tira giu," or as children say when

they come round one in England, "He is drawing it down." The

fundamental idea is, of course, that the draughtsman drags the

object which he is drawing away from its position, and "transfers"

it, as we say by the same metaphor, to his paper, as St. Cecilia

"drew an angel down" in "Alexander's Feast."

A good walk from Dalpe is to the Alpe di Campolungo and Fusio, but

it is better taken from Fusio. A very favourite path with me is

the one leading conjointly from Cornone and Dalpe to Prato. The

view up the valley of the St. Gothard looking down on Prato is

fine; I give a sketch of it taken five years ago before the railway

had been begun.

The little objects looking like sentry boxes that go all round the

church contain rough modern frescoes, representing, if I remember

rightly, the events attendant upon the Crucifixion. These are on a

small scale what the chapels on the sacred mountain of Varallo are

on a large one. Small single oratories are scattered about all

over the Canton Ticino, and indeed everywhere in North Italy by the

roadside, at all halting-places, and especially at the crest of any

more marked ascent, where the tired wayfarer, probably heavy laden,

might be inclined to say a naughty word or two if not checked. The

people like them, and miss them when they come to England. They

sometimes do what the lower animals do in confinement when

precluded from habits they are accustomed to, and put up with

strange makeshifts by way of substitute. I once saw a poor

Ticinese woman kneeling in prayer before a dentist's show-case in

the Hampstead Road; she doubtless mistook the teeth for the relics

of some saint. I am afraid she was a little like a hen sitting

upon a chalk egg, but she seemed quite contented.

Which of us, indeed, does not sit contentedly enough upon chalk

eggs at times? And what would life be but for the power to do so?

We do not sufficiently realise the part which illusion has played

in our development. One of the prime requisites for evolution is a

certain power for adaptation to varying circumstances, that is to

say, of plasticity, bodily and mental. But the power of adaptation

is mainly dependent on the power of thinking certain new things

sufficiently like certain others to which we have been accustomed

for us not to be too much incommoded by the change--upon the power,

in fact, of mistaking the new for the old. The power of fusing

ideas (and through ideas, structures) depends upon the power of

confusing them; the power to confuse ideas that are not very

unlike, and that are presented to us in immediate sequence, is

mainly due to the fact of the impetus, so to speak, which the mind

has upon it. We always, I believe, make an effort to see every new

object as a repetition of the object last before us. Objects are

so varied, and present themselves so rapidly, that as a general

rule we renounce this effort too promptly to notice it, but it is

always there, and it is because of it that we are able to mistake,

and hence to evolve new mental and bodily developments. Where the

effort is successful, there is illusion; where nearly successful

but not quite, there is a shock and a sense of being puzzled--more

or less, as the case may be; where it is so obviously impossible as

not to be pursued, there is no perception of the effort at all.

Mr. Locke has been greatly praised for his essay upon human

understanding. An essay on human misunderstanding should be no

less interesting and important. Illusion to a small extent is one

of the main causes, if indeed it is not the main cause, of

progress, but it must be upon a small scale. All abortive

speculation, whether commercial or philosophical, is based upon it,

and much as we may abuse such speculation, we are, all of us, its

debtors.

Leonardo da Vinci says that Sandro Botticelli spoke slightingly of

landscape-painting, and called it "but a vain study, since by

throwing a sponge impregnated with various colours against a wall,

it leaves some spots upon it, which may appear like a landscape."

Leonardo da Vinci continues: "It is true that a variety of

compositions may be seen in such spots according to the disposition

of mind with which they are considered; such as heads of men,

various animals, battles, rocky scenes, seas, clouds, words, and

the like. It may be compared to the sound of bells which may seem

to say whatever we choose to imagine. In the same manner these

spots may furnish hints for composition, though they do not teach

us how to finish any particular part." {6} No one can hate

drunkenness more than I do, but I am confident the human intellect

owes its superiority over that of the lower animals in great

measure to the stimulus which alcohol has given to imagination--

imagination being little else than another name for illusion. As

for wayside chapels, mine, when I am in London, are the shop

windows with pretty things in them.

The flowers on the slopes above Prato are wonderful, and the

village is full of nice bits for sketching, but the best thing, to

my fancy, is the church, and the way it stands, and the lovely

covered porch through which it is entered. This porch is not

striking from the outside, but I took two sketches of it from

within. There is, also, a fresco, half finished, of St. George and

the Dragon, probably of the fifteenth century, and not without

feeling. There is not much inside the church, which is modernised

and more recent than the tower. The tower is very good, and only

second, if second, in the upper Leventina to that of Quinto, which,

however, is not nearly so well placed.

The people of Prato are just as fond of cherries as those of

Primadengo, but I did not see any men in the trees. The children

in these parts are the most beautiful and most fascinating that I

know anywhere; they have black mouths all through the month of July

from the quantities of cherries that they devour. I can bear

witness that they are irresistible, for one kind old gentleman,

seeing me painting near his house, used to bring me daily a branch

of a cherry-tree with all the cherries on it. "Son piccole," he

would say, "ma son gustose"--"They are small, but tasty," which

indeed they were. Seeing I ate all he gave me--for there was no

stopping short as long as a single cherry was left--he, day by day,

increased the size of the branch, but no matter how many he brought

I was always even with him. I did my best to stop him from

bringing them, or myself from eating all of them, but it was no

use.

[Autograph which cannot be reproduced: Tlolinda Del Pietro]

Here is the autograph of one of the little black-mouthed folk. I

watch them growing up from year to year in many a village. I was

sketching at Primadengo, and a little girl of about three years

came up with her brother, a boy of perhaps eight. Before long the

smaller child began to set her cap at me, smiling, ogling, and

showing all her tricks like an accomplished little flirt. Her

brother said, "She always goes on like that to strangers." I said,

"What's her name?" "Forolinda." The name being new to me, I made

the boy write it, and here it is. He has forgotten to cross his F,

but the writing is wonderfully good for a boy of his age. The

child's name, doubtless, is Florinda.

More than once at Prato, and often elsewhere, people have wanted to

buy my sketches: if I had not required them for my own use I might

have sold a good many. I do not think my patrons intended giving

more than four or five francs a sketch, but a quick worker, who

could cover his three or four Fortuny panels a day, might pay his

expenses. It often happens that people who are doing well in

London or Paris are paying a visit to their native village, and

like to take back something to remind them of it in the winter.

From Prato, there are two ways to Faido, one past an old castle,

built to defend the northern entrance of the Monte Piottino, and so

over a small pass which will avoid the gorge; and the other, by

Dazio and the Monte Piottino gorge. Both are good.

CHAPTER IV--Rossura, Calonico

Another day I went up to Rossura, a village that can be seen from

the windows of the Hotel dell' Angelo, and which stands about 3500

feet above the sea, or a little more than 1100 feet above Faido.

The path to it passes along some meadows, from which the church of

Calonico can be seen on the top of its rocks some few miles off.

By and by a torrent is reached, and the ascent begins in earnest.

When the level of Rossura has been nearly attained, the path turns

off into meadows to the right, and continues--occasionally under

magnificent chestnuts--till one comes to Rossura.

The church has been a good deal restored during the last few years,

and an interesting old chapel--with an altar in it--at which mass

was said during a time of plague, while the people stood some way

off in a meadow, has just been entirely renovated; but as with some

English churches, the more closely a piece of old work is copied

the more palpably does the modern spirit show through it, so here

the opposite occurs, for the old-worldliness of the place has not

been impaired by much renovation, though the intention has been to

make everything as modern as possible.

I know few things more touching in their way than the porch of

Rossura church. It is dated early in the last century, and is

absolutely without ornament; the flight of steps inside it lead up

to the level of the floor of the church. One lovely summer Sunday

morning, passing the church betimes, I saw the people kneeling upon

these steps, the church within being crammed. In the darker light

of the porch, they told out against the sky that showed through the

open arch beyond them; far away the eye rested on the mountains--

deep blue save where the snow still lingered. I never saw anything

more beautiful--and these forsooth are the people whom so many of

us think to better by distributing tracts about Protestantism among

them!

While I was looking, there came a sound of music through the open

door--the people lifting up their voices and singing, as near as I

can remember, something which on the piano would come thus:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

I liked the porch almost best under an aspect which it no longer

presents. One summer an opening was made in the west wall, which

was afterwards closed because the wind blew through it too much and

made the church too cold. While it was open, one could sit on the

church steps and look down through it on to the bottom of the

Ticino valley; and through the windows one could see the slopes

about Dalpe and Cornone. Between the two windows there is a

picture of austere old S. Carlo Borromeo with his hands joined in

prayer.

It was at Rossura that I made the acquaintance of a word which I

have since found very largely used throughout North Italy. It is

pronounced "chow" pure and simple, but is written, if written at

all, "ciau," or "ciao," the "a" being kept very broad. I believe

the word is derived from "schiavo," a slave, which, became

corrupted into "schiao," and "ciao." It is used with two meanings,

both of which, however, are deducible from the word slave. In its

first and more common use it is simply a salute, either on greeting

or taking leave, and means, "I am your very obedient servant."

Thus, if one has been talking to a small child, its mother will

tell it to say "chow" before it goes away, and will then nod her

head and say "chow" herself. The other use is a kind of pious

expletive, intending "I must endure it," "I am the slave of a

higher power." It was in this sense I first heard it at Rossura.

A woman was washing at a fountain while I was eating my lunch. She

said she had lost her daughter in Paris a few weeks earlier. "She

was a beautiful woman," said the bereaved mother, "but--chow. She

had great talents--chow. I had her educated by the nuns of

Bellinzona--chow. Her knowledge of geography was consummate--chow,

chow," &c. Here "chow" means "pazienza," "I have done and said all

that I can, and must now bear it as best I may."

I tried to comfort her, but could do nothing, till at last it

occurred to me to say "chow" too. I did so, and was astonished at

the soothing effect it had upon her. How subtle are the laws that

govern consolation! I suppose they must ultimately be connected

with reproduction--the consoling idea being a kind of small cross

which RE-GENERATES or RE-CREATES the sufferer. It is important,

therefore, that the new ideas with which the old are to be crossed

should differ from these last sufficiently to divert the attention,

and yet not so much as to cause a painful shock.

There should be a little shock, or there will be no variation in

the new ideas that are generated, but they will resemble those that

preceded them, and grief will be continued; there must not be too

great a shock or there will be no illusion--no confusion and fusion

between the new set of ideas and the old, and in consequence, there

will be no result at all, or, if any, an increase in mental

discord. We know very little, however, upon this subject, and are

continually shown to be at fault by finding an unexpectedly small

cross produce a wide diversion of the mental images, while in other

cases a wide one will produce hardly any result. Sometimes again,

a cross which we should have said was much too wide will have an

excellent effect. I did not anticipate, for example, that my

saying "chow" would have done much for the poor woman who had lost

her daughter; the cross did not seem wide enough; she was already,

as I thought, saturated with "chow." I can only account for the

effect my application of it produced by supposing the word to have

derived some element of strangeness and novelty as coming from a

foreigner--just as land which will give a poor crop, if planted

with sets from potatoes that have been grown for three or four

years on this same soil, will yet yield excellently if similar sets

be brought from twenty miles off. For the potato, so far as I have

studied it, is a good-tempered, frivolous plant, easily amused and

easily bored, and one, moreover, which if bored, yawns horribly.

As an example of a cross proving satisfactory which I had expected

would be too wide, I would quote the following, which came under my

notice when I was in America. A young man called upon me in a

flood of tears over the loss of his grandmother, of whose death at

the age of ninety-three he had just heard. I could do nothing with

him; I tried all the ordinary panaceas without effect, and was

giving him up in despair, when I thought of crossing him with the

well-known ballad of Wednesbury Cocking. {7} He brightened up

instantly, and left me in as cheerful a state as he had been before

in a desponding one. "Chow" seems to do for the Italians what

Wednesbury Cocking did for my American friend; it is a kind of

small spiritual pick-me-up, or cup of tea.

From Rossura I went on to Tengia, about a hundred and fifty feet

higher than Rossura. From Tengia the path to Calonico, the next

village, is a little hard to find, and a boy had better be taken

for ten minutes or so beyond Tengia, Calonico church shows well for

some time before it is actually reached. The pastures here are

very rich in flowers, the tiger lilies being more abundant before

the hay is mown, than perhaps even at Fusio itself. The whole walk

is lovely, and the Gribbiasca waterfall, the most graceful in the

Val Leventina, is just opposite.

How often have I not sat about here in the shade sketching, and

watched the blue upon the mountains which Titian watched from under

the chestnuts of Cadore. No sound except the distant water, or the

croak of a raven, or the booming of the great guns in that battle

which is being fought out between man and nature on the Biaschina

and the Monte Piottino. It is always a pleasure to me to feel that

I have known the Val Leventina intimately before the great change

in it which the railway will effect, and that I may hope to see it

after the present turmoil is over. Our descendants a hundred years

hence will not think of the incessant noise as though of

cannonading with which we were so familiar. From nowhere was it

more striking than from Calonico, the Monte Piottino having no

sooner become silent than the Biaschina would open fire, and

sometimes both would be firing at once. Posterity may care to know

that another and less agreeable feature of the present time was the

quantity of stones that would come flying about in places which one

would have thought were out of range. All along the road, for

example, between Giornico and Lavorgo, there was incessant blasting

going on, and it was surprising to see the height to which stones

were sometimes carried. The dwellers in houses near the blasting

would cover their roofs with boughs and leaves to soften the fall

of the stones. A few people were hurt, but much less damage was

done than might have been expected. I may mention for the benefit

of English readers that the tunnels through Monte Piottino and the

Biaschina are marvels of engineering skill, being both of them

spiral; the road describes a complete circle, and descends rapidly

all the while, so that the point of egress as one goes from Airolo

towards Faido is at a much lower level than that of ingress.

If an accident does happen, they call it a disgrazia, thus

confirming the soundness of a philosophy which I put forward in an

earlier work. Every misfortune they hold (and quite rightly) to be

a disgrace to the person who suffers it; "Son disgraziato" is the

Italian for "I have been unfortunate." I was once going to give a

penny to a poor woman by the roadside, when two other women stopped

me. "Non merita," they said; "She is no deserving object for

charity"--the fact being that she was an idiot. Nevertheless they

were very kind to her.

CHAPTER V--Calonico (continued) and Giornico

Our inventions increase in geometrical ratio. They are like living

beings, each one of which may become parent of a dozen others--some

good and some ne'er-do-weels; but they differ from animals and

vegetables inasmuch as they not only increase in a geometrical

ratio, but the period of their gestation decreases in geometrical

ratio also. Take this matter of Alpine roads for example. For how

many millions of years was there no approach to a road over the St.

Gothard, save the untutored watercourses of the Ticino and the

Reuss, and the track of the bouquetin or the chamois? For how many

more ages after this was there not a mere shepherd's or huntsman's

path by the river side--without so much as a log thrown over so as

to form a rude bridge? No one would probably have ever thought of

making a bridge out of his own unaided imagination, more than any

monkey that we know of has done so. But an avalanche or a flood

once swept a pine into position and left it there; on this a

genius, who was doubtless thought to be doing something very

infamous, ventured to make use of it. Another time a pine was

found nearly across the stream, but not quite, and not quite,

again, in the place where it was wanted. A second genius, to the

horror of his fellow-tribesmen--who declared that this time the

world really would come to an end--shifted the pine a few feet so

as to bring it across the stream and into the place where it was

wanted. This man was the inventor of bridges--his family

repudiated him, and he came to a bad end. From this to cutting

down the pine and bringing it from some distance is an easy step.

To avoid detail, let us come to the old Roman horse road over the

Alps. The time between the shepherd's path and the Roman road is

probably short in comparison with that between the mere chamois

track and the first thing that can be called a path of men. From

the Roman we go on to the mediaeval road with more frequent stone

bridges, and from the mediaeval to the Napoleonic carriage road.

The close of the last century and the first quarter of this present

one was the great era for the making of carriage roads. Fifty

years have hardly passed and here we are already in the age of

tunnelling and railroads. The first period, from the chamois track

to the foot road, was one of millions of years; the second, from

the first foot road to the Roman military way, was one of many

thousands; the third, from the Roman to the mediaeval, was perhaps

a thousand; from the mediaeval to the Napoleonic, five hundred;

from the Napoleonic to the railroad, fifty. What will come next we

know not, but it should come within twenty years, and will probably

have something to do with electricity.

It follows by an easy process of reasoning that, after another

couple of hundred years or so, great sweeping changes should be

made several times in an hour, or indeed in a second, or fraction

of a second, till they pass unnoticed as the revolutions we undergo

in the embryonic stages, or are felt simply as vibrations. This

would undoubtedly be the case but for the existence of a friction

which interferes between theory and practice. This friction is

caused partly by the disturbance of vested interests which every

invention involves, and which will be found intolerable when men

become millionaires and paupers alternately once a fortnight--

living one week in a palace and the next in a workhouse, and having

perpetually to be sold up, and then to buy a new house and

refurnish, &c.--so that artificial means for stopping inventions

will be adopted; and partly by the fact that though all inventions

breed in geometrical ratio, yet some multiply more rapidly than

others, and the backwardness of one art will impede the forwardness

of another. At any rate, so far as I can see, the present is about

the only comfortable time for a man to live in, that either ever

has been or ever will be. The past was too slow, and the future

will be much too fast.

Another thing which we do not bear in mind when thinking of the

Alps is their narrowness, and the small extent of ground they

really cover. From Goschenen, for example, to Airolo seems a very

long distance. One must go up to the Devil's Bridge, and then to

Andermatt. From here by Hospenthal to the top of the pass seems a

long way, and again it is a long way down to Airolo; but all this

would easily go on to the ground between Kensington and Stratford.

From Goschenen to Andermatt is about as far as from Holland House

to Hyde Park Corner. From Andermatt to Hospenthal is much the same

distance as from Hyde Park Corner to the Oxford Street end of

Tottenham Court Road. From Hospenthal to the hospice on the top of

the pass is about equal to the space between Tottenham Court Road

and Bow; and from Bow you must go down three thousand feet of zig-

zags into Stratford, for Airolo. I have made the deviation from

the straight line about the same in one case as in the other; in

each, the direct distance is nine and a half miles. The whole

distance from Fluelen, on the Lake of Lucerne, to Biasca, which is

almost on the same level with the Lago Maggiore, is only forty

miles, and could be all got in between London and Lewes, while from

Lucerne to Locarno, actually on the Lago Maggiore itself, would go,

with a good large margin to spare, between London and Dover. We

can hardly fancy, however, people going backwards and forwards to

business daily between Fluelen and Biasca, as some doubtless do

between London and Lewes.

But how small all Europe is. We seem almost able to take it in at

a single coup d'oeil. From Mont Blanc we can see the mountains on

the Paris side of Dijon on the one hand, and those above Florence

and Bologna on the other. What a hole would not be made in Europe

if this great eyeful were scooped out of it.

The fact is (but it is so obvious that I am ashamed to say anything

about it), science is rapidly reducing space to the same

unsatisfactory state that it has already reduced time. Take lamb:

we can get lamb all the year round. This is perpetual spring; but

perpetual spring is no spring at all; it is not a season; there are

no more seasons, and being no seasons, there is no time. Take

rhubarb, again. Rhubarb to the philosopher is the beginning of

autumn, if indeed, the philosopher can see anything as the

beginning of anything. If any one asks why, I suppose the

philosopher would say that rhubarb is the beginning of the fruit

season, which is clearly autumnal, according to our present

classification. From rhubarb to the green gooseberry the step is

so small as to require no bridging--with one's eyes shut, and

plenty of cream and sugar, they are almost indistinguishable--but

the gooseberry is quite an autumnal fruit, and only a little

earlier than apples and plums, which last are almost winter;

clearly, therefore, for scientific purposes rhubarb is autumnal.

As soon as we can find gradations, or a sufficient number of

uniting links between two things, they become united or made one

thing, and any classification of them must be illusory.

Classification is only possible where there is a shock given to the

senses by reason of a perceived difference, which, if it is

considerable, can be expressed in words. When the world was

younger and less experienced, people were shocked at what appeared

great differences between living forms; but species, whether of

animals or plants, are now seen to be so united, either

inferentially or by actual finding of the links, that all

classification is felt to be arbitrary. The seasons are like

species--they were at one time thought to be clearly marked, and

capable of being classified with some approach to satisfaction. It

is now seen that they blend either in the present or the past

insensibly into one another, and cannot be classified except by

cutting Gordian knots in a way which none but plain sensible people

can tolerate. Strictly speaking, there is only one place, one

time, one action, and one individual or thing; of this thing or

individual each one of us is a part. It is perplexing, but it is

philosophy; and modem philosophy like modern music is nothing if it

is not perplexing.

A simple verification of the autumnal character of rhubarb may, at

first sight, appear to be found in Covent Garden Market, where we

can actually see the rhubarb towards the end of October. But this

way of looking at the matter argues a fatal ineptitude for the

pursuit of true philosophy. It would be a most serious error to

regard the rhubarb that will appear in Covent Garden Market next

October as belonging to the autumn then supposed to be current.

Practically, no doubt, it does so, but theoretically it must be

considered as the first-fruits of the autumn (if any) of the

following year, which begins before the preceding summer (or,

perhaps, more strictly, the preceding summer but one--and hence,

but any number), has well ended. Whether this, however, is so or

no, the rhubarb can be seen in Covent Garden, and I am afraid it

must be admitted that to the philosophically minded there lurks

within it a theory of evolution, and even Pantheism, as surely as

Theism was lurking in Bishop Berkeley's tar water.

To return, however, to Calonico. The church is built on the

extreme edge of a cliff that has been formed by the breaking away

of a large fragment of the mountain. This fragment may be seen

lying down below shattered into countless pieces. There is a

fissure in the cliff which suggests that at no very distant day

some more will follow, and I am afraid carry the church too. My

favourite view of the church is from the other side of the small

valley which separates it from the village, (see preceding page).

Another very good view is from closer up to the church.

The curato of Calonico was very kind to me. We had long talks

together. I could see it pained him that was not a Catholic. He

could never quite get over this, but he was very good and tolerant.

He was anxious to be assured that I was not one of those English

who went about distributing tracts, and trying to convert people.

This of course was the last thing I should have wished to do; and

when I told him so, he viewed me with sorrow, but henceforth

without alarm.

All the time I was with him I felt how much I wished could be a

Catholic in Catholic countries, and a Protestant in Protestant

ones. Surely there are some things which, like politics, are too

serious to be taken quite seriously. Surtout point de zele is not

the saying of a cynic, but the conclusion of a sensible man; and

the more deep our feeling is about any matter, the more occasion

have we to be on our guard against zele in this particular respect.

There is but one step from the "earnest" to the "intense." When

St. Paul told us to be all things to all men he let in the thin end

of the wedge, nor did he mark it to say how far it was to be

driven.

I have Italian friends whom I greatly value, and who tell me they

think I flirt just a trifle too much with il partito nero when I am

in Italy, for they know that in the main I think as they do.

"These people," they say, "make themselves very agreeable to you,

and show you their smooth side; we, who see more of them, know

their rough one. Knuckle under to them, and they will perhaps

condescend to patronise you; have any individuality of your own,

and they know neither scruple nor remorse in their attempts to get

you out of their way. "Il prete," they say, with a significant

look, "e sempre prete. For the future let us have professors and

men of science instead of priests." I smile to myself at this

last, and reply, that I am a foreigner come among them for

recreation, and anxious to keep clear of their internal discords.

I do not wish to cut myself off from one side of their national

character--a side which, in some respects, is no less interesting

than the one with which I suppose I am on the whole more

sympathetic. If I were an Italian, I should feel bound to take a

side; as it is, I wish to leave all quarrelling behind me, having

as much of that in England as suffices to keep me in good health

and temper.

In old times people gave their spiritual and intellectual sop to

Nemesis. Even when most positive, they admitted a percentage of

doubt. Mr. Tennyson has said well, "There lives more doubt"--I

quote from memory--"in honest faith, believe me, than in half the"

systems of philosophy, or words to that effect. The victor had a

slave at his ear during his triumph; the slaves during the Roman

Saturnalia dressed in their masters' clothes, sat at meat with

them, told them of their faults, and blacked their faces for them.

They made their masters wait upon them. In the ages of faith, an

ass dressed in sacerdotal robes was gravely conducted to the

cathedral choir at a certain season, and mass was said before him,

and hymns chanted discordantly. The elder D'Israeli, from whom I

am quoting, writes: "On other occasions, they put burnt old shoes

to fume in the censers; ran about the church leaping, singing,

dancing, and playing at dice upon the altar, while a BOY BISHOP or

POPE OF FOOLS burlesqued the divine service;" and later on he says:

"So late as 1645, a pupil of Gassendi, writing to his master what

he himself witnessed at Aix on the feast of Innocents, says--'I

have seen in some monasteries in this province extravagances

solemnised, which pagans would not have practised. Neither the

clergy nor the guardians indeed go to the choir on this day, but

all is given up to the lay brethren, the cabbage cutters, errand

boys, cooks, scullions, and gardeners; in a word, all the menials

fill their places in the church, and insist that they perform the

offices proper for the day. They dress themselves with all the

sacerdotal ornaments, but torn to rags, or wear them inside out;

they hold in their hands the books reversed or sideways, which they

pretend to read with large spectacles without glasses, and to which

they fix the rinds of scooped oranges . . . ; particularly while

dangling the censers they keep shaking them in derision, and

letting the ashes fly about their heads and faces, one against the

other. In this equipage they neither sing hymns nor psalms nor

masses, but mumble a certain gibberish as shrill and squeaking as a

herd of pigs whipped on to market. The nonsense verses they chant

are singularly barbarous:-

Haec est clara dies, clararum clara dierum,

Haec est festa dies festarum festa dierum.'" {8}

Faith was far more assured in the times when the spiritual

saturnalia were allowed than now. The irreverence which was not

dangerous then, is now intolerable. It is a bad sign for a man's

peace in his own convictions when he cannot stand turning the

canvas of his life occasionally upside down, or reversing it in a

mirror, as painters do with their pictures that they may judge the

better concerning them. I would persuade all Jews, Mohammedans,

Comtists, and freethinkers to turn high Anglicans, or better still,

downright Catholics for a week in every year, and I would send

people like Mr. Gladstone to attend Mr. Bradlaugh's lectures in the

forenoon, and the Grecian pantomime in the evening, two or three

times every winter. I should perhaps tell them that the Grecian

pantomime has nothing to do with Greek plays. They little know how

much more keenly they would relish their normal opinions during the

rest of the year for the little spiritual outing which I would

prescribe for them, which, after all, is but another phase of the

wise saying--Surtout point de zele. St. Paul attempted an

obviously hopeless task (as the Church of Rome very well

understands) when he tried to put down seasonarianism. People must

and will go to church to be a little better, to the theatre to be a

little naughtier, to the Royal Institution to be a little more

scientific, than they are in actual life. It is only by pulsations

of goodness, naughtiness, and whatever else we affect that we can

get on at all. I grant that when in his office, a man should be

exact and precise, but our holidays are our garden, and too much

precision here is a mistake.

Surely truces, without even an arriere pensee of difference of

opinion, between those who are compelled to take widely different

sides during the greater part of their lives, must be of infinite

service to those who can enter on them. There are few merely

spiritual pleasures comparable to that derived from the temporary

laying down of a quarrel, even though we may know that it must be

renewed shortly. It is a great grief to me that there is no place

where I can go among Mr. Darwin, Professors Huxley, Tyndall, and

Ray Lankester, Miss Buckley, Mr. Romanes, Mr. Allen, and others

whom I cannot call to mind at this moment, as I can go among the

Italian priests. I remember in one monastery (but this was not in

the Canton Ticino) the novice taught me how to make sacramental

wafers, and I played him Handel on the organ as well as I could. I

told him that Handel was a Catholic; he said he could tell that by

his music at once. There is no chance of getting among our

scientists in this way.

Some friends say I was telling a lie when I told the novice Handel

was a Catholic, and ought not to have done so. I make it a rule to

swallow a few gnats a day, lest I should come to strain at them,

and so bolt camels; but the whole question of lying is difficult.

What IS "lying"? Turning for moral guidance to my cousins the

lower animals, whose unsophisticated nature proclaims what God has

taught them with a directness we may sometimes study, I find the

plover lying when she lures us from her young ones under the

fiction of a broken wing. Is God angry, think you, with this

pretty deviation from the letter of strict accuracy? or was it not

He who whispered to her to tell the falsehood--to tell it with a

circumstance, without conscientious scruple, not once only, but to

make a practice of it, so as to be a plausible, habitual, and

professional liar for some six weeks or so in the year? I imagine

so. When I was young I used to read in good books that it was God

who taught the bird to make her nest, and if so He probably taught

each species the other domestic arrangements best suited to it. Or

did the nest-building information come from God, and was there an

evil one among the birds also who taught them at any rate to steer

clear of priggishness?

Think of the spider again--an ugly creature, but I suppose God

likes it. What a mean and odious lie is that web which naturalists

extol as such a marvel of ingenuity!

Once on a summer afternoon in a far country I met one of those

orchids who make it their business to imitate a fly with their

petals. This lie they dispose so cunningly that real flies,

thinking the honey is being already plundered, pass them without

molesting them. Watching intently and keeping very still,

methought I heard this orchid speaking to the offspring which she

felt within her, though I saw them not. "My children," she

exclaimed, "I must soon leave you; think upon the fly, my loved

ones, for this is truth; cling to this great thought in your

passage through life, for it is the one thing needful; once lose

sight of it and you are lost!" Over and over again she sang this

burden in a small still voice, and so I left her. Then straightway

I came upon some butterflies whose profession it was to pretend to

believe in all manner of vital truths which in their inner practice

they rejected; thus, asserting themselves to be certain other and

hateful butterflies which no bird will eat by reason of their

abominable smell, these cunning ones conceal their own sweetness,

and live long in the land and see good days. No: lying is so

deeply rooted in nature that we may expel it with a fork, and yet

it will always come back again: it is like the poor, we must have

it always with us; we must all eat a peck of moral dirt before we

die.

All depends upon who it is that is lying. One man may steal a

horse when another may not look over a hedge. The good man who

tells no lies wittingly to himself and is never unkindly, may lie

and lie and lie whenever he chooses to other people, and he will

not be false to any man: his lies become truths as they pass into

the hearers' ear. If a man deceives himself and is unkind, the

truth is not in him, it turns to falsehood while yet in his mouth,

like the quails in the Wilderness of Sinai. How this is so or why,

I know not, but that the Lord hath mercy on whom He will have mercy

and whom He willeth He hardeneth.

My Italian friends are doubtless in the main right about the

priests, but there are many exceptions, as they themselves gladly

admit. For my own part I have found the curato in the small

subalpine villages of North Italy to be more often than not a

kindly excellent man to whom I am attracted by sympathies deeper

than any mere superficial differences of opinion can counteract.

With monks, however, as a general rule I am less able to get on:

nevertheless, I have received much courtesy at the hands of some.

My young friend the novice was delightful--only it was so sad to

think of the future that is before him. He wanted to know all

about England, and when I told him it was an island, clasped his

hands and said, "Oh che Provvidenza!" He told me how the other

young men of his own age plagued him as he trudged his rounds high

up among the most distant hamlets begging alms for the poor. "Be a

good fellow," they would say to him, "drop all this nonsense and

come back to us, and we will never plague you again." Then he

would turn upon them and put their words from him. Of course my

sympathies were with the other young men rather than with him, but

it was impossible not to be sorry for the manner in which he had

been humbugged from the day of his birth, till he was now incapable

of seeing things from any other standpoint than that of authority.

What he said to me about knowing that Handel was a Catholic by his

music, put me in mind of what another good Catholic once said to me

about a picture. He was a Frenchman and very nice, but a devot,

and anxious to convert me. He paid a few days' visit to London, so

I showed him the National Gallery. While there I pointed out to

him Sebastian del Piombo's picture of the raising of Lazarus as one

of the supposed masterpieces of our collection. He had the proper

orthodox fit of admiration over it, and then we went through the

other rooms. After a while we found ourselves before West's

picture of "Christ healing the sick." My French friend did not, I

suppose, examine it very carefully, at any rate he believed he was

again before the raising of Lazarus by Sebastian del Piombo; he

paused before it and had his fit of admiration over again: then

turning to me he said, "Ah! you would understand this picture

better if you were a Catholic." I did not tell him of the mistake

he had made, but I thought even a Protestant after a certain amount

of experience would learn to see some difference between Benjamin

West and Sebastian del Piombo.

From Calonico I went down into the main road and walked to

Giornico, taking the right bank of the river from the bridge at the

top of the Biaschina. Not a sod of the railway was as yet turned.

At Giornico I visited the grand old church of S. Nicolao, which,

though a later foundation than the church at Mairengo, retains its

original condition, and appears, therefore, to be much the older of

the two. The stones are very massive, and the courses are here and

there irregular as in Cyclopean walls; the end wall is not bonded

into the side walls but simply built between them; the main door is

very fine, and there is a side door also very good. There are two

altars one above the other, as in the churches of S. Abbondio and

S. Cristoforo at Como, but I could not make the lower altar

intelligible in my sketch, and indeed could hardly see it, so was

obliged to leave it out. The remains of some very early frescoes

can be seen, but I did not think them remarkable. Altogether,

however, the church is one which no one should miss seeing who

takes an interest in early architecture.

While painting the study from which the following sketch is taken,

I was struck with the wonderfully vivid green which the whitewashed

vault of the chancel and the arch dividing the chancel from the

body of the church took by way of reflection from the grass and

trees outside. It is not easy at first to see how the green

manages to find its way inside the church, but the grass seems to

get in everywhere. I had already often seen green reflected from

brilliant pasturage on to the shadow under the eaves of whitewashed

houses, but I never saw it suffuse a whole interior as it does on a

fine summer's day at Giornico. I do not remember to have seen this

effect in England.

Looking up again against the mountain through the open door of the

church when the sun was in a certain position, I could see an

infinity of insect life swarming throughout the air. No one could

have suspected its existence, till the sun's rays fell on the wings

of these small creatures at a proper angle; on this they became

revealed against the darkness of the mountain behind them. The

swallows that were flying among them cannot have to hunt them, they

need only fly with their mouths wide open and they must run against

as many as will be good for them. I saw this incredibly

multitudinous swarm extending to a great height, and am satisfied

that it was no more than what is always present during the summer

months, though it is only visible in certain lights. To these

minute creatures the space between the mountains on the two sides

of the Ticino valley must be as great as that between England and

America to a codfish. Many, doubtless, live in the mid-air, and

never touch the bottom or sides of the valley, except at birth and

death, if then. No doubt some atmospheric effects of haze on a

summer's afternoon are due to nothing but these insects. What,

again, do the smaller of them live upon? On germs, which to them

are comfortable mouthfuls, though to us invisible even with a

microscope?

I find nothing more in my notes about Giornico except that the

people are very handsome, and, as I thought, of a Roman type. The

place was a Roman military station, but it does not follow that the

soldiers were Romans; nevertheless, there is a strain of bullet-

headed blood in the place. Also I remember being told in 1869 that

two bears had been killed in the mountains above Giornico the

preceding year. At Giornico the vine begins to grow lustily, and

wine is made. The vines are trellised, and looking down upon them

one would think one could walk upon them as upon a solid surface,

so closely and luxuriantly do they grow.

From Giornico I began to turn my steps homeward in company with an

engineer who was also about to walk back to Faido, but we resolved

to take Chironico on our way, and kept therefore to the right bank

of the river. After about three or four kilometres from Giornico

we reached Chironico, which is well placed upon a filled-up lake

and envied as a paese ricco, but is not so captivating as some

others. Hence we ascended till at last we reached Gribbio (3960

ft.), a collection of chalets inhabited only for a short time in

the year, but a nice place in summer, rich in gentians and sulphur-

coloured anemones. From Gribbio there is a path to Dalpe, offering

no difficulty whatever and perfect in its way. On this occasion,

however, we went straight back to Faido by a rather shorter way

than the ordinary path, and this certainly was a little difficult,

or as my companion called it, "un tantino difficoltoso," in one or

two places; I at least did not quite like them.

Another day I went to Lavorgo, below Calonico, and thence up to

Anzonico. The church and churchyard at Anzonico are very good;

from Anzonico there is a path to Cavagnago--which is also full of

good bits for sketching--and Sobrio. The highest villages in the

immediate neighbourhood of Faido are Campello and Molare; they can

be seen from the market-place of the town, and are well worth the

trouble of a climb.

CHAPTER VI--Piora

An excursion which may be very well made from Faido is to the Val

Piora, which I have already more than once mentioned. There is a

large hotel here which has been opened some years, but has not

hitherto proved the success which it was hoped it would be. I have

stayed there two or three times and found it very comfortable;

doubtless, now that Signor Lombardi of the Hotel Prosa has taken

it, it will become a more popular place of resort.

I took a trap from Faido to Ambri, and thence walked over to

Quinto; here the path begins to ascend, and after an hour Ronco is

reached. There is a house at Ronco where refreshments and

excellent Faido beer can be had. The old lady who keeps the house

would make a perfect Fate; I saw her sitting at her window

spinning, and looking down over the Ticino valley as though it were

the world and she were spinning its destiny. She had a somewhat

stern expression, thin lips, iron-grey eyes, and an aquiline nose;

her scanty locks straggled from under the handkerchief which she

wore round her head. Her employment and the wistful far-away look

she cast upon the expanse below made a very fine ensemble. "She

would have afforded," as Sir Walter Scott says, "a study for a

Rembrandt, had that celebrated painter existed at the period," {9}

but she must have been a smart-looking handsome girl once.

She brightened up in conversation. I talked about Piora, which I

already knew, and the Lago Tom, the highest of the three lakes.

She said she knew the Lago Tom. I said laughingly, "Oh, I have no

doubt you do. We've had many a good day at the Lago Tom, I know."

She looked down at once.

In spite of her nearly eighty years she was active as a woman of

forty, and altogether she was a very grand old lady. Her house is

scrupulously clean. While I watched her spinning, I thought of

what must so often occur to summer visitors. I mean what sort of a

look-out the old woman must have in winter, when the wind roars and

whistles, and the snow drives down the valley with a fury of which

we in England can have little conception. What a place to see a

snowstorm from! and what a place from which to survey the landscape

next morning after the storm is over and the air is calm and

brilliant. There are such mornings: I saw one once, but I was at

the bottom of the valley and not high up, as at Ronco. Ronco would

take a little sun even in midwinter, but at the bottom of the

valley there is no sun for weeks and weeks together; all is in deep

shadow below, though the upper hillsides may be seen to have the

sun upon them. I walked once on a frosty winter's morning from

Airolo to Giornico, and can call to mind nothing in its way more

beautiful: everything was locked in frost--there was not a

waterwheel but was sheeted and coated with ice: the road was hard

as granite--all was quiet and seen as through a dark but incredibly

transparent medium. Near Piotta I met the whole village dragging a

large tree; there were many men and women dragging at it, but they

had to pull hard and they were silent; as I passed them I thought

what comely, well-begotten people they were. Then, looking up,

there was a sky, cloudless and of the deepest blue, against which

the snow-clad mountains stood out splendidly. No one will regret a

walk in these valleys during the depth of winter. But I should

have liked to have looked down from the sun into the sunlessness,

as the old Fate woman at Ronco can do when she sits in winter at

her window; or again, I should like to see how things would look

from this same window on a leaden morning in midwinter after snow

has fallen heavily and the sky is murky and much darker than the

earth. When the storm is at its height, the snow must search and

search and search even through the double windows with which the

houses are protected. It must rest upon the frames of the pictures

of saints, and of the sister's "grab," and of the last hours of

Count Ugolino, which adorn the walls of the parlour. No wonder

there is a S. Maria della Neve--a "St. Mary of the Snow"; but I do

wonder that she has not been painted.

From Ronco the path keeps level and then descends a little so as to

cross the stream that comes down from Piora. This is near the

village of Altanca, the church of which looks remarkably well from

here. Then there is an hour and a half's rapid ascent, and at last

all on a sudden one finds one's self on the Lago Ritom, close to

the hotel.

The lake is about a mile, or a mile and a half, long, and half a

mile broad. It is 6000 feet above the sea, very deep at the lower

end, and does not freeze where the stream issues from it, so that

the magnificent trout in the, lake can get air and live through the

winter. In many other lakes, as for example the Lago di Tremorgio,

they cannot do this, and hence perish, though the lakes have been

repeatedly stocked. The trout in the Lago Ritom are said to be the

finest in the world, and certainly I know none so fine myself.

They grow to be as large as moderate-sized salmon, and have a deep

red flesh, very firm and full of flavour. I had two cutlets off

one for breakfast and should have said they were salmon unless I

had known otherwise. In winter, when the lake is frozen over, the

people bring their hay from the farther Lake of Cadagno in sledges

across the Lake Ritom. Here, again, winter must be worth seeing,

but on a rough snowy day Piora must be an awful place. There are a

few stunted pines near the hotel, but the hillsides are for the

most part bare and green. Piora in fact is a fine breezy open

upland valley of singular beauty, and with a sweet atmosphere of

cow about it; it is rich in rhododendrons, and all manner of Alpine

flowers, just a trifle bleak, but as bracing as the Engadine

itself.

The first night I was ever in Piora there was a brilliant moon, and

the unruffled surface of the lake took the reflection of the

mountains. I could see the cattle a mile off, and hear the

tinkling of their bells which danced multitudinously before the ear

as fireflies come and go before the eyes; for all through a fine

summer's night the cattle will feed as though it were day. A

little above the lake I came upon a man in a cave before a furnace,

burning lime, and he sat looking into the fire with his back to the

moonlight. He was a quiet moody man, and I am afraid I bored him,

for I could get hardly anything out of him but "Oh altro"--polite

but not communicative. So after a while I left him with his face

burnished as with gold from the fire, and his back silver with the

moonbeams; behind him were the pastures and the reflections in the

lake and the mountains; and the distant cowbells were ringing.

Then I wandered on till I came to the chapel of S. Carlo; and in a

few minutes found myself on the Lago di Cadagno. Here I heard that

there were people, and the people were not so much asleep as the

simple peasantry of these upland valleys are expected to be by nine

o'clock in the evening. For now was the time when they had moved

up from Ronco, Altanca, and other villages in some numbers to cut

the hay, and were living for a fortnight or three weeks in the

chalets upon the Lago di Cadagno. As I have said, there is a

chapel, but I doubt whether it is attended during this season with

the regularity with which the parish churches of Ronco, Altanca,

&c., are attended during the rest of the year. The young people, I

am sure, like these annual visits to the high places, and will be

hardly weaned from them. Happily the hay will be always there, and

will have to be cut by some one, and the old people will send the

young ones.

As I was thinking of these things, I found myself going off into a

doze, and thought the burnished man from the furnace came up and

sat beside me, and laid his hand upon my shoulder. Then I saw the

green slopes that rise all round the lake were much higher than I

had thought; they went up thousands of feet, and there were pine

forests upon them, while two large glaciers came down in streams

that ended in a precipice of ice, falling sheer into the lake. The

edges of the mountains against the sky were rugged and full of

clefts, through which I saw thick clouds of dust being blown by the

wind as though from the other side of the mountains.

And as I looked, I saw that this was not dust, but people coming in

crowds from the other side, but so small as to be visible at first

only as dust. And the people became musicians, and the mountainous

amphitheatre a huge orchestra, and the glaciers were two noble

armies of women-singers in white robes, ranged tier above tier

behind each other, and the pines became orchestral players, while

the thick dust-like cloud of chorus-singers kept pouring in through

the clefts in the precipices in inconceivable numbers. When I

turned my telescope upon them I saw they were crowded up to the

extreme edge of the mountains, so that I could see underneath the

soles of their boots as their legs dangled in the air. In the

midst of all, a precipice that rose from out of the glaciers shaped

itself suddenly into an organ, and there was one whose face I well

knew sitting at the keyboard, smiling and pluming himself like a

bird as he thundered forth a giant fugue by way of overture. I

heard the great pedal notes in the bass stalk majestically up and

down, like the rays of the Aurora that go about upon the face of

the heavens off the coast of Labrador. Then presently the people

rose and sang the chorus "Venus laughing from the skies;" but ere

the sound had well died away, I awoke, and all was changed; a light

fleecy cloud had filled the whole basin, but I still thought I

heard a sound of music, and a scampering-off of great crowds from

the part where the precipices should be. The music went thus:-

{10}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

By and by the cantering, galloping movement became a trotting one,

thus:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

After that I heard no more but a little singing from the chalets,

and turned homewards. When I got to the chapel of S. Carlo, I was

in the moonlight again, and when near the hotel, I passed the man

at the mouth of the furnace with the moon still gleaming upon his

back, and the fire upon his face, and he was very grave and quiet.

Next morning I went along the lake till I came to a good-sized

streamlet on the north side. If this is followed for half-an-hour

or so--and the walk is a very good one--Lake Tom is reached, about

7500 feet above the sea. The lake is not large, and there are not

so many chalets as at Cadagno; still there are some. The view of

the mountain tops on the other side the Ticino valley, as seen from

across the lake, is very fine. I tried to sketch, but was fairly

driven back by a cloud of black gnats. The ridges immediately at

the back of the lake, and no great height above it, are the main

dividing line of the watershed; so are those that rise from the

Lago di Cadagno; in fact, about 600 feet above this lake is the top

of a pass which goes through the Piano dei Porci, and leads down to

S. Maria Maggiore, on the German side of the Lukmanier. I do not

know the short piece between the Lago di Cadagno and S. Maria, but

it is sure to be good. It is a pity there is no place at S. Maria

where one can put up for a night or two. There is a small inn

there, but it did not look tempting.

Before leaving the Val Leventina, I would call attention to the

beautiful old parish church at Biasca, where there is now an

excellent inn, the Hotel Biasca. This church is not so old as the

one at Giornico, but it is a good though plain example of early

Lombard architecture.

CHAPTER VII--S. Michele and the Monte Pirchiriano

Some time after the traveller from Paris to Turin has passed

through the Mont Cenis tunnel, and shortly before he arrives at

Bussoleno station, the line turns eastward, and a view is obtained

of the valley of the Dora, with the hills beyond Turin, and the

Superga, in the distance. On the right-hand side of the valley and

about half-way between Susa and Turin the eye is struck by an

abruptly-descending mountain with a large building like a castle

upon the top of it, and the nearer it is approached the more

imposing does it prove to be. Presently the mountain is seen more

edgeways, and the shape changes. In half-an-hour or so from this

point, S. Ambrogio is reached, once a thriving town, where

carriages used to break the journey between Turin and Susa, but

left stranded since the opening of the railway. Here we are at the

very foot of the Monte Pirchiriano, for so the mountain is called,

and can see the front of the building--which is none other than the

famous sanctuary of S. Michele, commonly called "della Chiusa,"

from the wall built here by Desiderius, king of the Lombards, to

protect his kingdom from Charlemagne.

The history of the sanctuary is briefly as follows:-

At the close of the tenth century, when Otho III was Emperor of

Germany, a certain Hugh de Montboissier, a noble of Auvergne,

commonly called "Hugh the Unsewn" (lo sdruscito), was commanded by

the Pope to found a monastery in expiation of some grave offence.

He chose for his site the summit of the Monte Pirchiriano in the

valley of Susa, being attracted partly by the fame of a church

already built there by a recluse of Ravenna, Giovanni Vincenzo by

name, and partly by the striking nature of the situation. Hugh de

Montboissier when returning from Rome to France with Isengarde his

wife, would, as a matter of course, pass through the valley of

Susa. The two--perhaps when stopping to dine at S. Ambrogio--would

look up and observe the church founded by Giovanni Vincenzo: they

had got to build a monastery somewhere; it would very likely,

therefore, occur to them that they could not perpetuate their names

better than by choosing this site, which was on a much travelled

road, and on which a fine building would show to advantage. If my

view is correct, we have here an illustration of a fact which is

continually observable--namely, that all things which come to much,

whether they be books, buildings, pictures, music, or living

beings, are suggested by others of their own kind. It is; always

the most successful, like Handel and Shakespeare, who owe most to

their forerunners, in spite of the modifications with which their

works descend.

Giovanni Vincenzo had built his church about the year 987. It is

maintained by some that he had been Bishop of Ravenna, but Claretta

gives sufficient reason for thinking otherwise. In the "Cronaca

Clusina" it is said that he had for some years previously lived as

a recluse on the Monte Caprasio, to the north of the present Monte

Pirchiriano; but that one night he had a vision, in which he saw

the summit of Monte Pirchiriano enveloped in heaven-descended

flames, and on this founded a church there, and dedicated it to St.

Michael. This is the origin of the name Pirchiriano, which means

[Greek text], or the Lord's fire.

The fame of the heavenly flames and the piety of pilgrims brought

in enough money to complete the building--which, to judge from the

remains of it embodied in the later work, must have been small, but

still a church, and more than a mere chapel or oratory. It was, as

I have already suggested, probably imposing enough to fire the

imagination of Hugh de Montboissier, and make him feel the

capabilities of the situation, which a mere ordinary wayside chapel

might perhaps have failed to do. Having built his church, Giovanni

Vincenzo returned to his solitude on the top of Monte Caprasio, and

thenceforth went backwards and forwards from one place of abode to

the other.

Avogadro is among those who make Giovanni Bishop, or rather

Archbishop, of Ravenna, and gives the following account of the

circumstances which led to his resigning his diocese and going to

live at the top of the inhospitable Monte Caprasio. It seems there

had been a confirmation at Ravenna, during which he had

accidentally forgotten to confirm the child of a certain widow.

The child, being in weakly health, died before Giovanni could

repair his oversight, and this preyed upon his mind. In answer,

however, to his earnest prayers, it pleased the Almighty to give

him power to raise the dead child to life again: this he did, and

having immediately performed the rite of confirmation, restored the

boy to his overjoyed mother. He now became so much revered that he

began to be alarmed lest pride should obtain dominion over him; he

felt, therefore, that his only course was to resign his diocese,

and go and live the life of a recluse on the top of some high

mountain. It is said that he suffered agonies of doubt as to

whether it was not selfish of him to take such care of his own

eternal welfare, at the expense of that of his flock, whom no

successor could so well guide and guard from evil; but in the end

he took a reasonable view of the matter, and concluded that his

first duty was to secure his own spiritual position. Nothing short

of the top of a very uncomfortable mountain could do this, so he at

once resigned his bishopric and chose Monte Caprasio as on the

whole the most comfortable uncomfortable mountain he could find.

The latter part of the story will seem strange to Englishmen. We

can hardly fancy the Archbishop of Canterbury or York resigning his

diocese and settling down quietly on the top of Scafell or Cader

Idris to secure his eternal welfare. They would hardly do so even

on the top of Primrose Hill. But nine hundred years ago human

nature was not the same as nowadays.

The valley of Susa, then little else than marsh and forest, was

held by a marquis of the name of Arduin, a descendant of a French

or Norman adventurer Roger, who, with a brother, also named Arduin,

had come to seek his fortune in Italy at the beginning of the tenth

century. Roger had a son, Arduin Glabrio, who recovered the valley

of Susa from the Saracens, and established himself at Susa, at the

junction of the roads that come down from Mont Cenis and the Mont

Genevre. He built a castle here which commanded the valley, and

was his base of operations as Lord of the Marches and Warden of the

Alps.

Hugh de Montboissier applied to Arduin for leave to build upon the

Monte Pirchiriano. Arduin was then holding his court at Avigliana,

a small town near S. Ambrogio, even now singularly little altered,

and full of mediaeval remains; he not only gave his consent, but

volunteered to sell a site to the monastery, so as to ensure it

against future disturbance.

The first church of Giovanni Vincenzo had been built upon whatever

little space could be found upon the top of the mountain, without,

so far as I can gather, enlarging the ground artificially. The

present church--the one, that is to say, built by Hugh de

Montboissier about A.D. 1000--rests almost entirely upon stone

piers and masonry. The rock has been masked by a lofty granite

wall of several feet in thickness, which presents something of a

keep-like appearance. The spectator naturally imagines that there

are rooms, &c., behind this wall, whereas in point of fact there is

nothing but the staircase leading up to the floor of the church.

Arches spring from this masking wall, and are continued thence

until the rock is reached; it is on the level surface thus obtained

that the church rests. The true floor, therefore, does not begin

till near what appears from the outside to be the top of the

building.

There is some uncertainty as to the exact date of the foundation of

the monastery, but Claretta {11} inclines decidedly to the date

999, as against 966, the one assigned by Mabillon and Torraneo.

Claretta relies on the discovery, by Provana, of a document in the

royal archives which seems to place the matter beyond dispute. The

first abbot was undoubtedly Avverto or Arveo, who established the

rules of the Benedictine Order in his monastery. "In the seven

hours of daily work prescribed by the Benedictine rule," writes

Cesare Balbo, "innumerable were the fields they ploughed, and the

houses they built in deserts, while in more frequented places men

were laying cultivated ground waste, and destroying buildings:

innumerable, again, were the works of the holy fathers and of

ancient authors which were copied and preserved." {12}

From this time forward the monastery received gifts in land and

privileges, and became in a few years the most important religious

establishment in that part of Italy.

There have been several fires--one, among others, in the year 1340,

which destroyed a great part of the monastery, and some of the

deeds under which it held valuable grants; but though the part

inhabited by the monks may have been rebuilt or added to, the

church is certainly untouched.

CHAPTER VIII--S. Michele (continued)

I had often seen this wonderful pile of buildings, and had

marvelled at it, as all must do who pass from Susa to Turin, but I

never went actually up to it till last summer, in company with my

friend and collaborateur, Mr. H. F. Jones. We reached S. Ambrogio

station one sultry evening in July, and, before many minutes were

over, were on the path that leads to San Pietro, a little more than

an hour's walk above S. Ambrogio.

In spite of what I have said about Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, we

found ourselves thinking how thin and wanting, as it were, in

adipose cushion is every other country in comparison with Italy;

but the charm is enhanced in these days by the feeling that it can

be reached so easily. Wednesday morning, Fleet Street; Thursday

evening, a path upon the quiet mountain side, under the

overspreading chestnuts, with Lombardy at one's feet.

Some twenty minutes after we had begun to climb, the sanctuary

became lost to sight, large drops of thunder-rain began to fall,

and by the time we reached San Pietro it was pouring heavily, and

had become quite dark. An hour or so later the sky had cleared,

and there was a splendid moon: opening the windows, we found

ourselves looking over the tops of trees on to some lovely upland

pastures, on a winding path through which we could almost fancy we

saw a youth led by an angel, and there was a dog with him, and he

held a fish in his hand. Far below were lights from villages in

the valley of the Dora. Above us rose the mountains, bathed in

shadow, or glittering in the moonbeams, and there came from them

the pleasant murmuring of streamlets that had been swollen by the

storm.

Next morning the sky was cloudless and the air invigorating. S.

Ambrogio, at the foot of the mountain, must be some 800 feet above

the sea, and San Pietro about 1500 feet above S. Ambrogio. The

sanctuary at the top of the mountain is 2800 feet above the sea-

level, or about 500 feet above San Pietro. A situation more

delightful than that of San Pietro it is impossible to conceive.

It contains some 200 inhabitants, and lies on a ledge of level

land, which is, of course, covered with the most beautifully green

grass, and in spring carpeted with wild-flowers; great broad-leaved

chestnuts rise from out the meadows, and beneath their shade are

strewn masses of sober mulberry-coloured rock; but above all these

rises the great feature of the place, from which, when it is in

sight, the eyes can hardly be diverted,--I mean the sanctuary of S.

Michele itself.

A sketch gives but little idea of the place. In nature it appears

as one of those fascinating things like the smoke from Vesuvius, or

the town on the Sacro Monte at Varese, which take possession of one

to the exclusion of all else, as long as they are in sight. From

each point of view it becomes more and more striking. Climbing up

to it from San Pietro and getting at last nearly on a level with

the lower parts of the building, or again keeping to a pathway

along the side of the mountain towards Avigliana, it will come as

on the following page.

[At this point there is a picture in the book]

There is a very beautiful view from near the spot where the first

of these sketches is taken. We are then on the very ridge or crest

of the mountain, and look down on the one hand upon the valley of

the Dora going up to Susa, with the glaciers of the Mont Cenis in

the background, and on the other upon the plains near Turin, with

the colline bounding the horizon. Immediately beneath is seen the

glaring white straight line of the old Mont Cenis road, looking

much more important than the dingy narrow little strip of railroad

that has superseded it. The trains that pass along the line look

no bigger than caterpillars, but even at this distance they make a

great roar. If the path from which the second view is taken is

followed for a quarter of an hour or so, another no less beautiful

point is reached from which one can look down upon the two small

lakes of Avigliana. These lakes supply Turin with water, and, I

may add, with the best water that I know of as supplied to any

town.

We will now return to the place from which the first of the

sketches on p. 95 was taken, and proceed to the sanctuary itself.

Passing the small but very massive circular ruin shown on the right

hand of the sketch, about which nothing whatever is known either as

regards its date or object, we ascend by a gentle incline to the

outer gate of the sanctuary. The battered plates of iron that

cover the wooden doors are marked with many a bullet. Then we keep

under cover for a short space, after which we find ourselves at the

foot of a long flight of steps. Close by there is a little terrace

with a wall round it, where one can stand and enjoy a view over the

valley of the Dora to Turin.

Having ascended the steps, we are at the main entrance to the

building--a massive Lombard doorway, evidently the original one.

In the space above the door there have been two frescoes, an

earlier and a later one, one painted over the other, but nothing

now remains save the signature of the second painter, signed in

Gothic characters. On entering, more steps must be at once

climbed, and then the staircase turns at right angles and tends

towards the rock.

At the head of the flight shown p. 98, the natural rock appears.

The arch above it forms a recess filled with desiccated corpses.

The great pier to the left, and, indeed, all the masonry that can

be seen, has no other object than to obtain space for, and to

support, the floor of the church itself. My drawing was taken from

about the level of the top of the archway through which the

building is entered. There comes in at this point a third small

staircase from behind; ascending this, one finds one's self in the

window above the door, from the balcony of which there is a

marvellous panorama. I took advantage of the window to measure the

thickness of the walls, and found them a little over seven feet

thick and built of massive granite blocks. The stones on the

inside are so sharp and clean cut that they look as if they were

not more than fifty years old. On the outside, the granite, hard

as it is, is much weathered, which, indeed, considering the exposed

situation, is hardly to be wondered at.

Here again how the wind must howl and whistle, and how the snow

must beat in winter! No one who has not seen snow falling during a

time when the thermometer is about at zero can know how searching a

thing it is. How softly would it not lie upon the skulls and

shoulders of the skeletons. Fancy a dull dark January afternoon's

twilight upon this staircase, after a heavy snow, when the soft

fleece clings to the walls, having drifted in through many an

opening. Or fancy a brilliant winter's moonlight, with the moon

falling upon the skeletons after snow. And then let there be a

burst of music from an organ in the church above (I am sorry to say

they have only a harmonium; I wish some one would give them a fine

organ). I should like the following for example:- {13}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

How this would sound upon these stairs, if they would leave the

church-door open. It is said in Murray's handbook that formerly

the corpses which are now under the arch, used to be placed in a

sitting position upon the stairs, and the peasants would crown them

with flowers. Fancy twilight or moonlight on these stairs, with

the corpses sitting among the withered flowers and snow, and the

pealing of a great organ.

After ascending the steps that lead towards the skeletons, we turn

again sharp round to the left, and come upon another noble flight--

broad and lofty, and cut in great measure from the living rock.

At the top of this flight there are two sets of Lombard portals,

both of them very fine, but in such darkness and so placed that it

was impossible to get a drawing of them in detail. After passing

through them, the staircase turns again, and, as far as I can

remember, some twenty or thirty steps bring one up to the level of

the top of the arch which forms the recess where the corpses are.

Here there is another beautiful Lombard doorway, with a small

arcade on either side which I thought English, rather than Italian,

in character. An impression was produced upon both of us that this

doorway and the arcade on either side were by a different architect

from the two lower archways, and from the inside of the church; or

at any rate, that the details of the enrichment were cut by a

different mason, or gang of masons. I think, however, the whole

doorway is in a later style, and must have been put in after some

fire had destroyed the earlier one.

Opening the door, which by day is always unlocked, we found

ourselves in the church itself. As I have said, it is of pure

Lombard architecture, and very good of its kind; I do not think it

has been touched since the beginning of the eleventh century,

except that it has been re-roofed and the pitch of the roof

altered. At the base of the most westerly of the three piers that

divide the nave from the aisles, there crops out a small piece of

the living rock; this is at the end farthest from the choir. It is

not likely that Giovanni Vincenzo's church reached east of this

point, for from this point onwards towards the choir the floor is

artificially supported, and the supporting structure is due

entirely to Hugo de Montboissier. The part of the original church

which still remains is perhaps the wall, which forms the western

limit of the present church. This wall is not external. It forms

the eastern wall of a large chamber with frescoes. I am not sure

that this chamber does not occupy the whole space of the original

church.

There are a few nice votive pictures in the church, and one or two

very early frescoes, which are not without interest; but the main

charm of the place is in the architecture, and the sense at once of

age and strength which it produces. The stock things to see are

the vaults in which many of the members of the royal house of

Savoy, legitimate and illegitimate, lie buried; they need not,

however, be seen.

I have said that the whole building is of much about the same date,

and, unless perhaps in the residential parts, about which I can say

little, has not been altered. This is not the view taken by the

author of Murray's Handbook for North Italy, who says that

"injudicious repairs have marred the effect of the building;" but

this writer has fallen into several errors. He talks, for example,

of the "open Lombard gallery of small circular arches" as being

"one of the oldest and most curious features of the building,"

whereas it is obviously no older than the rest of the church, nor

than the keep-like construction upon which it rests. Again, he is

clearly in error when he says that the "extremely beautiful

circular arch by which we pass from the staircase to the corridor

leading to the church, is a vestige of the original building." The

double round arched portals through which we pass from the main

staircase to the corridor are of exactly the same date as the

staircase itself, and as the rest of the church. They certainly

formed no part of Giovanni Vincenzo's edifice; for, besides being

far too rich, they are not on a level with what remains of that

building, but several feet below it. It is hard to know what the

writer means by "the original building;" he appears to think it

extended to the present choir, which, he says, "retains traces of

an earlier age." The choir retains no such traces. The only

remains of the original church are at the back of the west end,

invisible from the inside of the church, and at the opposite end to

the choir. As for the church being "in a plain Gothic style," it

is an extremely beautiful example of pure Lombard, of the first few

years of the eleventh century. True, the middle arch of the three

which divide the nave from the aisles is pointed, whereas the two

others are round, but this is evidently done to economise space,

which was here unusually costly. There was room for more than two

round arches, but not room enough for three, so it was decided to

dock the middle arch a little. It is a she-arch--that is to say,

it has no keystone, but is formed simply by propping two segments

of a circle one against the other. It certainly is not a Gothic

arch; it is a Lombard arch, modified in an unusual manner, owing to

its having been built under unusual conditions.

The visitor should on no account omit to ring the bell and ask to

be shown the open Lombard gallery already referred to as running

round the outside of the choir. It is well worth walking round

this, if only for the view.

The official who showed us round was very kind, and as a personal

favour we were allowed to visit the fathers' private garden. The

large arm-chairs are made out of clipped box-trees. While on our

way to the garden we passed a spot where there was an alarming

buzzing, and found ourselves surrounded by what appeared to be an

angry swarm of bees; closer inspection showed that the host was a

medley one, composed of wasps, huge hornets, hive-bees, humble-

bees, flies, dragon-flies, butterflies, and all kinds of insects,

flying about a single patch of ivy in full blossom, which attracted

them so strongly that they neglected everything else. I think some

of them were intoxicated. If this was so, then perhaps Bacchus is

called "ivy-crowned" because ivy-blossoms intoxicate insects, but I

never remember to have before observed that ivy-blossoms had any

special attraction for insects.

I have forgotten to say anything about a beam of wood which may be

seen standing out at right angles from the tower to the right of

the main building. This I believe to have been the gallows.

Another like it may be seen at S. Giorio, but I have not got it in

my sketch of that place. The attendant who took us round S.

Michele denied that it was the gallows, but I think it must have

been. Also, the attendant showed us one place which is called Il

Salto della belle Alda. Alda was being pursued by a soldier; to

preserve her honour, she leaped from a window and fell over a

precipice some hundreds of feet below; by the intercession of the

Virgin she was saved, but became so much elated that she determined

to repeat the feat. She jumped a second time from the window, but

was dashed to pieces. We were told this as being unworthy of

actual credence, but as a legend of the place. We said we found no

great difficulty in believing the first half of the story, but

could hardly believe that any one would jump from that window

twice. {14}

CHAPTER IX--The North Italian Priesthood

There is now a school in the sanctuary; we met the boys several

times. They seemed well cared for and contented. The priests who

reside in the sanctuary were courtesy itself; they took a warm

interest in England, and were anxious for any information I could

give them about the monastery near Loughborough--a name which they

had much difficulty in pronouncing. They were perfectly tolerant,

and ready to extend to others the consideration they expected for

themselves. This should not be saying much, but as things go it is

saying a good deal. What indeed more can be wished for?

The faces of such priests as these--and I should say such priests

form a full half of the North Italian priesthood--are perfectly

free from that bad furtive expression which we associate with

priestcraft, and which, when seen, cannot be mistaken: their faces

are those of our own best English country clergy, with perhaps a

trifle less flesh about them and a trifle more of a not unkindly

asceticism.

Comparing our own clergy with the best North Italian and Ticinese

priests, I should say there was little to choose between them. The

latter are in a logically stronger position, and this gives them

greater courage in their opinions; the former have the advantage in

respect of money, and the more varied knowledge of the world which

money will command. When I say Catholics have logically the

advantage over Protestants, I mean that starting from premises

which both sides admit, a merely logical Protestant will find

himself driven to the Church of Rome. Most men as they grow older

will, I think, feel this, and they will see in it the explanation

of the comparatively narrow area over which the Reformation

extended, and of the gain which Catholicism has made of late years

here in England. On the other hand, reasonable people will look

with distrust upon too much reason. The foundations of action lie

deeper than reason can reach. They rest on faith--for there is no

absolutely certain incontrovertible premise which can be laid by

man, any more than there is any investment for money or security in

the daily affairs of life which is absolutely unimpeachable. The

funds are not absolutely sale; a volcano might break out under the

Bank of England. A railway journey is not absolutely safe; one

person, at least, in several millions gets killed. We invest our

money upon faith mainly. We choose our doctor upon faith, for how

little independent judgment can we form concerning his capacity?

We choose schools for our children chiefly upon faith. The most

important things a man has are his body, his soul, and his money.

It is generally better for him to commit these interests to the

care of others of whom he can know little, rather than be his own

medical man, or invest his money on his own judgment; and this is

nothing else than making a faith which lies deeper than reason can

reach, the basis of our action in those respects which touch us

most nearly.

On the other hand, as good a case could be made out for placing

reason as the foundation, inasmuch as it would be easy to show that

a faith, to be worth anything, must be a reasonable one--one, that

is to say, which is based upon reason. The fact is, that faith and

reason are like desire and power, or demand and supply; it is

impossible to say which comes first: they come up hand in hand,

and are so small when we can first descry them, that it is

impossible to say which we first caught sight of. All we can now

see is that each has a tendency continually to outstrip the other

by a little, but by a very little only. Strictly they are not two

things, but two aspects of one thing; for convenience sake,

however, we classify them separately.

It follows, therefore--but whether it follows or no, it is

certainly true--that neither faith alone nor reason alone is a

sufficient guide: a man's safety lies neither in faith nor reason,

but in temper--in the power of fusing faith and reason, even when

they appear most mutually destructive. A man of temper will be

certain in spite of uncertainty, and at the same time uncertain in

spite of certainty; reasonable in spite of his resting mainly upon

faith rather than reason, and full of faith even when appealing

most strongly to reason. If it is asked, In what should a man have

faith? To what faith should he turn when reason has led him to a

conclusion which he distrusts? the answer is, To the current

feeling among those whom he most looks up to--looking upon himself

with suspicion if he is either among the foremost or the laggers.

In the rough, homely common sense of the community to which we

belong we have as firm ground as can be got. This, though not

absolutely infallible, is secure enough for practical purposes.

As I have said, Catholic priests have rather a fascination for me--

when they are not Englishmen. I should say that the best North

Italian priests are more openly tolerant than our English clergy

generally are. I remember picking up one who was walking along a

road, and giving him a lift in my trap. Of course we fell to

talking, and it came out that I was a member of the Church of

England. "Ebbene, caro Signore," said he when we shook hands at

parting; "mi rincresce che Lei non crede come me, ma in questi

tempi non possiamo avere tutti i medesimi principii." {15}

I travelled another day from Susa to S. Ambrogio with a priest, who

told me he took in "The Catholic Times," and who was well up to

date on English matters. Being myself a Conservative, I found his

opinions sound on all points but one--I refer to the Irish

question: he had no sympathy with the obstructionists in

Parliament, but nevertheless thought the Irish were harshly

treated. I explained matters as well as I could, and found him

very willing to listen to our side of the question.

The one thing, he said, which shocked him with the English, was the

manner in which they went about distributing tracts upon the

Continent. I said no one could deplore the practice more

profoundly than myself, but that there were stupid and conceited

people in every country, who would insist upon thrusting their

opinions upon people who did not want them. He replied that the

Italians travelled not a little in England, but that he was sure

not one of them would dream of offering Catholic tracts to people,

for example, in the streets of London. Certainly I have never seen

an Italian to be guilty of such rudeness. It seems to me that it

is not only toleration that is a duty; we ought to go beyond this

now; we should conform, when we are among a sufficient number of

those who would not understand our refusal to do so; any other

course is to attach too much importance at once to our own opinions

and to those of our opponents. By all means let a man stand by his

convictions when the occasion requires, but let him reserve his

strength, unless it is imperatively called for. Do not let him

exaggerate trifles, and let him remember that everything is a

trifle in comparison with the not giving offence to a large number

of kindly, simple-minded people. Evolution, as we all know, is the

great doctrine of modern times; the very essence of evolution

consists in the not shocking anything too violently, but enabling

it to mistake a new action for an old one, without "making believe"

too much.

One day when I was eating my lunch near a fountain, there came up a

moody, meditative hen, crooning plaintively after her wont. I

threw her a crumb of bread while she was still a good way off, and

then threw more, getting her to come a little closer and a little

closer each time; at last she actually took a piece from my hand.

She did not quite like it, but she did it. This is the evolution

principle; and if we wish those who differ from us to understand

us, it is the only method to proceed upon. I have sometimes

thought that some of my friends among the priests have been

treating me as I treated the meditative hen. But what of that?

They will not kill and eat me, nor take my eggs. Whatever,

therefore, promotes a more friendly feeling between us must be pure

gain.

The mistake our advanced Liberals make is that of flinging much too

large pieces of bread at a time, and flinging them at their hen,

instead of a little way off her. Of course the hen is fluttered

and driven away. Sometimes, too, they do not sufficiently

distinguish between bread and stones.

As a general rule, the common people treat the priests

respectfully, but once I heard several attacking one warmly on the

score of eternal punishment. "Sara," said one, "per cento anni,

per cinque cento, per mille o forse per dieci mille anni, ma non

sara eterna; perche il Dio e un uomo forte--grande, generoso, di

buon cuore." {16} An Italian told me once that if ever I came upon

a priest whom I wanted to tease, I was to ask him if he knew a

place called La Torre Pellice. I have never yet had the chance of

doing this; for, though I am fairly quick at seeing whether I am

likely to get on with a priest or no, I find the priest is

generally fairly quick too; and I am no sooner in a diligence or

railway carriage with an unsympathetic priest, than he curls

himself round into a moral ball and prays horribly--bristling out

with collects all over like a cross-grained spiritual hedgehog.

Partly, therefore, from having no wish to go out of my way to make

myself obnoxious, and partly through the opposite party being

determined that I shall not get the chance, the question about La

Torre Pellice has never come off, and I do not know what a priest

would say if the subject were introduced,--but I did get a talking

about La Torre Pellice all the same.

I was going from Turin to Pinerolo, and found myself seated

opposite a fine-looking elderly gentleman who was reading a paper

headed, "Le Temoin, Echo des Vallees Vaudoises": for the Vaudois,

or Waldenses, though on the Italian side of the Alps, are French in

language and perhaps in origin. I fell to talking with this

gentleman, and found he was on his way to La Torre Pellice, the

headquarters of indigenous Italian evangelicism. He told me there

were about 25,000 inhabitants of these valleys, and that they were

without exception Protestant, or rather that they had never

accepted Catholicism, but had retained the primitive Apostolic

faith in its original purity. He hinted to me that they were

descendants of some one or more of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

The English, he told me (meaning, I gather, the English of the

England that affects Exeter Hall), had done great things for the

inhabitants of La Torre at different times, and there were streets

called the Via Williams and Via Beckwith. They were, he said, a

very growing sect, and had missionaries and establishments in all

the principal cities in North Italy; in fact, so far as I could

gather, they were as aggressive as malcontents generally are, and,

Italians though they were, would give away tracts just as readily

as we do. I did not, therefore, go to La Torre.

Sometimes priests say things, as a matter of course, which would

make any English clergyman's hair stand on end. At one town there

is a remarkable fourteenth-century bridge, commonly known as "The

Devil's Bridge." I was sketching near this when a jolly old priest

with a red nose came up and began a conversation with me. He was

evidently a popular character, for every one who passed greeted

him. He told me that the devil did not really build the bridge. I

said I presumed not, for he was not in the habit of spending his

time so well.

"I wish he had built it," said my friend; "for then perhaps he

would build us some more."

"Or we might even get a church out of him," said I, a little slyly.

"Ha, ha, ha! we will convert him, and make a good Christian of him

in the end."

When will our Protestantism, or Rationalism, or whatever it may be,

sit as lightly upon ourselves?

CHAPTER X--S. Ambrogio and Neighbourhood

Since the opening of the railway, the old inn where the diligences

and private carriages used to stop has been closed; but I was made,

in a homely way, extremely comfortable at the Scudo di Francia,

kept by Signor Bonaudo and his wife. I stayed here over a

fortnight, during which I made several excursions.

One day I went to San Giorio, as it is always written though San

Giorgio is evidently intended. Here there is a ruined castle,

beautifully placed upon a hill; this castle shows well from the

railway shortly after leaving Bussoleno station, on the right hand

going towards Turin. Having been struck with it, I went by train

to Bussoleno (where there is much that I was unwillingly compelled

to neglect), and walked back to San Giorio. On my way, however, I

saw a patch of Cima-da-Conegliano-looking meadow-land on a hill

some way above me, and on this there rose from among the chestnuts

what looked like a castellated mansion. I thought it well to make

a digression to this, and when I got there, after a lovely walk,

knocked at the door, having been told by peasants that there would

be no difficulty about my taking a look round. The place is called

the Castel Burrello, and is tenanted by an old priest who has

retired hither to end his days. I sent in my card and business by

his servant, and by-and-by he came out to me himself.

"Vous etes Anglais, monsieur?" said he in French.

"Oui, monsieur."

"Vous etes Catholique?"

"Monsieur, je suis de la religion de mes peres."

"Pardon, monsieur, vos ancetres etaient Catholiques jusqu'au temps

de Henri VIII."

"Mais il y a trois cent ans depuis le temps de Henri VIII."

"Eh bien! chacun a ses convictions; vous ne parlez pas contre la

religion?"

"Jamais, jamais, monsieur; j'ai un respect enorme pour l'Eglise

Catholique."

"Monsieur, faites comme chez vous; allez ou vous voulez; vous

trouverez toutes les portes ouvertes. Amusez-vous bien."

He then explained to me that the castle had never been a properly

fortified place, being intended only as a summer residence for the

barons of Bussoleno, who used to resort hither during the extreme

heat, if times were tolerably quiet. After this he left me.

Taking him at his word, I walked all round, but there was only a

shell remaining; the rest of the building had evidently been burnt,

even the wing in which the present proprietor resides being, if I

remember rightly, modernised. The site, however, and the sloping

meadows which the castle crowns, are of extreme beauty.

I now walked down to San Giorio, and found a small inn where I

could get bread, butter, eggs, and good wine. I was waited upon by

a good-natured boy, the son of the landlord, who was accompanied by

a hawk that sat always either upon his hand or shoulder. As I

looked at the pair I thought they were very much alike, and

certainly they were very much in love with one another. After

dinner I sketched the castle. While I was doing so, a gentleman

told me that a large breach in the wall was made a few years ago,

and a part of the wall found to be hollow, the bottom of the hollow

part being unwittingly removed, there fell through a skeleton in a

full suit of armour. Others, whom I asked, had heard nothing of

this.

Talking of hawks, I saw a good many boys with tame young hawks in

the villages round about. There was a tame hawk at the station of

S. Ambrogio. The station-master said it used to go now and again

to the church-steeple to catch sparrows, but would always return in

an hour or two. Before my stay was over it got in the way of a

passing train and was run over.

Young birds are much eaten in this neighbourhood. The houses and

barns, not to say the steeples of the churches, are to be seen

stuck about with what look like terra-cotta water-bottles with the

necks outwards. Two or three may be seen in the illustration on p.

113 outside the window that comes out of the roof, on the left-hand

side of the picture. I have seen some outside an Italian

restaurant near Lewisham. They are artificial bird's-nests for the

sparrows to build in: as soon as the young are old enough they are

taken and made into a pie. The church-tower near the Hotel de la

Poste at Lanzo is more stuck about with them than any other

building that I have seen.

Swallows and hawks are about the only birds whose young are not

eaten. One afternoon I met a boy with a jay on his finger: having

imprudently made advances to this young gentleman in the hopes of

getting acquainted with the bird, he said he thought I had better

buy it and have it for my dinner; but I did not fancy it. Another

day I saw the padrona at the inn-door talking to a lad, who pulled

open his shirt-front and showed some twenty or thirty nestlings in

the simple pocket formed by his shirt on the one side and his skin

upon the other. The padrona wanted me to say I should like to eat

them, in which case she would have bought them; but one cannot get

all the nonsense one hears at home out of one's head in a moment,

and I am afraid I preached a little. The padrona, who is one of

the most fascinating women in the world, and at sixty is still

handsome, looked a little vexed and puzzled: she admitted the

truth of what I said, but pleaded that the boys found it very hard

to gain a few soldi, and if people didn't kill and eat one thing,

they would another. The result of it all was that I determined for

the future to leave young birds to their fate; they and the boys

must settle that matter between themselves. If the young bird was

a boy, and the boy a young bird, it would have been the boy who was

taken ruthlessly from his nest and eaten. An old bird has no right

to have a homestead, and a young bird has no right to exist at all,

unless they can keep both homestead and existence out of the way of

boys who are in want of half-pence. It is all perfectly right, and

when we go and stay among these charming people, let us do so as

learners, not as teachers.

I watched the padrona getting my supper ready. With what art do

not these people manage their fire. The New Zealand Maoris say the

white man is a fool: "He makes a large fire, and then has to sit

away from it; the Maori makes a small fire, and sits over it." The

scheme of an Italian kitchen-fire is that there shall always be one

stout log smouldering on the hearth, from which a few live coals

may be chipped off if wanted, and put into the small square

gratings which are used for stewing or roasting. Any warming up,

or shorter boiling, is done on the Maori principle of making a

small fire of light dry wood, and feeding it frequently. They

economise everything. Thus I saw the padrona wash some hen's eggs

well in cold water; I did not see why she should wash them before

boiling them, but presently the soup which I was to have for my

supper began to boil. Then she put the eggs into the soup and

boiled them in it.

After supper I had a talk with the padrone, who told me I was

working too hard. "Totam noctem," said he in Latin, "lavoravimus

et nihil incepimus." ("We have laboured all night and taken

nothing.") "Oh!" he continued, "I have eyes and ears in my head."

And as he spoke, with his right hand he drew down his lower eyelid,

and with his left pinched the pig of his ear. "You will be ill if

you go on like this." Then he laid his hand along his cheek, put

his head on one side, and shut his eyes, to imitate a sick man in

bed. On this I arranged to go an excursion with him on the day

following to a farm he had a few miles off, and to which he went

every Friday.

We went to Borgone station, and walked across the valley to a

village called Villar Fochiardo. Thence we began gently to ascend,

passing under some noble chestnuts. Signor Bonaudo said that this

is one of the best chestnut-growing districts in Italy. A good

tree, he told me, would give its forty francs a year. This seems

as though chestnut-growing must be lucrative, for an acre should

carry some five or six trees, and there is no outlay to speak of.

Besides the chestnuts, the land gives a still further return by way

of the grass that grows beneath them. Walnuts do not yield nearly

so much per tree as chestnuts do. In three-quarters of an hour or

so we reached Signor Bonaudo's farm, which was called the Casina di

Banda. The buildings had once been a monastery, founded at the

beginning of the seventeenth century and secularised by the first

Napoleon, but had been purchased from the state a few years ago by

Signor Bonaudo, in partnership with three others, after the passing

of the Church Property Act. It is beautifully situated some

hundreds of feet above the valley, and commands a lovely view of

the Comba, as it is called, or Combe of Susa. The accompanying

sketch will give an idea of the view looking towards Turin. The

large building on the hill is, of course, S. Michele. The very

distant dome is the Superga on the other side of Turin.

The first thing Signor Bonaudo did when he got to his farm was to

see whether the water had been duly turned on to his own portion of

the estate. Each of the four purchasers had his separate portion,

and each had a right to the water for thirty-six hours per week.

Signor Bonaudo went round with his hind at once, and saw that the

dams in the ducts were so opened or closed that his own land was

being irrigated.

Nothing can exceed the ingenuity with which the little canals are

arranged so that each part of a meadow, however undulating, shall

be saturated equally. The people are very jealous of their water

rights, and indeed not unnaturally, for the yield of grass depends

in very great measure upon the amount of irrigation which the land

can get.

The matter of the water having been seen to, we went to the

monastery, or, as it now is, the homestead. As we entered the

farmyard we found two cows fighting, and a great strapping wench

belabouring them in order to separate them. "Let them alone," said

the padrone; "let them fight it out here on the level ground."

Then he explained to me that he wished them to find out which was

mistress, and fall each of them into her proper place, for if they

fought on the rough hillsides they might easily break each other's

necks.

We walked all over the monastery. The day was steamy with frequent

showers, and thunderstorms in the air. The rooms were dark and

mouldy, and smelt rather of rancid cheese, but it was not a bad

sort of rambling old place, and if thoroughly done up would make a

delightful inn. There is a report that there is hidden treasure

here. I do not know a single old castle or monastery in North

Italy about which no such report is current, but in the present

case there seems more than usual ground (so the hind told me) for

believing the story to be well founded, for the monks did certainly

smelt the quartz in the neighbourhood, and as no gold was ever

known to leave the monastery, it is most likely that all the

enormous quantity which they must have made in the course of some

two centuries is still upon the premises, if one could only lay

one's hands upon it. So reasonable did this seem, that about two

years ago it was resolved to call in a somnambulist or clairvoyant

from Turin, who, when he arrived at the spot, became seized with

convulsions, betokening of course that there was treasure not far

off: these convulsions increased till he reached the choir of the

chapel, and here he swooned--falling down as if dead, and being

resuscitated with apparent difficulty. He afterwards declared that

it was in this chapel that the treasure was hidden. In spite of

all this, however, the chapel has not been turned upside down and

ransacked, perhaps from fear of offending the saint to whom it is

dedicated.

In the chapel there are a few votive pictures, but not very

striking ones. I hurriedly sketched one, but have failed to do it

justice. The hind saw me copying the little girl in bed, and I had

an impression as though he did not quite understand my motive. I

told him I had a dear little girl of my own at home, who had been

alarmingly ill in the spring, and that this picture reminded me of

her. This made everything quite comfortable.

We had brought up our dinner from S. Ambrogio, and ate it in what

had been the refectory of the monastery. The windows were broken,

and the swallows, who had built upon the ceiling inside the room,

kept flying close to us all the time we were eating. Great mallows

and hollyhocks peered in at the window, and beyond them there was a

pretty Devonshire-looking orchard. The noontide sun streamed in at

intervals between the showers.

After dinner we went "al cresto della collina"--to the crest of the

hill--to use Signor Bonaudo's words, and looked down upon S.

Giorio, and the other villages of the Combe of Susa. Nothing could

be more delightful. Then, getting under the chestnuts, I made the

sketch which I have already given. While making it I was accosted

by an underjawed man (there is an unusually large percentage of

underjawed people in the neighbourhood of S. Ambrogio), who asked

whether my taking this sketch must not be considered as a sign that

war was imminent. The people in this valley have bitter and

comparatively recent experience of war, and are alarmed at anything

which they fancy may indicate its recurrence. Talking further with

him, he said, "Here we have no signori; we need not take off our

hats to any one except the priest. We grow all we eat, we spin and

weave all we wear; if all the world except our own valley were

blotted out, it would make no difference, so long as we remain as

we are and unmolested." He was a wild, weird, St. John the Baptist

looking person, with shaggy hair, and an Andrea Mantegnesque

feeling about him. I gave him a pipe of English tobacco, which he

seemed to relish, and so we parted.

I stayed a week or so at another place not a hundred miles from

Susa, but I will not name it, for fear of causing offence. It was

situated high, above the valley of the Dora, among the pastures,

and just about the upper limit of the chestnuts. It offers a

summer retreat, of which the people in Turin avail themselves in

considerable numbers. The inn was a more sophisticated one than

Signor Bonaudo's house at S. Ambrogio, and there were several Turin

people staying there as well as myself, but there were no English.

During the whole time I was in that neighbourhood I saw not a

single English, French, or German tourist. The ways of the inn,

therefore, were exclusively Italian, and I had a better opportunity

of seeing the Italians as they are among themselves than I ever had

before.

Nothing struck me more than the easy terms on which every one,

including the waiter, appeared to be with every one else. This,

which in England would be impossible, is here not only possible but

a matter of course, because the general standard of good breeding

is distinctly higher than it is among ourselves. I do not mean to

say that there are no rude or unmannerly Italians, but that there

are fewer in proportion than there are in any other nation with

which I have acquaintance. This is not to be wondered at, for the

Italians have had a civilisation for now some three or four

thousand years, whereas all other nations are, comparatively

speaking, new countries, with a something even yet of colonial

roughness pervading them. As the colonies to England, so is

England to Italy in respect of the average standard of courtesy and

good manners. In a new country everything has a tendency to go

wild again, man included; and the longer civilisation has existed

in any country the more trustworthy and agreeable will its

inhabitants be. This preface is necessary, as explaining how it is

possible that things can be done in Italy without offence which

would be intolerable elsewhere; but I confess to feeling rather

hopeless of being able to describe what I actually saw without

giving a wrong impression concerning it.

Among the visitors was the head confidential clerk of a well-known

Milanese house, with his wife and sister. The sister was an

invalid, and so also was the husband, but the wife was a very

pretty woman and a very merry one. The waiter was a good-looking

young fellow of about five-and-twenty, and between him and Signora

Bonvicino--for we will say this was the clerk's name--there sprang

up a violent flirtation, all open and above board. The waiter was

evidently very fond of her, but said the most atrociously impudent

things to her from time to time. Dining under the veranda at the

next table I heard the Signora complain that the cutlets were

burnt. So they were--very badly burnt. The waiter looked at them

for a moment--threw her a contemptuous glance, clearly intended to

provoke war--"Chi non ha appetito {17} . . . " he exclaimed, and

was moving off with a shrug of the shoulders. The Signora

recognising a challenge, rose instantly from the table, and

catching him by the nape of his neck, kicked him deftly downstairs

into the kitchen, both laughing heartily, and the husband and

sister joining. I never saw anything more neatly done. Of course,

in a few minutes some fresh and quite unexceptionable cutlets made

their appearance.

Another morning, when I came down to breakfast, I found an

altercation going on between the same pair as to whether the lady's

nose was too large or not. It was not at all too large. It was a

very pretty little nose. The waiter was maintaining that it was

too large, and the lady that it was not.

One evening Signor Bonvicino told me that his employer had a very

large connection in England, and that though he had never been in

London, he knew all about it almost as well as if he had. The

great centre of business, he said, was in Red Lion Square. It was

here his employer's agent resided, and this was a more important

part than even the city proper. I threw a drop or two of cold

water on this, but without avail. Presently I asked what the

waiter's name was, not having been able to catch it. I asked this

of the Signora, and saw a little look on her face as though she

were not quite prepared to reply. Not understanding this, I

repeated my question.

"Oh! his name is Cesare," was the answer.

"Cesare! but that is not the name I hear you call him by."

"Well, perhaps not; we generally call him Cricco," {18} and she

looked as if she had suddenly remembered having been told that

there were such things as prigs, and might, for aught she knew, be

in the presence of one of these creatures now.

Her husband came to the rescue. "Yes," said he, "his real name is

Julius Caesar, but we call him Cricco. Cricco e un nome di paese;

parlando cosi non si offende la religione." {19}

The Roman Catholic religion, if left to itself and not compelled to

be introspective, is more kindly and less given to taking offence

than outsiders generally believe. At the Sacro Monte of Varese

they sell little round tin boxes that look like medals, and contain

pictures of all the chapels. In the lid of the box there is a

short printed account of the Sacro Monte, which winds up with the

words, "La religione e lo stupendo panorama tirano numerosi ed

allegri visitatori." {20}

Our people are much too earnest to allow that a view could have

anything to do with taking people up to the top of a hill where

there was a cathedral, or that people could be "merry" while on an

errand connected with religion.

On leaving this place I wanted to say good-bye to Signora

Bonvicino, and could not find her; after a time I heard she was at

the fountain, so I went and found her on her knees washing her

husband's and her own clothes, with her pretty round arms bare

nearly to the shoulder.

It never so much as occurred to her to mind being caught at this

work.

Some months later, shortly before winter, I returned to the same

inn for a few days, and found it somewhat demoralised. There had

been grand doings of some sort, and, though the doings were over,

the moral and material debris were not yet quite removed. The

famiglia Bonvicino was gone, and so was Cricco. The cook, the new

waiter, and the landlord (who sings a good comic song upon

occasion) had all drunk as much wine as they could carry; and later

on I found Veneranda, the one-eyed old chambermaid, lying upon my

bed fast asleep. I afterwards heard that, in spite of the autumnal

weather, the landlord spent his night on the grass under the

chestnuts, while the cook was found at four o'clock in the morning

lying at full length upon a table under the veranda. Next day,

however, all had become normal again.

Among our fellow-guests during this visit was a fiery-faced

eructive butcher from Turin. A difference of opinion having arisen

between him and his wife, I told the Signora that I would rather be

wrong with her than right with her husband. The lady was

delighted.

"Do you hear that, my dear?" said she. "He says he had rather be

wrong with me than right with you. Isn't he a naughty man?"

She said that if she died her husband was going to marry a girl of

fifteen. I said: "And if your husband dies, ma'am, send me a

dispatch to London, and I will come and marry you myself." They

were both delighted at this.

She told us the thunder had upset her and frightened her.

"Has it given you a headache?"

She replied: No; but it had upset her stomach. No doubt the

thunder had shaken her stomach's confidence in the soundness of its

opinions, so as to weaken its proselytising power. By and by,

seeing that she ate a pretty good dinner, I inquired:

"Is your stomach better now, ma'am?"

And she said it was. Next day my stomach was bad too.

I told her I had been married, but had lost my wife and had

determined never to marry again till I could find a widow whom I

had admired as a married woman.

Giovanni, the new waiter, explained to me that the butcher was not

really bad or cruel at all. I shook my head at him and said I

wished I could think so, but that his poor wife looked very ill and

unhappy.

The housemaid's name was La Rosa Mistica.

The landlord was a favourite with all the guests. Every one patted

him on the cheeks or the head, or chucked him under the chin, or

did something nice and friendly at him. He was a little man with a

face like a russet pippin apple, about sixty-five years old, but

made of iron. He was going to marry a third wife, and six young

women had already come up from S. Ambrogio to be looked at. I saw

one of them. She was a Visigoth-looking sort of person and wore a

large wobbly-brimmed straw hat; she was about forty, and gave me

the impression of being familiar with labour of all kinds. He

pressed me to give my opinion of her, but I sneaked out of it by

declaring that I must see a good deal more of the lady than I was

ever likely to see before I could form an opinion at all.

On coming down from the sanctuary one afternoon I heard the

landlord's comic song, of which I have spoken above. It was about

the musical instruments in a band: the trumpet did this, the

clarinet did that, the flute went tootle, tootle, tootle, and there

was an appropriate motion of the hand for every instrument. I was

a little disappointed with it, but the landlord said I was too

serious and the only thing that would cure me was to learn the song

myself. He said the butcher had learned it already, so it was not

hard, which indeed it was not. It was about as hard as:

The battle of the Nile

I was there all the while

At the battle of the Nile.

I had to learn it and sing it (Heaven help me, for I have no more

voice than a mouse!), and the landlord said that the motion of my

little finger was very promising.

The chestnuts are never better than after harvest, when they are

heavy-laden with their pale green hedgehog-like fruit and alive

with people swarming among their branches, pruning them while the

leaves are still good winter food for cattle. Why, I wonder, is

there such an especial charm about the pruning of trees? Who does

not feel it? No matter what the tree is, the poplar of France, or

the brookside willow or oak coppice of England, or the chestnuts or

mulberries of Italy, all are interesting when being pruned, or when

pruned just lately. A friend once consulted me casually about a

picture on which he was at work, and complained that a row of trees

in it was without sufficient interest. I was fortunate enough to

be able to help him by saying: "Prune them freely and put a

magpie's nest in one of them," and the trees became interesting at

once. People in trees always look well, or rather, I should say,

trees always look well with people in them, or indeed with any

living thing in them, especially when it is of a kind that is not

commonly seen in them; and the measured lop of the bill-hook and,

by and by, the click as a bough breaks and the lazy crash as it

falls over on to the ground, are as pleasing to the ear as is the

bough-bestrewn herbage to the eye.

To what height and to what slender boughs do not these hardy

climbers trust themselves. It is said that the coming man is to be

toeless. I will venture for it that he will not be toeless if

these chestnut-pruning men and women have much to do with his

development. Let the race prune chestnuts for a couple of hundred

generations or so, and it will have little trouble with its toes.

Of course, the pruners fall sometimes, but very rarely. I remember

in the Val Mastallone seeing a votive picture of a poor lady in a

short petticoat and trousers trimmed with red round the bottom who

was falling head foremost from the top of a high tree, whose leaves

she had been picking, and was being saved by the intervention of

two saints who caught her upon two gridirons. Such accidents,

however, and, I should think, such interventions, are exceedingly

rare, and as a rule the peasants venture freely into places which

in England no one but a sailor or a steeple-jack would attempt.

And so we left this part of Italy, wishing that more Hugo de

Montboissiers had committed more crimes and had had to expiate them

by building more sanctuaries.

CHAPTER XI--Lanzo

From S. Ambrogio we went to Turin, a city so well known that I need

not describe it. The Hotel Europa is the best, and, indeed, one of

the best hotels on the continent. Nothing can exceed it for

comfort and good cookery. The gallery of old masters contains some

great gems. Especially remarkable are two pictures of Tobias and

the angel, by Antonio Pollaiuolo and Sandro Botticelli; and a

magnificent tempera painting of the Crucifixion, by Gaudenzio

Ferrari--one of his very finest works. There are also several

other pictures by the same master, but the Crucifixion is the best.

From Turin I went alone to Lanzo, about an hour and a half's

railway journey from Turin, and found a comfortable inn, the Hotel

de la Poste. There is a fine fourteenth-century tower here, and

the general effect of the town is good.

One morning while I was getting my breakfast, English fashion, with

some cutlets to accompany my bread and butter, I saw an elderly

Italian gentleman, with his hand up to his chin, eyeing me with

thoughtful interest. After a time he broke silence.

"Ed il latte," he said, "serve per la suppa." {21}

I said that that was the view we took of it. He thought it over a

while, and then feelingly exclaimed -

"Oh bel!"

Soon afterwards he left me with the words -

"La! dunque! cerrea! chow! stia bene."

"La" is a very common close to an Italian conversation. I used to

be a little afraid of it at first. It sounds rather like saying,

"There, that's that. Please to bear in mind that I talked to you

very nicely, and let you bore me for a long time; I think I have

now done the thing handsomely, so you'll be good enough to score me

one and let me go." But I soon found out that it was quite a

friendly and civil way of saying good-bye.

The "dunque" is softer; it seems to say, "I cannot bring myself to

say so sad a word as 'farewell,' but we must both of us know that

the time has come for us to part, and so" -

"Cerrea" is an abbreviation and corruption of "di sua Signoria,"--

"by your highness's leave." "Chow" I have explained already.

"Stia bene" is simply "farewell."

The principal piazza of Lanzo is nice. In the upper part of the

town there is a large school or college. One can see into the

school through a grating from the road. I looked down, and saw

that the boys had cut their names all over the desks, just as

English boys would do. They were very merry and noisy, and though

there was a priest standing at one end of the room, he let them do

much as they liked, and they seemed quite happy. I heard one boy

shout out to another, "Non c' e pericolo," in answer to something

the other had said. This is exactly the "no fear" of America and

the colonies. Near the school there is a field on the slope of the

hill which commands a view over the plain. A woman was mowing

there, and, by way of making myself agreeable, I remarked that the

view was fine. "Yes, it is," she answered; "you can see all the

trains."

The baskets with which the people carry things in this

neighbourhood are of a different construction from any I have seen

elsewhere. They are made to fit all round the head like something

between a saddle and a helmet, and at the same time to rest upon

the shoulders--the head being, as it were, ensaddled by the basket,

and the weight being supported by the shoulders as well as by the

head. Why is it that such contrivances as this should prevail in

one valley and not in another? If, one is tempted to argue, the

plan is a convenient one, why does it not spread further? If

inconvenient, why has it spread so far? If it is good in the

valley of the Stura, why is it not also good in the contiguous

valley of the Dora? There must be places where people using

helmet-made baskets live next door to people who use baskets that

are borne entirely by back and shoulders. Why do not the people in

one or other of these houses adopt their neighbour's basket? Not

because people are not amenable to conviction, for within a certain

radius from the source of the invention they are convinced to a

man. Nor again is it from any insuperable objection to a change of

habit. The Stura people have changed their habit--possibly for the

worse; but if they have changed it for the worse, how is it they do

not find it out and change again?

Take, again, the pane Grissino, from which the neighbourhood of

Turin has derived its nickname of il Grissinotto. It is made in

long sticks, rather thicker than a tobacco pipe, and eats crisp

like toast. It is almost universally preferred to ordinary bread

by the inhabitants of what was formerly Piedmont, but beyond these

limits it is rarely seen. Why so? Either it is good or not good.

If not good, how has it prevailed over so large an area? If good,

why does it not extend its empire? The Reformation is another case

in point: granted that Protestantism is illogical, how is it that

so few within a given area can perceive it to be so? The same

question arises in respect of the distribution of many plants and

animals; the reason of the limits which some of them cannot pass,

being, indeed, perfectly clear, but as regards perhaps the greater

number of them, undiscoverable. The upshot of it is that things do

not in practice find their perfect level any more than water does

so, but are liable to disturbance by way of tides and local

currents, or storms. It is in his power to perceive and profit by

these irregularities that the strength or weakness of a commercial

man will be apparent,

One day I made an excursion from Lanzo to a place, the name of

which I cannot remember, but which is not far from the Groscavallo

glacier. Here I found several Italians staying to take the air,

and among them one young gentleman, who told me he was writing a

book upon this neighbourhood, and was going to illustrate it with

his own drawings. This naturally interested me, and I encouraged

him to tell me more, which he was nothing loth to do. He said he

had a passion for drawing, and was making rapid progress; but there

was one thing that held him back--the not having any Conte chalk:

if he had but this, all his difficulties would vanish.

Unfortunately I had no Conte chalk with me, I but I asked to see

the drawings, and was shown about twenty, all of which greatly

pleased me. I at once proposed an exchange, and have thus become

possessed of the two which I reproduce here. Being pencil

drawings, and not done with a view to Mr. Dawson's process, they

have suffered somewhat in reproduction, but I decided to let them

suffer rather than attempt to copy them. What can be more

absolutely in the spirit of the fourteenth century than the

drawings given above? They seem as though done by some fourteenth-

century painter who had risen from the dead. And to show that they

are no rare accident, I will give another (p. 138), also done by an

entirely self-taught Italian, and intended to represent the castle

of Laurenzana in the neighbourhood of Potenza.

If the reader will pardon a digression, I will refer to a more

important example of an old master born out of due time. One day,

in the cathedral at Varallo, I saw a picture painted on linen of

which I could make nothing. It was not old and it was not modern.

The expression of the Virgin's face was lovely, and there was more

individuality than is commonly found in modern Italian work.

Modern Italian colour is generally either cold and dirty, or else

staring. The colour here was tender, and reminded me of fifteenth-

century Florentine work. The folds of the drapery were not modern;

there was a sense of effort about them, as though the painter had

tried to do them better, but had been unable to get them as free

and flowing as he had wished. Yet the picture was not old; to all

appearance it might have been painted a matter of ten years; nor

again was it an echo--it was a sound: the archaism was not

affected; on the contrary, there was something which said, as

plainly as though the living painter had spoken it, that his

somewhat constrained treatment was due simply to his having been

puzzled with the intricacy of what he saw, and giving as much as he

could with a hand which was less advanced than his judgment. By

some strange law it comes about that the imperfection of men who

are at this stage of any art is the only true perfection; for the

wisdom of the wise is set at naught, and the foolishness of the

simple is chosen, and it is out of the mouths of babes and

sucklings that strength is ordained.

Unable to arrive at any conclusion, I asked the sacristan, and was

told it was by a certain Dedomenici of Rossa, in the Val Sesia, and

that it had been painted some forty or fifty years ago. I

expressed my surprise, and the sacristan continued: "Yes, but what

is most wonderful about him is that he never left his native

valley, and never had any instruction, but picked up his art for

himself as best he could."

I have been twice to Varallo since, to see whether I should change

my mind, but have not done so. If Dedomenici had been a Florentine

or Venetian in the best times, he would have done as well as the

best; as it is, his work is remarkable. He died about 1840, very

old, and he kept on improving to the last. His last work--at least

I was told upon the spot that it was his last--is in a little

roadside chapel perched high upon a rock, and dedicated, if I

remember rightly, to S. Michele, on the path from Fobello in the

Val Mastallone to Taponaccio. It is a Madonna and child in clouds,

with two full-length saints standing beneath--all the figures life-

size. I came upon this chapel quite accidentally one evening, and,

looking in, recognised the altar-piece as a Dedomenici. I inquired

at the next village who had painted it, and was told, "un certo

Dedomenici da Rossa." I was also told that he was nearly eighty

years old when he painted this picture. I went a couple of years

ago to reconsider it, and found that I remained much of my original

opinion. I do not think that any of my readers who care about the

history of Italian art will regret having paid it a visit.

Such men are more common in Italy than is believed. There is a

fresco of the Crucifixion outside the Campo Santo at Fusio, in the

Canton Ticino, done by a local artist, which, though far inferior

to the work of Dedomenici, is still remarkable. The painter

evidently knows nothing of the rules of his art, but he has made

Christ on the cross bowing His head towards the souls in purgatory,

instead of in the conventional fine frenzy to which we are

accustomed. There is a storm which has caught and is sweeping the

drapery round Christ's body. The angel's wings are no longer

white, but many coloured as in old times, and there is a touch of

humour in the fact that of the six souls in purgatory, four are

women and only two men. The expression on Christ's face is very

fine, but otherwise the drawing could not well be more imperfect

than it is.

CHAPTER XII--Considerations on the Decline of Italian Art

Those who know the Italians will see no sign of decay about them.

They are the quickest witted people in the world, and at the same

time have much more of the old Roman steadiness than they are

generally credited with. Not only is there no sign of

degeneration, but, as regards practical matters, there is every

sign of health and vigorous development. The North Italians are

more like Englishmen, both in body and mind, than any other people

whom I know; I am continually meeting Italians whom I should take

for Englishmen if I did not know their nationality. They have all

our strong points, but they have more grace and elasticity of mind

than we have.

Priggishness is the sin which doth most easily beset middle-class

and so-called educated Englishmen: we call it purity and culture,

but it does not much matter what we call it. It is the almost

inevitable outcome of a university education, and will last as long

as Oxford and Cambridge do, but not much longer.

Lord Beaconsfield sent Lothair to Oxford; it is with great pleasure

that I see he did not send Endymion. My friend Jones called my

attention to this, and we noted that the growth observable

throughout Lord Beaconsfield's life was continued to the end. He

was one of those who, no matter how long he lived, would have been

always growing: this is what makes his later novels so much better

than those of Thackeray or Dickens. There was something of the

child about him to the last. Earnestness was his greatest danger,

but if he did not quite overcome it (as who indeed can? It is the

last enemy that shall be subdued), he managed to veil it with a

fair amount of success. As for Endymion, of course if Lord

Beaconsfield had thought Oxford would be good for him, he could, as

Jones pointed out to me, just as well have killed Mr. Ferrars a

year or two later. We feel satisfied, therefore, that Endymion's

exclusion from a university was carefully considered, and are glad.

I will not say that priggishness is absolutely unknown among the

North Italians; sometimes one comes upon a young Italian who wants

to learn German, but not often. Priggism, or whatever the

substantive is, is as essentially a Teutonic vice as holiness is a

Semitic characteristic; and if an Italian happens to be a prig, he

will, like Tacitus, invariably show a hankering after German

institutions. The idea, however, that the Italians were ever a

finer people than they are now, will not pass muster with those who

know them.

At the same time, there can be no doubt that modern Italian art is

in many respects as bad as it was once good. I will confine myself

to painting only. The modern Italian painters, with very few

exceptions, paint as badly as we do, or even worse, and their

motives are as poor as is their painting. At an exhibition of

modern Italian pictures, I generally feel that there is hardly a

picture on the walls but is a sham--that is to say, painted not

from love of this particular subject and an irresistible desire to

paint it, but from a wish to paint an academy picture, and win

money or applause.

The same holds good in England, and in all other countries that I

know of. There is very little tolerable painting anywhere. In

some kinds, indeed, of black and white work the present age is

strong. The illustrations to "Punch," for example, are often as

good as anything that can be imagined. We know of nothing like

them in any past age or country. This is the one kind of art--and

it is a very good one--in which we excel as distinctly as the age

of Phidias excelled in sculpture. Leonardo da Vinci would never

have succeeded in getting his drawings accepted at 85 Fleet Street,

any more than one of the artists on the staff of "Punch" could

paint a fresco which should hold its own against Da Vinci's Last

Supper. Michael Angelo again and Titian would have failed

disastrously at modern illustration. They had no more sense of

humour than a Hebrew prophet; they had no eye for the more trivial

side of anything round about them. This aspect went in at one eye

and out at the other--and they lost more than ever poor Peter Bell

lost in the matter of primroses. I never can see what there was to

find fault with in that young man.

Fancy a street-Arab by Michael Angelo. Fancy even the result which

would have ensued if he had tried to put the figures into the

illustrations of this book. I should have been very sorry to let

him try his hand at it. To him a priest chucking a small boy under

the chin was simply non-existent. He did not care for it, and had

therefore no eye for it. If the reader will turn to the copy of a

fresco of St. Christopher on p. 209, he will see the conventional

treatment of the rocks on either side the saint. This was the best

thing the artist could do, and probably cost him no little trouble.

Yet there were rocks all around him--little, in fact, else than

rock in those days; and the artist could have drawn them well

enough if it had occurred to him to try and do so. If he could

draw St. Christopher, he could have drawn a rock; but he had an

interest in the one, and saw nothing in the other which made him

think it worth while to pay attention to it. What rocks were to

him, the common occurrences of everyday life were to those who are

generally held to be the giants of painting. The result of this

neglect to kiss the soil--of this attempt to be always soaring--is

that these giants are for the most part now very uninteresting,

while the smaller men who preceded them grow fresher and more

delightful yearly. It was not so with Handel and Shakespeare.

Handel's

"Ploughman near at hand, whistling o'er the furrowed land,"

is intensely sympathetic, and his humour is admirable whenever he

has occasion for it.

Leonardo da Vinci is the only one of the giant Italian masters who

ever tried to be humorous, and he failed completely: so, indeed,

must any one if he tries to be humorous. We do not want this; we

only want them not to shut their eyes to by-play when it comes in

their way, and if they are giving us an account of what they have

seen, to tell us something about this too. I believe the older the

world grows, the better it enjoys a joke. The mediaeval joke

generally was a heavy, lumbering old thing, only a little better

than the classical one. Perhaps in those days life was harder than

it is now, and people if they looked at it at all closely dwelt

upon its soberer side. Certainly in humorous art, we may claim to

be not only principes, but facile principes. Nevertheless, the

Italian comic journals are, some of them, admirably illustrated,

though in a style quite different from our own; sometimes, also,

they are beautifully coloured.

As regards painting, the last rays of the sunset of genuine art are

to be found in the votive pictures at Locarno or Oropa, and in many

a wayside chapel. In these, religious art still lingers as a

living language, however rudely spoken. In these alone is the

story told, not as in the Latin and Greek verses of the scholar,

who thinks he has succeeded best when he has most concealed his

natural manner of expressing himself, but by one who knows what he

wants to say, and says it in his mother-tongue, shortly, and

without caring whether or not his words are in accordance with

academic rules. I regret to see photography being introduced for

votive purposes, and also to detect in some places a disposition on

the part of the authorities to be a little ashamed of these

pictures and to place them rather out of sight.

Sometimes in a little country village, as at Doera near Mesocco,

there is a modern fresco on a chapel in which the old spirit

appears, with its absolute indifference as to whether it was

ridiculous or no, but such examples are rare.

Sometimes, again, I have even thought I have detected a ray of

sunset upon a milkman's window-blind in London, and once upon an

undertaker's, but it was too faint a ray to read by. The best

thing of the kind that I have seen in London is the picture of the

lady who is cleaning knives with Mr. Spong's patent knife-cleaner,

in his shop window nearly opposite Day & Martin's in Holborn. It

falls a long way short, however, of a good Italian votive picture:

but it has the advantage of moving.

I knew of a little girl once, rather less than four years old,

whose uncle had promised to take her for a drive in a carriage with

him, and had failed to do so. The child was found soon afterwards

on the stairs weeping, and being asked what was the matter,

replied, "Mans is all alike." This is Giottesque. I often think

of it as I look upon Italian votive pictures. The meaning is so

sound in spite of the expression being so defective--if, indeed,

expression can be defective when it has so well conveyed the

meaning.

I knew, again, an old lady whose education had been neglected in

her youth. She came into a large fortune, and at some forty years

of age put herself under the best masters. She once said to me as

follows, speaking very slowly and allowing a long time between each

part of the sentence;--"You see," she said, "the world, and all

that it contains, is wrapped up in such curious forms, that it is

only by a knowledge of human nature, that we can rightly tell what

to say, to do, or to admire." I copied the sentence into my

notebook immediately on taking my leave. It is like an academy

picture.

But to return to the Italians. The question is, how has the

deplorable falling-off in Italian painting been caused? And by

doing what may we again get Bellinis and Andrea Mantegnas as in old

time? The fault does not lie in any want of raw material: the

drawings I have already given prove this. Nor, again, does it lie

in want of taking pains. The modern Italian painter frets himself

to the full as much as his predecessor did--if the truth were

known, probably a great deal more. It does not lie in want of

schooling or art education. For the last three hundred years, ever

since the Carracci opened their academy at Bologna, there has been

no lack of art education in Italy. Curiously enough, the date of

the opening of the Bolognese Academy coincides as nearly as may be

with the complete decadence of Italian painting.

This is an example of the way in which Italian boys begin their art

education now. The drawing which I reproduce here was given me by

the eminent sculptor, Professor Vela, as the work of a lad of

twelve years old, and as doing credit alike to the school where the

lad was taught and to the pupil himself. {22}

So it undoubtedly does. It shows as plainly the receptiveness and

docility of the modern Italian, as the illustrations given above

show his freshness and naivete when left to himself. The drawing

is just such as we try to get our own young people to do, and few

English elementary schools in a small country town would succeed in

turning out so good a one. I have nothing, therefore, but praise

both for the pupil and the teacher; but about the system which

makes such teachers and such pupils commendable, I am more

sceptical. That system trains boys to study other people's works

rather than nature, and, as Leonardo da Vinci so well says, it

makes them nature's grandchildren and not her children. The boy

who did the drawing given above is not likely to produce good work

in later life. He has been taught to see nature with an old man's

eyes at once, without going through the embryonic stages. He has

never said his "mans is all alike," and by twenty will be painting

like my old friend's long academic sentence. All his individuality

has been crushed out of him.

I will now give a reproduction of the frontispiece to Avogadro's

work on the sanctuary of S. Michele, from which I have already

quoted; it is a very pretty and effective piece of work, but those

who are good enough to turn back to p. 93, and to believe that I

have drawn carefully, will see how disappointing Avogadro's

frontispiece must be to those who hold, as most of us will, that a

draughtsman's first business is to put down what he sees, and to

let prettiness take care of itself. The main features, indeed, can

still be traced, but they have become as transformed and lifeless

as rudimentary organs. Such a frontispiece, however, is the almost

inevitable consequence of the system of training that will make

boys of twelve do drawings like the one given on p. 147.

If half a dozen young Italians could be got together with a taste

for drawing like that shown by the authors of the sketches on pp.

136, 137, 138; if they had power to add to their number; if they

were allowed to see paintings and drawings done up to the year A.D.

1510, and votive pictures and the comic papers; if they were left

with no other assistance than this, absolutely free to please

themselves, and could be persuaded not to try and please any one

else, I believe that in fifty years we should have all that was

ever done repeated with fresh naivete, and as much more

delightfully than even by the best old masters, as these are more

delightful than anything we know of in classic painting. The young

plants keep growing up abundantly every day--look at Bastianini,

dead not ten years since--but they are browsed down by the

academies. I remember there came out a book many years ago with

the title, "What becomes of all the clever little children?" I

never saw the book, but the title is pertinent.

Any man who can write, can draw to a not inconsiderable extent.

Look at the Bayeux tapestry; yet Matilda probably never had a

drawing lesson in her life. See how well prisoner after prisoner

in the Tower of London has cut this or that out in the stone of his

prison wall, without, in all probability, having ever tried his

hand at drawing before. Look at my friend Jones, who has several

illustrations in this book. The first year he went abroad with me

he could hardly draw at all. He was no year away from England more

than three weeks. How did he learn? On the old principle, if I am

not mistaken. The old principle was for a man to be doing

something which he was pretty strongly bent on doing, and to get a

much younger one to help him. The younger paid nothing for

instruction, but the elder took the work, as long as the relation

of master and pupil existed between them. I, then, was making

illustrations for this book, and got Jones to help me. I let him

see what I was doing, and derive an idea of the sort of thing I

wanted, and then left him alone--beyond giving him the same kind of

small criticism that I expected from himself--but I appropriated

his work. That is the way to teach, and the result was that in an

incredibly short time Jones could draw. The taking the work is a

sine qua non. If I had not been going to have his work, Jones, in

spite of all his quickness, would probably have been rather slower

in learning to draw. Being paid in money is nothing like so good.

This is the system of apprenticeship versus the academic system.

The academic system consists in giving people the rules for doing

things. The apprenticeship system consists in letting them do it,

with just a trifle of supervision. "For all a rhetorician's

rules," says my great namesake, "teach nothing, but to name his

tools;" and academic rules generally are much the same as the

rhetorician's. Some men can pass through academies unscathed, but

they are very few, and in the main the academic influence is a

baleful one, whether exerted in a university or a school. While

young men at universities are being prepared for their entry into

life, their rivals have already entered it. The most university

and examination ridden people in the world are the Chinese, and

they are the least progressive.

Men should learn to draw as they learn conveyancing: they should

go into a painter's studio and paint on his pictures. I am told

that half the conveyances in the country are drawn by pupils; there

is no more mystery about painting than about conveyancing--not half

in fact, I should think, so much. One may ask, How can the

beginner paint, or draw conveyances, till he has learnt how to do

so? The answer is, How can he learn, without at any rate trying to

do? If he likes his subject, he will try: if he tries, he will

soon succeed in doing something which shall open a door. It does

not matter what a man does; so long as he does it with the

attention which affection engenders, he will come to see his way to

something else. After long waiting he will certainly find one door

open, and go through it. He will say to himself that he can never

find another. He has found this, more by luck than cunning, but

now he is done. Yet by and by he will see that there is ONE more

small, unimportant door which he had overlooked, and he proceeds

through this too. If he remains now for a long while and sees no

other, do not let him fret; doors are like the kingdom of heaven,

they come not by observation, least of all do they come by forcing:

let them just go on doing what comes nearest, but doing it

attentively, and a great wide door will one day spring into

existence where there had been no sign of one but a little time

previously. Only let him be always doing something, and let him

cross himself now and again, for belief in the wondrous efficacy of

crosses and crossing is the corner-stone of the creed of the

evolutionist. Then after years--but not probably till after a

great many--doors will open up all round, so many and so wide that

the difficulty will not be to find a door, but rather to obtain the

means of even hurriedly surveying a portion of those that stand

invitingly open.

I know that just as good a case can be made out for the other side.

It may be said as truly that unless a student is incessantly on the

watch for doors he will never see them, and that unless he is

incessantly pressing forward to the kingdom of heaven he will never

find it--so that the kingdom does come by observation. It is with

this as with everything else--there must be a harmonious fusing of

two principles which are in flat contradiction to one another.

The question whether it is better to abide quiet and take advantage

of opportunities that come, or to go further afield in search of

them, is one of the oldest which living beings have had to deal

with. It was on this that the first great schism or heresy arose

in what was heretofore the catholic faith of protoplasm. The

schism still lasts, and has resulted in two great sects--animals

and plants. The opinion that it is better to go in search of prey

is formulated in animals; the other--that it is better on the whole

to stay at home and profit by what comes--in plants. Some

intermediate forms still record to us the long struggle during

which the schism was not yet complete.

If I may be pardoned for pursuing this digression further, I would

say that it is the plants and not we who are the heretics. There

can be no question about this; we are perfectly justified,

therefore, in devouring them. Ours is the original and orthodox

belief, for protoplasm is much more animal than vegetable; it is

much more true to say that plants have descended from animals than

animals from plants. Nevertheless, like many other heretics,

plants have thriven very fairly well. There are a great many of

them, and as regards beauty, if not wit--of a limited kind indeed,

but still wit--it is hard to say that the animal kingdom has the

advantage. The views of plants are sadly narrow; all dissenters

are narrow-minded; but within their own bounds they know the

details of their business sufficiently well--as well as though they

kept the most nicely-balanced system of accounts to show them their

position. They are eaten, it is true; to eat them is our bigoted

and intolerant way of trying to convert them: eating is only a

violent mode of proselytising or converting; and we do convert

them--to good animal substance, of our own way of thinking. But

then, animals are eaten too. They convert one another, almost as

much as they convert plants. And an animal is no sooner dead than

a plant will convert it back again. It is obvious, however, that

no schism could have been so long successful, without having a good

deal to say for itself.

Neither party has been quite consistent. Who ever is or can be?

Every extreme--every opinion carried to its logical end--will prove

to be an absurdity. Plants throw out roots and boughs and leaves;

this is a kind of locomotion; and as Dr. Erasmus Darwin long since

pointed out, they do sometimes approach nearly to what may be

called travelling; a man of consistent character will never look at

a bough, a root, or a tendril without regarding it as a melancholy

and unprincipled compromise. On the other hand, many animals are

sessile, and some singularly successful genera, as spiders, are in

the main liers-in-wait. It may appear, however, on the whole, like

reopening a settled question to uphold the principle of being busy

and attentive over a small area, rather than going to and fro over

a larger one, for a mammal like man, but I think most readers will

be with me in thinking that, at any rate as regards art and

literature, it is he who does his small immediate work most

carefully who will find doors open most certainly to him, that will

conduct him into the richest chambers.

Many years ago, in New Zealand, I used sometimes to accompany a

dray and team of bullocks who would have to be turned loose at

night that they might feed. There were no hedges or fences then,

so sometimes I could not find my team in the morning, and had no

clue to the direction in which they had gone. At first I used to

try and throw my soul into the bullocks' souls, so as to divine if

possible what they would be likely to have done, and would then

ride off ten miles in the wrong direction. People used in those

days to lose their bullocks sometimes for a week or fortnight--when

they perhaps were all the time hiding in a gully hard by the place

where they were turned out. After some time I changed my tactics.

On losing my bullocks I would go to the nearest accommodation

house, and stand occasional drinks to travellers. Some one would

ere long, as a general rule, turn up who had seen the bullocks.

This case does not go quite on all fours with what I have been

saying above, inasmuch as I was not very industrious in my limited

area; but the standing drinks and inquiring was being as

industrious as the circumstances would allow.

To return, universities and academies are an obstacle to the

finding of doors in later life; partly because they push their

young men too fast through doorways that the universities have

provided, and so discourage the habit of being on the look-out for

others; and partly because they do not take pains enough to make

sure that their doors are bona fide ones. If, to change the

metaphor, an academy has taken a bad shilling, it is seldom very

scrupulous about trying to pass it on. It will stick to it that

the shilling is a good one as long as the police will let it. I

was very happy at Cambridge; when I left it I thought I never again

could be so happy anywhere else; I shall ever retain a most kindly

recollection both of Cambridge and of the school where I passed my

boyhood; but I feel, as I think most others must in middle life,

that I have spent as much of my maturer years in unlearning as in

learning.

The proper course is for a boy to begin the practical business of

life many years earlier than he now commonly does. He should begin

at the very bottom of a profession; if possible of one which his

family has pursued before him--for the professions will assuredly

one day become hereditary. The ideal railway director will have

begun at fourteen as a railway porter. He need not be a porter for

more than a week or ten days, any more than he need have been a

tadpole more than a short time; but he should take a turn in

practice, though briefly, at each of the lower branches in the

profession. The painter should do just the same. He should begin

by setting his employer's palette and cleaning his brushes. As for

the good side of universities, the proper preservative of this is

to be found in the club.

If, then, we are to have a renaissance of art, there must be a

complete standing aloof from the academic system. That system has

had time enough. Where and who are its men? Can it point to one

painter who can hold his own with the men of, say, from 1450 to

1550? Academies will bring out men who can paint hair very like

hair, and eyes very like eyes, but this is not enough. This is

grammar and deportment; we want it and a kindly nature, and these

cannot be got from academies. As far as mere TECHNIQUE is

concerned, almost every one now can paint as well as is in the

least desirable. The same mutatis mutandis holds good with writing

as with painting. We want less word-painting and fine phrases, and

more observation at first-hand. Let us have a periodical

illustrated by people who cannot draw, and written by people who

cannot write (perhaps, however, after all, we have some), but who

look and think for themselves, and express themselves just as they

please,--and this we certainly have not. Every contributor should

be at once turned out if he or she is generally believed to have

tried to do something which he or she did not care about trying to

do, and anything should be admitted which is the outcome of a

genuine liking. People are always good company when they are doing

what they really enjoy. A cat is good company when it is purring,

or a dog when it is wagging its tail.

The sketching clubs up and down the country might form the nucleus

of such a society, provided all professional men were rigorously

excluded. As for the old masters, the better plan would be never

even to look at one of them, and to consign Raffaelle, along with

Plato, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Dante, Goethe, and two others,

neither of them Englishmen, to limbo, as the Seven Humbugs of

Christendom.

While we are about it, let us leave off talking about "art for

art's sake." Who is art that it should have a sake? A work of art

should be produced for the pleasure it gives the producer, and the

pleasure he thinks it will give to a few of whom he is fond; but

neither money nor people whom he does not know personally should be

thought of. Of course such a society as I have proposed would not

remain incorrupt long. "Everything that grows, holds in perfection

but a little moment." The members would try to imitate

professional men in spite of their rules, or, if they escaped this

and after a while got to paint well, they would become dogmatic,

and a rebellion against their authority would be as necessary ere

long as it was against that of their predecessors: but the balance

on the whole would be to the good.

Professional men should be excluded, if for no other reason yet for

this, that they know too much for the beginner to be en rapport

with them. It is the beginner who can help the beginner, as it is

the child who is the most instructive companion for another child.

The beginner can understand the beginner, but the cross between him

and the proficient performer is too wide for fertility. It savours

of impatience, and is in flat contradiction to the first principles

of biology. It does a beginner positive harm to look at the

masterpieces of the great executionists, such as Rembrandt or

Turner.

If one is climbing a very high mountain which will tax all one's

strength, nothing fatigues so much as casting upward glances to the

top, nothing encourages so much as casting downward glances. The

top seems never to draw nearer; the parts that we have passed

retreat rapidly. Let a water-colour student go and see the drawing

by Turner, in the basement of our National Gallery, dated 1787.

This is the sort of thing for him, not to copy, but to look at for

a minute or two now and again. It will show him nothing about

painting, but it may serve to teach him not to overtax his

strength, and will prove to him that the greatest masters in

painting, as in everything else, begin by doing work which is no

way superior to that of their neighbours. A collection of the

earliest known works of the greatest men would be much more useful

to the student than any number of their maturer works, for it would

show him that he need not worry himself because his work does not

look clever, or as silly people say, "show power."

The secrets of success are affection for the pursuit chosen, a flat

refusal to be hurried or to pass anything as understood which is

not understood, and an obstinacy of character which shall make the

student's friends find it less trouble to let him have his own way

than to bend him into theirs. Our schools and academies or

universities are covertly, but essentially, radical institutions

and abhorrent to the genius of Conservatism. Their sin is the true

radical sin of being in too great a hurry, and of believing in

short cuts too soon. But it must be remembered that this

proposition, like every other, wants tempering with a slight

infusion of its direct opposite.

I said in an early part of this book that the best test to know

whether or no one likes a picture is to ask one's self whether one

would like to look at it if one was quite sure one was alone. The

best test for a painter as to whether he likes painting his picture

is to ask himself whether he should like to paint it if he was

quite sure that no one except himself, and the few of whom he was

very fond, would ever see it. If he can answer this question in

the affirmative, he is all right; if he cannot, he is all wrong. I

will close these remarks with an illustration which will show how

nearly we can approach the early Florentines even now--when nobody

is looking at us. I do not know who Mr. Pollard is. I never heard

of him till I came across a cheap lithograph of his Funeral of Tom

Moody in the parlour of a village inn. I should not think he ever

was an R.A., but he has approached as nearly as the difference

between the geniuses of the two countries will allow, to the spirit

of the painters who painted in the Campo Santo at Pisa. Look,

again, at Garrard, at the close of the last century. We generally

succeed with sporting or quasi-sporting subjects, and our cheap

coloured coaching and hunting subjects are almost always good, and

often very good indeed. We like these things: therefore we

observe them; therefore we soon become able to express them.

Historical and costume pictures we have no genuine love for; we do

not, therefore, go beyond repeating commonplaces concerning them.

I must reserve other remarks upon this subject for another

occasion.

CHAPTER XIII--Viu, Fucine, and S. Ignazio

I must now return to my young friend at Groscavallo. I have

published his drawings without his permission, having unfortunately

lost his name and address, and being unable therefore to apply to

him. I hope that, should they ever meet his eye, he will accept

this apology and the assurance of my most profound consideration.

Delighted as I had been with his proposed illustrations, I thought

I had better hear some of the letterpress, so I begged him to read

me his MS. My time was short, and he began at once. The few

introductory pages were very nice, but there was nothing

particularly noticeable about them; when, however, he came to his

description of the place where we now were, he spoke of a beautiful

young lady as attracting his attention on the evening of his

arrival. It seemed that she was as much struck with him as he with

her, and I thought we were going to have a romance, when he

proceeded as follows: "We perceived that we were sympathetic, and

in less than a quarter of an hour had exchanged the most solemn

vows that we would never marry one another." "What?" said I,

hardly able to believe my ears, "will you kindly read those last

words over again?" He did so, slowly and distinctly; I caught them

beyond all power of mistake, and they were as I have given them

above:- "We perceived that we were sympathetic, and in less than a

quarter of an hour had exchanged the most solemn vows that we would

never marry one another." While I was rubbing my eyes and making

up my mind whether I had stumbled upon a great satirist or no, I

heard a voice from below--"Signor Butler, Signor Butler, la vettura

e pronta." I had therefore to leave my doubt unsolved, but all the

time as we drove down the valley I had the words above quoted

ringing in my head. If ever any of my readers come across the book

itself--for I should hope it will be published--I should be very

grateful to them if they will direct my attention to it.

Another day I went to Ceres, and returned on foot via S. Ignazio.

S. Ignazio is a famous sanctuary on the very top of a mountain,

like that of Sammichele; but it is late, the St. Ignatius being St.

Ignatius Loyola, and not the apostolic father. I got my dinner at

a village inn at the foot of the mountain, and from the window

caught sight of a fresco upon the wall of a chapel a few yards off.

There was a companion to it hardly less interesting, but I had not

time to sketch it. I do not know what the one I give is intended

to represent. St. Ignatius is upon a rock, and is pleased with

something, but there is nothing to show what it is, except his

attitude, which seems to say, "Senza far fatica,"--"You see I can

do it quite easily," or, "There is no deception." Nor do we easily

gather what it is that the Roman centurion is saying to St.

Ignatius. I cannot make up my mind whether he is merely warning

him to beware of the reaction, or whether he is a little

scandalised.

From this village I went up the mountain to the sanctuary of S.

Ignazio itself, which looks well from the distance, and commands a

striking view, but contains nothing of interest, except a few nice

votive pictures.

From Lanzo I went to Viu, a summer resort largely frequented by the

Turinese, but rarely visited by English people. There is a good

inn at Viu--the one close to where the public conveyance stops--and

the neighbourhood is enchanting. The little village on the crest

of the hill in the distance, to the left of the church, as shown on

the preceding page, is called the Colma di S. Giovanni, and is well

worth a visit. In spring, before the grass is cut, the pastures

must be even better than when I saw them in August, and they were

then still of almost incredible beauty.

I went to S. Giovanni by the directest way--descending, that is, to

the level of the Stura, crossing it, and then going straight up the

mountain. I returned by a slight detour so as to take the village

of Fucine, a frazione of Viu a little higher up the river. I found

many picturesque bits; among them the one which I give on the next

page. It was a grand festa; first they had had mass, then there

had been the funzioni, which I never quite understand, and

thenceforth till sundown there was a public ball on the bowling

ground of a little inn on the Viu side of the bridge. The

principal inn is on the other side. It was here I went and ordered

dinner. The landlady brought me a minestra, or hodge-podge soup,

full of savoury vegetables, and very good; a nice cutlet fried in

bread-crumbs, bread and butter ad libitum, and half a bottle of

excellent wine. She brought all together on a tray, and put them

down on the table. "It'll come to a franc," said she, "in all, but

please to pay first." I did so, of course, and she was satisfied.

A day or two afterwards I went to the same inn, hoping to dine as

well and cheaply as before; but I think they must have discovered

that I was a forestiere inglese in the meantime, for they did not

make me pay first, and charged me normal prices.

What pretty words they have! While eating my dinner I wanted a

small plate and asked for it. The landlady changed the word I had

used, and told a girl to bring me a tondino. A tondino is an

abbreviation of rotondino, a "little round thing." A plate is a

tondo, a small plate a tondino. The delicacy of expression which

their diminutives and intensitives give is untranslateable. One

day I was asking after a waiter whom I had known in previous years,

but who was ill. I said I hoped he was not badly off. "Oh dear,

no," was the answer; "he has a discreta posizionina"--"a snug

little sum put by." "Is the road to such and such a place

difficult?" I once inquired. "Un tantino," was the answer. "Ever

such a very little," I suppose, is as near as we can get to this.

At one inn I asked whether I could have my linen back from the wash

by a certain time, and was told it was impossibilissimo. I have an

Italian friend long resident in England who often introduces

English words when talking with me in Italian. Thus I have heard

him say that such and such a thing is tanto cheapissimo. As for

their gestures, they are inimitable. To say nothing of the pretty

little way in which they say "no," by moving the forefinger

backwards and forwards once or twice, they have a hundred movements

to save themselves the trouble of speaking, which say what they

have to say better than any words can do. It is delightful to see

an Italian move his hand in such way as to show you that you have

got to go round a corner. Gesture is easier both to make and to

understand than speech is. Speech is a late acquisition, and in

critical moments is commonly discarded in favour of gesture, which

is older and more habitual.

I once saw an Italian explaining something to another and tapping

his nose a great deal. He became more and more confidential, and

the more confidential he became, the more he tapped, till his

finger seemed to become glued to, and almost grow into his nose.

At last the supreme moment came. He drew the finger down, pressing

it closely against his lower lip, so as to drag it all down and

show his gums and the roots of his teeth. "There," he seemed to

say, "you now know all: consider me as turned inside out: my

mucous membrane is before you."

At Fucine, and indeed in all the valleys hereabout, spinning-wheels

are not uncommon. I also saw a woman sitting in her room with the

door opening on to the street, weaving linen at a hand-loom. The

woman and the hand-loom were both very old and rickety. The first

and the last specimens of anything, whether animal or vegetable

organism, or machine, or institution, are seldom quite

satisfactory. Some five or six years ago I saw an old gentleman

sitting outside the St. Lawrence Hall at Montreal, in Canada, and

wearing a pigtail, but it was not a good pigtail; and when the

Scotch baron killed the last wolf in Scotland, it was probably a

weak, mangy old thing, capable of little further mischief.

Presently I walked a mile or two up the river, and met a godfather

coming along with a cradle on his shoulder; he was followed by two

women, one carrying some long wax candles, and the other something

wrapped up in a piece of brown paper; they were going to get the

child christened at Fucine. Soon after I met a priest, and bowed,

as a matter of course. In towns or places where many foreigners

come and go this is unnecessary, but in small out-of-the-way places

one should take one's hat off to the priest. I mention this

because many Englishmen do not know that it is expected of them,

and neglect the accustomed courtesy through ignorance. Surely,

even here in England, if one is in a small country village, off

one's beat, and meets the clergyman, it is more polite than not to

take off one's hat.

Viu is one of the places from which pilgrims ascend the Rocca

Melone at the beginning of August. This is one of the most popular

and remarkable pilgrimages of North Italy; the Rocca Melone is

11,000 feet high, and forms a peak so sharp, that there is room for

little else than the small wooden chapel which stands at the top of

it. There is no accommodation whatever, except at some rough

barracks (so I have been told) some thousands of feet below the

summit. These, I was informed, are sometimes so crowded that the

people doze standing, and the cold at night is intense, unless

under the shelter just referred to; yet some five or six thousand

pilgrims ascend on the day and night of the festa--chiefly from

Susa, but also from all parts of the valleys of the Dora and the

Stura. They leave Susa early in the morning, camp out or get

shelter in the barracks that evening, reaching the chapel at the

top of the Rocca Melone next day. I have not made the ascent

myself, but it would probably be worth making by one who did not

mind the fatigue.

I may mention that thatch is not uncommon in the Stura valley. In

the Val Mastallone, and more especially between Civiasco (above

Varallo) and Orta, thatch is more common still, and the thatching

is often very beautifully done. Thatch in a stone country is an

indication of German, or at any rate Cisalpine descent, and is

among the many proofs of the extent to which German races crossed

the Alps and spread far down over Piedmont and Lombardy. I was

more struck with traces of German influence on the path from Pella

on the Lago d'Orta, to the Colma on the way to Varallo, than

perhaps anywhere else. The churches have a tendency to have pure

spires--a thing never seen in Italy proper; clipped yews and box-

trees are common; there are lime-trees in the churchyards, and

thatch is the rule, not the exception. At Rimella in the Val

Mastallone, not far off, German is still the current language. As

I sat sketching, a woman came up to me, and said, "Was machen sic?"

as a matter of course. Rimella is the highest village in its

valley, yet if one crosses the saddle at the head of the valley,

one does not descend upon a German-speaking district; one descends

on the Val Anzasca, where Italian is universally spoken. Until

recently German was the language of many other villages at the

heads of valleys, even though these valleys were themselves

entirely surrounded by Italian-speaking people. At Alagna in the

Val Sesia, German is still spoken.

Whatever their origin, however, the people are now thoroughly

Italianised. Nevertheless, as I have already said, it is strange

what a number of people one meets among them, whom most people

would unhesitatingly pronounce to be English if asked to name their

nationality.

CHAPTER XIV--Sanctuary of Oropa

From Lanzo I went back to Turin, where Jones again joined me, and

we resolved to go and see the famous sanctuary of Oropa near

Biella. Biella is about three hours' railway journey from Turin.

It is reached by a branch line of some twenty miles, that leaves

the main line between Turin and Milan at Santhia. Except the view

of the Alps, which in clear weather cannot be surpassed, there is

nothing of very particular interest between Turin and Santhia, nor

need Santhia detain the traveller longer than he can help. Biella

we found to consist of an upper and a lower town--the upper, as may

be supposed, being the older. It is at the very junction of the

plain and the mountains, and is a thriving place, with more of the

busy air of an English commercial town than perhaps any other of

its size in North Italy. Even in the old town large rambling old

palazzi have been converted into factories, and the click of the

shuttle is heard in unexpected places.

We were unable to find that Biella contains any remarkable pictures

or other works of art, though they are doubtless to be found by

those who have the time to look for them. There is a very fine

campanile near the post-office, and an old brick baptistery, also

hard by; but the church to which both campanile and baptistery

belonged, has, as the author of "Round about London" so well says,

been "utterly restored;" it cannot be uglier than what we sometimes

do, but it is quite as ugly. We found an Italian opera company in

Biella; peeping through a grating, as many others were doing, we

watched the company rehearsing "La forza del destino," which was to

be given later in the week.

The morning after our arrival, we took the daily diligence for

Oropa, leaving Biella at eight o'clock. Before we were clear of

the town we could see the long line of the hospice, and the chapels

dotted about near it, high up in a valley at some distance off;

presently we were shown another fine building some eight or nine

miles away, which we were told was the sanctuary of Graglia. About

this time the pictures and statuettes of the Madonna began to

change their hue and to become black--for the sacred image of Oropa

being black, all the Madonnas in her immediate neighbourhood are of

the same complexion. Underneath some of them is written, "Nigra

sum sed sum formosa," which, as a rule, was more true as regards

the first epithet than the second.

It was not market-day, but streams of people were coming to the

town. Many of them were pilgrims returning from the sanctuary, but

more were bringing the produce of their farms, or the work of their

hands for sale. We had to face a steady stream of chairs, which

were coming to town in baskets upon women's heads. Each basket

contained twelve chairs, though whether it is correct to say that

the basket contained the chairs--when the chairs were all, so to

say, froth running over the top of the basket--is a point I cannot

settle. Certainly we had never seen anything like so many chairs

before, and felt almost as though we had surprised nature in the

laboratory wherefrom she turns out the chair supply of the world.

The road continued through a succession of villages almost running

into one another for a long way after Biella was passed, but

everywhere we noticed the same air of busy thriving industry which

we had seen in Biella itself. We noted also that a preponderance

of the people had light hair, while that of the children was

frequently nearly white, as though the infusion of German blood was

here stronger even than usual. Though so thickly peopled, the

country was of great beauty. Near at hand were the most exquisite

pastures close shaven after their second mowing, gay with autumnal

crocuses, and shaded with stately chestnuts; beyond were rugged

mountains, in a combe on one of which we saw Oropa itself now

gradually nearing; behind and below, many villages with vineyards

and terraces cultivated to the highest perfection; further on,

Biella already distant, and beyond this a "big stare," as an

American might say, over the plains of Lombardy from Turin to

Milan, with the Apennines from Genoa to Bologna hemming the

horizon. On the road immediate before us, we still faced the same

steady stream of chairs flowing ever Biella-ward.

After a couple of hours the houses became more rare; we got above

the sources of the chair-stream; bits of rough rock began to jut

out from the pasture; here and there the rhododendron began to show

itself by the roadside; the chestnuts left off along a line as

level as though cut with a knife; stone-roofed cascine began to

abound, with goats and cattle feeding near them; the booths of the

religious trinket-mongers increased; the blind, halt, and maimed

became more importunate, and the foot-passengers were more entirely

composed of those whose object was, or had been, a visit to the

sanctuary itself. The numbers of these pilgrims--generally in

their Sunday's best, and often comprising the greater part of a

family--were so great, though there was no special festa, as to

testify to the popularity of the institution. They generally

walked barefoot, and carried their shoes and stockings; their

baggage consisted of a few spare clothes, a little food, and a pot

or pan or two to cook with. Many of them looked very tired, and

had evidently tramped from long distances--indeed, we saw costumes

belonging to valleys which could not be less than two or three days

distant. They were almost invariably quiet, respectable, and

decently clad, sometimes a little merry, but never noisy, and none

of them tipsy. As we travelled along the road, we must have fallen

in with several hundreds of these pilgrims coming and going; nor is

this likely to be an extravagant estimate, seeing that the hospice

can make up more than five thousand beds. By eleven we were at the

sanctuary itself.

Fancy a quiet upland valley, the floor of which is about the same

height as the top of Snowdon, shut in by lofty mountains upon three

sides, while on the fourth the eye wanders at will over the plains

below. Fancy finding a level space in such a valley watered by a

beautiful mountain stream, and nearly filled by a pile of

collegiate buildings, not less important than those, we will say,

of Trinity College, Cambridge. True, Oropa is not in the least

like Trinity, except that one of its courts is large, grassy, has a

chapel and a fountain in it, and rooms all round it; but I do not

know how better to give a rough description of Oropa than by

comparing it with one of our largest English colleges.

The buildings consist of two main courts. The first comprises a

couple of modern wings, connected by the magnificent facade of what

is now the second or inner court. This facade dates from about the

middle of the seventeenth century; its lowest storey is formed by

an open colonnade, and the whole stands upon a raised terrace from

which a noble flight of steps descends into the outer court.

Ascending the steps and passing under the colonnade, we found

ourselves in the second or inner court, which is a complete

quadrangle, and is, we were told, of rather older date than the

facade. This is the quadrangle which gives its collegiate

character to Oropa. It is surrounded by cloisters on three sides,

on to which the rooms in which the pilgrims are lodged open--those

at least that are on the ground-floor, for there are three storeys.

The chapel, which was dedicated in the year 1600, juts out into the

court upon the north-east side. On the north-west and south-west

sides are entrances through which one may pass to the open country.

The grass, at the time of our visit, was for the most part covered

with sheets spread out to dry. They looked very nice, and, dried

on such grass and in such an air, they must be delicious to sleep

on. There is, indeed, rather an appearance as though it were a

perpetual washing-day at Oropa, but this is not to be wondered at

considering the numbers of comers and goers; besides, people in

Italy do not make so much fuss about trifles as we do. If they

want to wash their sheets and dry them, they do not send them to

Ealing, but lay them out in the first place that comes handy, and

nobody's bones are broken.

CHAPTER XV--Oropa (continued)

On the east side of the main block of buildings there is a grassy

slope adorned with chapels that contain illustrating scenes in the

history of the Virgin. These figures are of terra-cotta, for the

most part life-size, and painted up to nature. In some cases, if I

remember rightly, they have hemp or flax for hair, as at Varallo,

and throughout realism is aimed at as far as possible, not only in

the figures, but in the accessories. We have very little of the

same kind in England. In the Tower of London there is an effigy of

Queen Elizabeth going to the city to give thanks for the defeat of

the Spanish Armada. This looks as if it might have been the work

of some one of the Valsesian sculptors. There are also the figures

that strike the quarters of Sir John Bennett's city clock in

Cheapside. The automatic movements of these last-named figures

would have struck the originators of the Varallo chapels with envy.

They aimed at realism so closely that they would assuredly have had

recourse to clockwork in some one or two of their chapels; I cannot

doubt, for example, that they would have eagerly welcomed the idea

of making the cock crow to Peter by a cuckoo-clock arrangement, if

it had been presented to them. This opens up the whole question of

realism versus conventionalism in art--a subject much too large to

be treated here.

As I have said, the founders of these Italian chapels aimed at

realism. Each chapel was intended as an illustration, and the

desire was to bring the whole scene more vividly before the

faithful by combining the picture, the statue, and the effect of a

scene upon the stage in a single work of art. The attempt would be

an ambitious one, though made once only in a neighbourhood, but in

most of the places in North Italy where anything of the kind has

been done, the people have not been content with a single

illustration; it has been their scheme to take a mountain as though

it had been a book or wall and cover it with illustrations. In

some cases--as at Orta, whose Sacro Monte is perhaps the most

beautiful of all as regards the site itself--the failure is

complete, but in some of the chapels at Varese and in many of those

at Varallo, great works have been produced which have not yet

attracted as much attention as they deserve. It may be doubted,

indeed, whether there is a more remarkable work of art in North

Italy than the Crucifixion chapel at Varallo, where the twenty-five

statues, as well as the frescoes behind them, are (with the

exception of the figure of Christ, which has been removed) by

Gaudenzio Ferrari. It is to be wished that some one of these

chapels--both chapel and sculptures--were reproduced at South

Kensington.

Varallo, which is undoubtedly the most interesting sanctuary in

North Italy, has forty-four of these illustrative chapels; Varese,

fifteen; Orta, eighteen; and Oropa, seventeen. No one is allowed

to enter them, except when repairs are needed; but when these are

going on, as is constantly the case, it is curious to look through

the grating into the somewhat darkened interior, and to see a

living figure or two among the statues; a little motion on the part

of a single figure seems to communicate itself to the rest and make

them all more animated. If the living figure does not move much,

it is easy at first to mistake it for a terra-cotta one. At Orta,

some years since, looking one evening into a chapel when the light

was fading, I was surprised to see a saint whom I had not seen

before; he had no glory except what shone from a very red nose; he

was smoking a short pipe, and was painting the Virgin Mary's face.

The touch was a finishing one, put on with deliberation, slowly, so

that it was two or three seconds before I discovered that the

interloper was no saint.

The figures in the chapels at Oropa are not as good as the best of

those at Varallo, but some of them are very nice notwithstanding.

We liked the seventh chapel the best--the one which illustrates the

sojourn of the Virgin Mary in the temple. It contains forty-four

figures, and represents the Virgin on the point of completing her

education as head girl at a high-toned academy for young

gentlewomen. All the young ladies are at work making mitres for

the bishop, or working slippers in Berlin wool for the new curate,

but the Virgin sits on a dais above the others on the same platform

with the venerable lady-principal, who is having passages read out

to her from some standard Hebrew writer. The statues are the work

of a local sculptor, named Aureggio, who lived at the end of the

seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century.

The highest chapel must be a couple of hundred feet above the main

buildings, and from near it there is an excellent bird's-eye view

of the sanctuary and the small plain behind; descending on to this

last, we entered the quadrangle from the north-west side and

visited the chapel in which the sacred image of the Madonna is

contained. We did not see the image itself, which is only exposed

to public view on great occasions. It is believed to have been

carved by St. Luke the Evangelist. I must ask the reader to

content himself with the following account of it which I take from

Marocco's work upon Oropa.:-

"That this statue of the Virgin is indeed by St. Luke is attested

by St. Eusebius, a man of eminent piety and no less enlightened

than truthful. St. Eusebius discovered its origin by revelation;

and the store which he set by it is proved by his shrinking from no

discomforts in his carriage of it from a distant country, and by

his anxiety to put it in a place of great security. His desire,

indeed, was to keep it in the spot which was most near and dear to

him, so that he might extract from it the higher incitement to

devotion, and more sensible comfort in the midst of his austerities

and apostolic labours.

"This truth is further confirmed by the quality of the wood from

which the statue is carved, which is commonly believed to be cedar;

by the Eastern character of the work; by the resemblance both of

the lineaments and the colour to those of other statues by St.

Luke; by the tradition of the neighbourhood, which extends in an

unbroken and well-assured line to the time of St. Eusebius himself;

by the miracles that have been worked here by its presence, and

elsewhere by its invocation, or even by indirect contact with it;

by the miracles, lastly, which are inherent in the image itself,

{23} and which endure to this day, such as is its immunity from all

worm and from the decay which would naturally have occurred in it

through time and damp--more especially in the feet, through the

rubbing of religious objects against them.

\* \* \*

"The authenticity of this image is so certainly and clearly

established, that all supposition to the contrary becomes

inexplicable and absurd. Such, for example, is a hypothesis that

it should not be attributed to the Evangelist, but to another Luke,

also called 'Saint,' and a Florentine by birth. This painter lived

in the eleventh century--that is to say, about seven centuries

after the image of Oropa had been known and venerated! This is

indeed an anachronism.

"Other difficulties drawn either from the ancient discipline of the

Church, or from St. Luke the Evangelist's profession, which was

that of a physician, vanish at once when it is borne in mind--

firstly, that the cult of holy images, and especially of that of

the most blessed Virgin, is of extreme antiquity in the Church, and

of apostolic origin as is proved by ecclesiastical writers and

monuments found in the catacombs which date as far back as the

first century (see among other authorities, Nicolas, "La Vergine

vivente nella Chiesa," lib. iii. cap. iii. SS 2); secondly, that

as the medical profession does not exclude that of artist, St. Luke

may have been both artist and physician; that he did actually

handle both the brush and the scalpel is established by respectable

and very old traditions, to say nothing of other arguments which

can be found in impartial and learned writers upon such matters."

I will only give one more extract. It runs:-

"In 1855 a celebrated Roman portrait-painter, after having

carefully inspected the image of the Virgin Mary at Oropa, declared

it to be certainly a work of the first century of our era." {24}

I once saw a common cheap china copy of this Madonna announced as

to be given away with two pounds of tea, in a shop near Hatton

Garden.

The church in which the sacred image is kept is interesting from

the pilgrims who at all times frequent it, and from the collection

of votive pictures which adorn its walls. Except the votive

pictures and the pilgrims the church contains little of interest,

and I will pass on to the constitution and objects of the

establishment.-

The objects are--1. Gratuitous lodging to all comers for a space

of from three to nine days as the rector may think fit. 2. A

school. 3. Help to the sick and poor. It is governed by a

president and six members, who form a committee. Four members are

chosen by the communal council, and two by the cathedral chapter of

Biella. At the hospice itself there reside a director, with his

assistant, a surveyor to keep the fabric in repair, a rector or

dean with six priests, called cappellani, and a medical man. "The

government of the laundry," so runs the statute on this head, "and

analogous domestic services are entrusted to a competent number of

ladies of sound constitution and good conduct, who live together in

the hospice under the direction of an inspectress, and are called

daughters of Oropa."

The bye-laws of the establishment are conceived in a kindly genial

spirit, which in great measure accounts for its unmistakeable

popularity. We understood that the poorer visitors, as a general

rule, avail themselves of the gratuitous lodging, without making

any present when they leave, but in spite of this it is quite clear

that they are wanted to come, and come they accordingly do. It is

sometimes difficult to lay one's hands upon the exact passages

which convey an impression, but as we read the bye-laws which are

posted up in the cloisters, we found ourselves continually smiling

at the manner in which almost anything that looked like a

prohibition could be removed with the consent of the director.

There is no rule whatever about visitors attending the church; all

that is required of them is that they do not interfere with those

who do. They must not play games of chance, or noisy games; they

must not make much noise of any sort after ten o'clock at night

(which corresponds about with midnight in England). They should

not draw upon the walls of their rooms, nor cut the furniture.

They should also keep their rooms clean, and not cook in those that

are more expensively furnished. This is about all that they must

not do, except fee the servants, which is most especially and

particularly forbidden. If any one infringes these rules, he is to

be admonished, and in case of grave infraction or continued

misdemeanour he may be expelled and not readmitted.

Visitors who are lodged in the better-furnished apartments can be

waited upon if they apply at the office; the charge is twopence for

cleaning a room, making the bed, bringing water, &c. If there is

more than one bed in a room, a penny must be paid for every bed

over the first. Boots can be cleaned for a penny, shoes for a

half-penny. For carrying wood, &c., either a halfpenny or a penny

will be exacted according to the time taken. Payment for these

services must not be made to the servant, but at the office.

The gates close at ten o'clock at night, and open at sunrise, "but

if any visitor wishes to make Alpine excursions, or has any other

sufficient reason, he should let the director know." Families

occupying many rooms must--when the hospice is very crowded, and

when they have had due notice--manage to pack themselves into a

smaller compass. No one can have rooms kept for him. It is to be

strictly "first come, first served." No one must sublet his room.

Visitors must not go away without giving up the key of their room.

Candles and wood may be bought at a fixed price.

Any one wishing to give anything to the support of the hospice must

do so only to the director, the official who appoints the

apartments, the dean or the cappellani, or to the inspectress of

the daughters of Oropa, but they must have a receipt for even the

smallest sum; alms-boxes, however, are placed here and there, into

which the smaller offerings may be dropped (we imagine this means

anything under a franc).

The poor will be fed as well as housed for three days gratuitously-

-provided their health does not require a longer stay; but they

must not beg on the premises of the hospice; professional beggars

will be at once handed over to the mendicity society in Biella, or

even perhaps to prison. The poor for whom a hydropathic course is

recommended, can have it under the regulations made by the

committee--that is to say, if there is a vacant place.

There are trattorie and cafes at the hospice, where refreshments

may be obtained both good and cheap. Meat is to be sold there at

the prices current in Biella; bread at two centimes the chilogramma

more, to pay for the cost of carriage.

Such are the bye-laws of this remarkable institution. Few except

the very rich are so under-worked that two or three days of change

and rest are not at times a boon to them, while the mere knowledge

that there is a place where repose can be had cheaply and

pleasantly is itself a source of strength. Here, so long as the

visitor wishes to be merely housed, no questions are asked; no one

is refused admittance, except for some obviously sufficient reason;

it is like getting a reading ticket for the British Museum, there

is practically but one test--that is to say, desire on the part of

the visitor--the coming proves the desire, and this suffices. A

family, we will say, has just gathered its first harvest; the heat

on the plains is intense, and the malaria from the rice grounds

little less than pestilential; what, then, can be nicer than to

lock up the house and go for three days to the bracing mountain air

of Oropa? So at daybreak off they all start, trudging, it may be,

their thirty or forty miles, and reaching Oropa by nightfall. If

there is a weakly one among them, some arrangement is sure to be

practicable, whereby he or she can be helped to follow more

leisurely, and can remain longer at the hospice. Once arrived,

they generally, it is true, go the round of the chapels, and make

some slight show of pilgrimage, but the main part of their time is

spent in doing absolutely nothing. It is sufficient amusement to

them to sit on the steps, or lie about under the shadow of the

trees, and neither say anything nor do anything, but simply

breathe, and look at the sky and at each other. We saw scores of

such people just resting instinctively in a kind of blissful waking

dream. Others saunter along the walks which have been cut in the

woods that surround the hospice, or if they have been pent up in a

town and have a fancy for climbing, there are mountain excursions,

for the making of which the hospice affords excellent headquarters,

and which are looked upon with every favour by the authorities.

It must be remembered also that the accommodation provided at Oropa

is much better than what the people are, for the most part,

accustomed to in their own homes, and the beds are softer, more

often beaten up, and cleaner than those they have left behind them.

Besides, they have sheets--and beautifully clean sheets. Those who

know the sort of place in which an Italian peasant is commonly

content to sleep, will understand how much he must enjoy a really

clean and comfortable bed, especially when he has not got to pay

for it. Sleep, in the circumstances of comfort which most readers

will be accustomed to, is a more expensive thing than is commonly

supposed. If we sleep eight hours in a London hotel we shall have

to pay from 4d. to 6d. an hour, or from 1d. to 1.5d. for every

fifteen minutes we lie in bed; nor is it reasonable to believe that

the charge is excessive, when we consider the vast amount of

competition which exists. There is many a man the expenses of

whose daily meat, drink, and clothing are less than what an

accountant would show us we, many of us, lay out nightly upon our

sleep. The cost of really comfortable sleep-necessaries cannot, of

course, be nearly so great at Oropa as in a London hotel, but they

are enough to put them beyond the reach of the peasant under

ordinary circumstances, and he relishes them all the more when he

can get them.

But why, it may be asked, should the peasant have these things if

he cannot afford to pay for them; and why should he not pay for

them if he can afford to do so? If such places as Oropa were

common, would not lazy vagabonds spend their lives in going the

rounds of them, &c., &c.? Doubtless if there were many Oropas,

they would do more harm than good, but there are some things which

answer perfectly well as rarities or on a small scale, out of which

all the virtue would depart if they were common or on a larger one;

and certainly the impression left upon our minds by Oropa was that

its effects were excellent.

Granted the sound rule to be that a man should pay for what he has,

or go without it; in practice, however, it is found impossible to

carry this rule out strictly. Why does the nation give A. B., for

instance, and all comers a large, comfortable, well-ventilated,

warm room to sit in, with chair, table, reading-desk, &c., all more

commodious than what he may have at home, without making him pay a

sixpence for it directly from year's end to year's end? The three

or nine days' visit to Oropa is a trifle in comparison with what we

can all of us obtain in London if we care about it enough to take a

very small amount of trouble. True, one cannot sleep in the

reading-room of the British Museum--not all night, at least--but by

day one can make a home of it for years together except during

cleaning times, and then it is hard if one cannot get into the

National Gallery or South Kensington, and be warm, quiet, and

entertained without paying for it.

It will be said that it is for the national interest that people

should have access to treasuries of art or knowledge, and therefore

it is worth the nation's while to pay for placing the means of

doing so at their disposal; granted, but is not a good bed one of

the great ends of knowledge, whereto it must work, if it is to be

accounted knowledge at all? and is it not worth a nation's while

that her children should now and again have practical experience of

a higher state of things than the one they are accustomed to, and a

few days' rest and change of scene and air, even though she may

from time to time have to pay something in order to enable them to

do so? There can be few books which do an averagely-educated

Englishman so much good, as the glimpse of comfort which he gets by

sleeping in a good bed in a well-appointed room does to an Italian

peasant; such a glimpse gives him an idea of higher potentialities

in connection with himself, and nerves him to exertions which he

would not otherwise make. On the whole, therefore, we concluded

that if the British Museum reading-room was in good economy, Oropa

was so also; at any rate, it seemed to be making a large number of

very nice people quietly happy--and it is hard to say more than

this in favour of any place or institution.

The idea of any sudden change is as repulsive to us as it will be

to the greater number of my readers; but if asked whether we

thought our English universities would do most good in their

present condition as places of so-called education, or if they were

turned into Oropas, and all the educational part of the story

totally suppressed, we inclined to think they would be more popular

and more useful in this latter capacity. We thought also that

Oxford and Cambridge were just the places, and contained all the

appliances and endowments almost ready made for constituting two

splendid and truly imperial cities of recreation--universities in

deed as well as in name. Nevertheless, we should not venture to

propose any further actual reform during the present generation

than to carry the principle which is already admitted as regards

the M.A. degree a trifle further, and to make the B.A. degree a

mere matter of lapse of time and fees--leaving the Little Go, and

whatever corresponds to it at Oxford, as the final examination.

This would be enough for the present.

There is another sanctuary about three hours' walk over the

mountain behind Oropa, at Andorno, and dedicated to St. John. We

were prevented by the weather from visiting it, but understand that

its objects are much the same as those of the institution I have

just described. I will now proceed to the third sanctuary for

which the neighbourhood of Biella is renowned.

CHAPTER XVI--Graglia

The sanctuary of Graglia is reached in about two hours from Biella.

There are daily diligences. It is not so celebrated as that of

Oropa, nor does it stand so high above the level of the sea, but it

is a remarkable place and well deserves a visit. The restaurant is

perfect--the best, indeed, that I ever saw in North Italy, or, I

think, anywhere else. I had occasion to go into the kitchen, and

could not see how anything could beat it for the most absolute

cleanliness and order. Certainly I never dined better than at the

sanctuary of Graglia; and one dines all the more pleasantly for

doing so on a lovely terrace shaded by trellised creepers, and

overlooking Lombardy.

I find from a small handbook by Signor Giuseppe Muratori, that the

present institution, like that of S. Michele, and almost all things

else that achieve success, was founded upon the work of a

predecessor, and became great not in one, but in several

generations. The site was already venerated on account of a chapel

in honour of the Vergine addolorata which had existed here from

very early times. A certain Nicolao Velotti, about the year 1616,

formed the design of reproducing Mount Calvary on this spot, and of

erecting perhaps a hundred chapels with terra-cotta figures in

them. The famous Valsesian sculptor, Tabachetti, and his pupils,

the brothers Giovanni and Antonio (commonly called "Tanzio"),

D'Enrico of Riva in the Val Sesia, all of whom had recently been

working at the sanctuary of Varallo, were invited to Graglia, and

later on, another eminent native of the Val Sesia, Pietro Giuseppe

Martello. These artists appear to have done a good deal of work

here, of which nothing now remains visible to the public, though it

is possible that in the chapel of S. Carlo and the closed chapels

on the way to it, there may be some statues lying neglected which I

know nothing about. I was told of no such work, but when I was at

Graglia I did not know that the above-named great men had ever

worked there, and made no inquiries. It is quite possible that all

the work they did here has not perished.

The means at the disposal of the people of Graglia were

insufficient for the end they had in view, but subscriptions came

in freely from other quarters. Among the valuable rights,

liberties, privileges, and immunities that were conferred upon the

institution, was one which in itself was a source of unfailing and

considerable revenue, namely, the right of setting a robber free

once in every year; also, the authorities there were allowed to

sell all kinds of wine and eatables (robe mangiative) without

paying duty upon them. As far as I can understand, the main work

of Velotti's is the chapel of S. Carlo, on the top of a hill some

few hundred feet above the present establishment. I give a sketch

of this chapel here, but was not able to include the smaller

chapels which lead up to it.

A few years later, one Nicolao Garono built a small oratory at

Campra, which is nearer to Biella than Graglia is. He dedicated it

to S. Maria della Neve--to St. Mary of the Snow. This became more

frequented than Graglia itself, and the feast of the Virgin on the

5th August was exceedingly popular. Signor Muratori says of it:-

"This is the popular feast of Graglia, and I can remember how but a

few years since it retained on a small scale all the features of

the sacre campestri of the Middle Ages. For some time past,

however, the stricter customs which have been introduced here no

less than in other Piedmontese villages have robbed this feast (as

how many more popular feasts has it not also robbed?) of that

original and spontaneous character in which a jovial heartiness and

a diffusive interchange of the affections came welling forth from

all abundantly. In spite of all, however, and notwithstanding its

decline, the feast of the Madonna is even now one of those rare

gatherings--the only one, perhaps, in the neighbourhood of Biella--

to which the pious Christian and the curious idler are alike

attracted, and where they will alike find appropriate amusement."

{25}

How Miltonic, not to say Handelian, is this attitude towards the

Pagan tendencies which, it is clear, predominated at the festa of

St. Mary of the Snow. In old days a feast was meant to be a time

of actual merriment--a praising "with mirth, high cheer, and wine."

{26} Milton felt this a little, and Handel much. To them an

opportunity for a little paganism is like the scratching of a mouse

to the princess who had been born a cat. Off they go after it--

more especially Handel--under some decent pretext no doubt, but as

fast, nevertheless, as their art can carry them. As for Handel, he

had not only a sympathy for paganism, but for the shades and

gradations of paganism. What, for example, can be a completer

contrast than between the polished and refined Roman paganism in

Theodora, {27} the rustic paganism of "Bid the maids the youths

provoke" in Hercules, the magician's or sorcerer's paganism of the

blue furnace in "Chemosh no more," {28} or the Dagon choruses in

Samson--to say nothing of a score of other examples that might be

easily adduced? Yet who can doubt the sincerity and even fervour

of either Milton's or Handel's religious convictions? The attitude

assumed by these men, and by the better class of Romanists, seems

to have become impossible to Protestants since the time of Dr.

Arnold.

I once saw a church dedicated to St. Francis. Outside it, over the

main door, there was a fresco of the saint receiving the stigmata;

his eyes were upturned in a fine ecstasy to the illuminated spot in

the heavens whence the causes of the stigmata were coming. The

church was insured, and the man who had affixed the plate of the

insurance office had put it at the precise spot in the sky to which

St. Francis's eyes were turned, so that the plate appeared to be

the main cause of his ecstasy. Who cared? No one; until a carping

Englishman came to the place, and thought it incumbent upon him to

be scandalised, or to pretend to be so; on this the authorities

were made very uncomfortable, and changed the position of the

plate. Granted that the Englishman was right; granted, in fact,

that we are more logical; this amounts to saying that we are more

rickety, and must walk more supported by cramp-irons. All the

"earnestness," and "intenseness," and "aestheticism," and "culture"

(for they are in the end one) of the present day, are just so many

attempts to conceal weakness.

But to return. The church of St. Mary of the Snow at Campra was

incorporated into the Graglia institution in 1628. There was

originally no connection between the two, and it was not long

before the later church became more popular than the earlier,

insomuch that the work at Graglia was allowed to fall out of

repair. On the death of Velotti the scheme languished, and by and

by, instead of building more chapels, it was decided that it would

be enough to keep in repair those that were already built. These,

as I have said, are the chapels of S. Carlo, and the small ones

which are now seen upon the way up to it, but they are all in a

semi-ruinous state.

Besides the church of St. Mary of the Snow at Campra, there was

another which was an exact copy of the Santa Casa di Loreto, and

where there was a remarkable echo which would repeat a word of ten

syllables when the wind was quiet. This was exactly on the site of

the present sanctuary. It seemed a better place for the

continuation of Velotti's work than the one he had himself chosen

for it, inasmuch as it was where Signor Muratori so well implies a

centre of devotion ought to be, namely, in "a milder climate, and

in a spot which offers more resistance to the inclemency of the

weather, and is better adapted to attract and retain the concourse

of the faithful."

The design of the present church was made by an architect of the

name of Arduzzi, in the year 1654, and the first stone was laid in

1659. In 1687 the right of liberating a bandit every year had been

found to be productive of so much mischief that it was

discontinued, and a yearly contribution of two hundred lire was

substituted. The church was not completed until the second half of

the last century, when the cupola was finished mainly through the

energy of a priest, Carlo Giuseppe Gastaldi of Netro. This poor

man came to his end in a rather singular way. He was dozing for a

few minutes upon a scaffolding, and being awakened by a sudden

noise, he started up, lost his balance, and fell over on to the

pavement below. He died a few days later, on the 17th of October,

either 1787 or 1778, I cannot determine which, through a misprint

in Muratori's account.

The work was now virtually finished, and the buildings were much as

they are seen now, except that a third storey was added to the

hospice about the year 1840. It is in the hospice that the

apartments are in which visitors are lodged. I was shown all over

them, and found them not only comfortable but luxurious--decidedly

more so than those of Oropa; there was the same cleanliness

everywhere which I had noticed in the restaurant. As one stands at

the windows or on the balconies and looks down on to the tops of

the chestnuts, and over these to the plains, one feels almost as if

one could fly out of the window like a bird; for the slope of the

hills is so rapid that one has a sense of being already suspended

in mid-air.

I thought I observed a desire to attract English visitors in the

pictures which I saw in the bedrooms. Thus there was "A view of

the black lead mine in Cumberland," a coloured English print of the

end of the last century or the beginning of this, after, I think,

Loutherbourg, and in several rooms there were English engravings

after Martin. The English will not, I think, regret if they yield

to these attractions. They will find the air cool, shady walks,

good food, and reasonable prices. Their rooms will not be charged

for, but they will do well to give the same as they would have paid

at an hotel. I saw in one room one of those flippant, frivolous,

Lorenzo de' Medici match-boxes on which there was a gaudily-

coloured nymph in high-heeled boots and tights, smoking a

cigarette. Feeling that I was in a sanctuary, I was a little

surprised that such a matchbox should have been tolerated. I

suppose it had been left behind by some guest. I should myself

select a matchbox with the Nativity, or the Flight into Egypt upon

it, if I were going to stay a week or so at Graglia. I do not

think I can have looked surprised or scandalised, but the worthy

official who was with me could just see that there was something on

my mind. "Do you want a match?" said he, immediately reaching me

the box. I helped myself, and the matter dropped.

There were many fewer people at Graglia than at Oropa, and they

were richer. I did not see any poor about, but I may have been

there during a slack time. An impression was left upon me, though

I cannot say whether it was well or ill founded, as though there

were a tacit understanding between the establishments at Oropa and

Graglia that the one was to adapt itself to the poorer, and the

other to the richer classes of society; and this not from any

sordid motive, but from a recognition of the fact that any great

amount of intermixture between the poor and the rich is not found

satisfactory to either one or the other. Any wide difference in

fortune does practically amount to a specific difference, which

renders the members of either species more or less suspicious of

those of the other, and seldom fertile inter se. The well-to-do

working-man can help his poorer friends better than we can. If an

educated man has money to spare, he will apply it better in helping

poor educated people than those who are more strictly called the

poor. As long as the world is progressing, wide class distinctions

are inevitable; their discontinuance will be a sign that

equilibrium has been reached. Then human civilisation will become

as stationary as that of ants and bees. Some may say it will be

very sad when this is so; others, that it will be a good thing; in

truth, it is good either way, for progress and equilibrium have

each of them advantages and disadvantages which make it impossible

to assign superiority to either; but in both cases the good greatly

overbalances the evil; for in both the great majority will be

fairly well contented, and would hate to live under any other

system.

Equilibrium, if it is ever reached, will be attained very slowly,

and the importance of any change in a system depends entirely upon

the rate at which it is made. No amount of change shocks--or, in

other words, is important--if it is made sufficiently slowly, while

hardly any change is too small to shock if it is made suddenly. We

may go down a ladder of ten thousand feet in height if we do so

step by step, while a sudden fall of six or seven feet may kill us.

The importance, therefore, does not lie in the change, but in the

abruptness of its introduction. Nothing is absolutely important or

absolutely unimportant, absolutely good or absolutely bad.

This is not what we like to contemplate. The instinct of those

whose religion and culture are on the surface only is to conceive

that they have found, or can find, an absolute and eternal

standard, about which they can be as earnest as they choose. They

would have even the pains of hell eternal if they could. If there

had been any means discoverable by which they could torment

themselves beyond endurance, we may be sure they would long since

have found it out; but fortunately there is a stronger power which

bars them inexorably from their desire, and which has ensured that

intolerable pain shall last only for a very little while. For

either the circumstances or the sufferer will change after no long

time. If the circumstances are intolerable, the sufferer dies: if

they are not intolerable, he becomes accustomed to them, and will

cease to feel them grievously. No matter what the burden, there

always has been, and always must be, a way for us also to escape.

CHAPTER XVII--Soazza and the Valley of Mesocco

I regret that I have not space for any of the sketches I took at

Bellinzona, than which few towns are more full of admirable

subjects. The Hotel de la Ville is an excellent house, and the

town is well adapted for an artist's headquarters. Turner's two

water-colour drawings of Bellinzona in the National Gallery are

doubtless very fine as works of art, but they are not like

Bellinzona, the spirit of which place (though not the letter) is

better represented by the background to Basaiti's Madonna and

child, also in our gallery, supposing the castle on the hill to

have gone to ruin.

At Bellinzona a man told me that one of the two towers was built by

the Visconti and the other by Julius Caesar, a hundred years

earlier. So, poor old Mrs. Barratt at Langar could conceive no

longer time than a hundred years. The Trojan war did not last ten

years, but ten years was as big a lie as Homer knew.

Almost all days in the subalpine valleys of North Italy have a

beauty with them of some kind or another, but none are more lovely

than a quiet gray day just at the beginning of autumn, when the

clouds are drawing lazily and in the softest fleeces over the pine

forests high up on the mountain sides. On such days the mountains

are very dark till close up to the level of the clouds; here, if

there is dewy or rain-besprinkled pasture, it tells of a luminous

silvery colour by reason of the light which the clouds reflect upon

it; the bottom edges of the clouds are also light through the

reflection upward from the grass, but I do not know which begins

this battledore and shuttlecock arrangement. These things are like

quarrels between two old and intimate friends; one can never say

who begins them. Sometimes on a dull gray day like this, I have

seen the shadow parts of clouds take a greenish-ashen-coloured

tinge from the grass below them.

On one of these most enjoyable days we left Bellinzona for Mesocco

on the S. Bernardino road. The air was warm, there was not so much

as a breath of wind, but it was not sultry: there had been rain,

and the grass, though no longer decked with the glory of its spring

flowers, was of the most brilliant emerald, save where flecked with

delicate purple by myriads of autumnal crocuses. The level ground

at the bottom of the valley where the Moesa runs is cultivated with

great care. Here the people have gathered the stones in heaps

round any great rock which is too difficult to move, and the whole

mass has in time taken a mulberry hue, varied with gray and russet

lichens, or blobs of velvety green moss. These heaps of stone crop

up from the smooth shaven grass, and are overhung with barberries,

mountain ash, and mountain elder with their brilliant scarlet

berries--sometimes, again, with dwarf oaks, or alder, or nut, whose

leaves have just so far begun to be tinged as to increase the

variety of the colouring. The first sparks of autumn's yearly

conflagration have been kindled, but the fire is not yet raging as

in October; soon after which, indeed, it will have burnt itself

out, leaving the trees it were charred, with here and there a live

coal of a red leaf or two still smouldering upon them.

As yet lingering mulleins throw up their golden spikes amid a

profusion of blue chicory, and the gourds run along upon the ground

like the fire mingled with the hail in "Israel in Egypt." Overhead

are the umbrageous chestnuts loaded with their prickly harvest.

Now and again there is a manure heap upon the grass itself, and

lusty wanton gourds grow out from it along the ground like

vegetable octopi. If there is a stream it will run with water

limpid as air, and as full of dimples as "While Kedron's brook" in

"Joshua":-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

How quiet and full of rest does everything appear to be. There is

no dust nor glare, and hardly a sound save that of the unfailing

waterfalls, or the falling cry with which the peasants call to one

another from afar. {29}

So much depends upon the aspect in which one sees a place for the

first time. What scenery can stand, for example, a noontide glare?

Take the valley from Lanzo to Viu. It is of incredible beauty in

the mornings and afternoons of brilliant days, and all day long

upon a gray day; but in the middle hours of a bright summer's day

it is hardly beautiful at all, except locally in the shade under

chestnuts. Buildings and towns are the only things that show well

in a glare. We perhaps, therefore, thought the valley of the Moesa

to be of such singular beauty on account of the day on which we saw

it, but doubt whether it must not be absolutely among the most

beautiful of the subalpine valleys upon the Italian side.

The least interesting part is that between Bellinzona and Roveredo,

but soon after leaving Roveredo the valley begins to get narrower

and to assume a more mountain character. Ere long the eye catches

sight of a white church tower and a massive keep, near to one

another and some two thousand feet above the road. This is Santa

Maria in Calanca. One can see at once that it must be an important

place for such a district, but it is strange why it should be

placed so high. I will say more about it later on.

Presently we passed Cama, where there is an inn, and where the road

branches off into the Val Calanca. Alighting here for a few

minutes we saw a cane lupino--that is to say, a dun mouse-coloured

dog about as large as a mastiff, and with a very large infusion of

wolf blood in him. It was like finding one's self alone with a

wolf--but he looked even more uncanny and ferocious than a wolf. I

once saw a man walking down Fleet Street accompanied by one of

these cani lupini, and noted the general attention and alarm which

the dog caused. Encouraged by the landlord, we introduced

ourselves to the dog at Cama, and found him to be a most sweet

person, with no sense whatever of self-respect, and shrinking from

no ignominy in his importunity for bits of bread. When we put the

bread into his mouth and felt his teeth, he would not take it till

he had looked in our eyes and said as plainly as though in words,

"Are you quite sure that my teeth are not painful to you? Do you

really think I may now close my teeth upon the bread without

causing you any inconvenience?" We assured him that we were quite

comfortable, so he swallowed it down, and presently began to pat us

softly with his foot to remind us that it was our turn now.

Before we left, a wandering organ-grinder began to play outside the

inn. Our friend the dog lifted up his voice and howled. I am sure

it was with pleasure. If he had disliked the music he would have

gone away. He was not at all the kind of person who would stay a

concert out if he did not like it. He howled because he was

stirred to the innermost depths of his nature. On this he became

intense, and as a matter of course made a fool of himself; but he

was in no way more ridiculous than an Art Professor whom I once

observed as he was holding forth to a number of working men, whilst

escorting them round the Italian pictures in the National Gallery.

When the organ left off he cast an appealing look at Jones, and we

could almost hear the words, "What IS it out of?" coming from his

eyes. We did not happen to know, so we told him that it was "Ah

che la morte" from "Il Trovatore," and he was quite contented.

Jones even thought he looked as much as to say, "Oh yes, of course,

how stupid of me; I thought I knew it." He very well may have done

so, but I am bound to say that I did not see this.

Near to Cama is Grono, where Baedeker says there is a chapel

containing some ancient frescoes. I searched Grono in vain for any

such chapel. A few miles higher up, the church of Soazza makes its

appearance perched upon the top of its hill, and soon afterwards

the splendid ruin of Mesocco on another rock or hill which rises in

the middle of the valley.

The mortuary chapel of Soazza church is the subject my friend Mr.

Gogin has selected for the etching at the beginning of this volume.

There was a man mowing another part of the churchyard when I was

there. He was so old and lean that his flesh seemed little more

than parchment stretched over his bones, and he might have been

almost taken for Death mowing his own acre. When he was gone some

children came to play, but he had left his scythe behind him.

These children were beyond my strength to draw, so I turned the

subject over to Mr. Gogin's stronger hands. Children are

dynamical; churches and frescoes are statical. I can get on with

statical subjects, but can do nothing with dynamical ones. Over

the door and windows are two frescoes of skeletons holding mirrors

in their hands, with a death's head in the mirror. This reflected

head is supposed to be that of the spectator to whom death is

holding up the image of what he will one day become. I do not

remember the inscription at Soazza; the one in the Campo Santo at

Mesocco is, "Sicut vos estis nos fuimus, et sicut nos sumus vos

eritis." {30}

On my return to England I mentioned this inscription to a friend

who, as a young man, had been an excellent Latin scholar; he took a

panic into his head that "eritis" was not right for the second

person plural of the future tense of the verb "esse." Whatever it

was, it was not "eritis." This panic was speedily communicated to

myself, and we both puzzled for some time to think what the future

of "esse" really was. At last we turned to a grammar and found

that "eritis" was right after all. How skin-deep that classical

training penetrates on which we waste so many years, and how

completely we drop it as soon as we are left to ourselves.

On the right-hand side of the door of the mortuary chapel there

hangs a wooden tablet inscribed with a poem to the memory of Maria

Zara. It is a pleasing poem, and begins:-

"Appena al trapassar il terzo lustro

Maria Zara la sua vita fini.

Se a Soazza ebbe la sua colma

A Roveredo la sua tomba . . .

she found," or words to that effect, but I forget the Italian.

This poem is the nearest thing to an Italian rendering of

"Affliction sore long time I bore" that I remember to have met

with, but it is longer and more grandiose generally.

Soazza is full of beautiful subjects, and indeed is the first place

in the valley of the Moesa which I thought good sketching ground,

in spite of the general beauty of the valley. There is an inn

there quite sufficient for a bachelor artist. The clergyman of the

place is a monk, and he will not let one paint on a feast-day. I

was told that if I wanted to paint on a certain feast-day I had

better consult him; I did so, but was flatly refused permission,

and that too as it appeared to me with more peremptoriness than a

priest would have shown towards me.

It is at Soazza that the ascent of the San Bernardino becomes

perceptible; hitherto the road has seemed to be level all the way,

but henceforth the ascent though gradual is steady. Mesocco Castle

looks very fine as soon as Soazza is passed, and gets finer and

finer until it is actually reached. Here is the upper limit of the

chestnuts, which leave off upon the lower side of Mesocco Castle.

A few yards off the castle on the upper side is the ancient church

of S. Cristoforo, with its huge St. Christopher on the right-hand

side of the door. St. Christopher is a very favourite saint in

these parts; people call him S. Cristofano, and even S. Carpofano.

I think it must be in the church of S. Cristoforo at Mesocco that

the frescoes are which Baedeker writes of as being near Grono. Of

these I will speak at length in the next chapter. About half or

three-quarters of a mile higher up the road than the castle is

Mesocco itself.

CHAPTER XVIII--Mesocco, S. Bernardino, and S. Maria in Calanca

At the time of my first visit there was an inn kept by one

Desteffanis and his wife, where I stayed nearly a month, and was

made very comfortable. Last year, however, Jones and I found it

closed, but did very well at the Hotel Toscani. At the Hotel

Desteffanis there used to be a parrot which lived about loose and

had no cage, but did exactly what it liked. Its name was Lorrito.

It was a very human bird; I saw it eat some bread and milk from its

tin one day and then sidle along a pole to a place where there was

a towel hanging. It took a corner of the towel in its claw, wiped

its beak with it, and then sidled back again. It would sometimes

come and see me at breakfast; it got from a chair-back on to the

table by dropping its head and putting its round beak on to the

table first, making a third leg as it were of its head; it would

then waddle to the butter and begin helping itself. It was a great

respecter of persons and knew the landlord and landlady perfectly

well. It yawned just like a dog or a human being, and this not

from love of imitation but from being sleepy. I do not remember to

have seen any other bird yawn. It hated boys because the boys

plagued it sometimes. The boys generally go barefoot in summer,

and if ever a boy came near the door of the hotel this parrot would

go straight for his toes.

The most striking feature of Mesocco is the castle, which, as I

have said, occupies a rock in the middle of the valley, and is one

of the finest ruins in Switzerland. More interesting than the

castle, however, is the church of S. Cristoforo. Before I entered

it I was struck with the fresco on the facciata of the church,

which, though the facciata bears the date 1720, was painted in a

style so much earlier than that of 1720 that I at first imagined I

had found here another old master born out of due time; for the

fresco was in such a good state of preservation that it did not

look more than 150 years old, and it was hardly likely to have been

preserved when the facciata was renovated in 1720. When, however,

my friend Jones joined me, he blew that little romance away by

discovering a series of names with dates scrawled upon it from

"1481. viii. Febraio" to the present century. The lowest part of

the fresco must be six feet from the ground, and it must rise at

least ten or a dozen feet more, so the writings upon it are not

immediately obvious, but they will be found on looking at all

closely.

It is plain, therefore, that when the facciata paired the original

fresco was preserved; it cannot be, as I had supposed, the work of

a local painter who had taken his ideas of rocks and trees from the

frescoes inside the church. That I am right in supposing the

curious blanc-mange-mould-looking objects on either side St.

Christopher's legs to be intended for rocks will be clear to any

one who has seen the frescoes inside the church, where mountains

with trees and towns upon them are treated on exactly the same

principle. I cannot think the artist can have been quite easy in

his mind about them.

On entering the church the left-hand wall is found to be covered

with the most remarkable series of frescoes in the Italian Grisons.

They are disposed in three rows, one above the other, occupying the

whole wall of the church as far as the chancel. The top row

depicts a series of incidents prior to the Crucifixion, and is cut

up by the pulpit at the chancel end. These events are treated so

as to form a single picture.

The second row is in several compartments. There is a saint in

armour on horseback, life-size, killing a dragon, and a queen who

seems to have been leading the dragon by a piece of red tape

buckled round its neck--unless, indeed, the dragon is supposed to

have been leading the queen. The queen still holds the tape and

points heavenward. Next to this there is a very nice saint on

horse-back, who is giving a cloak to a man who is nearly naked.

Then comes St. Michael trampling on the dragon, and holding a pair

of scales in his hand, in which are two little souls of a man and

of a woman. The dragon has a hook in his hand, and thrusting this

up from under St. Michael, he hooks it on to the edge of the scale

with the woman in it, and drags her down. The man, it seems, will

escape. Next to this there is a compartment in which a monk is

offering a round thing to St. Michael, who does not seem to care

much about it; there are other saints and martyrs in this

compartment, and St. Anthony with his pig, and Sta. Lucia holding a

box with two eyes in it, she being patroness of the eyesight as

well as of mariners. Lastly, there is the Adoration, ruined by the

pulpit.

Below this second compartment are twelve frescoes, each about three

and a half feet square, representing the twelve months--from a

purely secular point of view. January is a man making and hanging

up sausages; February, a man chopping wood; March, a youth

proclaiming spring with two horns to his mouth, and his hair flying

all abroad; April is a young man on horseback carrying a flower in

his hand; May, a knight, not in armour, going out hawking with his

hawk on one finger, his bride on a pillion behind him, and a dog

beside the horse; June is a mower; July, another man reaping

twenty-seven ears of corn; August, an invalid going to see his

doctor; October, a man knocking down chestnuts from a tree and a

woman catching them; November is hidden and destroyed by the

pulpit; December is a butcher felling an ox with a hatchet.

We could find no signature of the artist, nor any date on the

frescoes to show when they were painted; but while looking for a

signature we found a name scratched with a knife or stone, and

rubbed the tracing which I reproduce, greatly reduced, here; Jones

thinks the last line was not written by Lazarus Bovollinus, but by

another who signs A. T.

[At this point in the book there is a brass rubbing. It looks

like: Lazarus Bouollins 1534 30 Augusti explenit 20 Amurs ...]

The Boelini were one of the principal families in Mesocco. Gaspare

Boelini, the head of the house, had been treacherously thrown over

the castle walls and killed by order of Giovanni Giacomo Triulci in

the year 1525, because as chancellor of the valley he declined to

annul the purchase of the castle of Mesocco, which Triulci had

already sold to the people of Mesocco, and for which he had been in

great part paid. His death is recorded on a stone placed by the

roadside under the castle.

Examining the wall further, we found a little to the right that the

same Lazzaro Bovollino (I need hardly say that "Bovollino" is

another way of spelling "Boelini") scratched his name again some

sixteen years later, as follows:-

1550 adj (?)

26 Decemb. morijm (?)

Lazzaro Bovollino

\*

|

15 L ----------- B 50

The handwriting is not so good as it was when he wrote his name

before; but we observed, with sympathy, that the writer had dropped

his Latin. Close by is scratched "Gullielmo Bo."

The mark between the two letters L and B was the family mark of the

Boelini, each family having its mark, a practice of which further

examples will be given presently.

We looked still more, and on the border of one of the frescoes we

discovered -

Veneris.

"1481 die Jovis viiIj Februarij hoines di Misochi et Soazza

fecerunt fidelitatem in manibus di Johani Jacobi Triulzio,"

- "The men of Mesocco and Soazza did fealty to John Jacob Triulci

on Friday the 8th of February 1481." The day originally written

was Thursday the 7th of February, but "Jovis" was scratched out and

"Veneris" written above, while another "i" was intercalated among

the i's of the viij of February. We could not determine whether

some hitch arose so as to cause a change of day, or whether

"Thursday" and "viij" were written by a mistake for "Friday" and

"viiij," but we imagined both inscription and correction to have

been contemporaneous with the event itself. It will be remembered

that on the St. Christopher outside the church there is scratched

it "1481. 8 Febraio" and nothing more. The mistake of the day,

therefore, if it was a mistake, was made twice, and was corrected

inside the church but not upon the fresco outside--perhaps because

a ladder would have had to be fetched to reach it. Possibly the

day had been originally fixed for Thursday the 8th, and a heavy

snow-storm prevented people from coming till next day.

I could not find that any one in Mesocco, not even my excellent

friend Signor a Marca, the curato himself, knew anything about

either the inscriptions or the cause of their being written. No

one was aware even of their existence; on borrowing, however, the

history of the Valle Mesolcina by Signor Giovanni Antonio a Marca,

{31} I found what I think will throw light upon the matter. The

family of De Sax had held the valley of Mesocco for over four

hundred years, and sold it in 1480 to John Jacob Triulci, who it

seems tried to cheat him out of a large part of the purchase money

later on; probably this John Jacob Triulci had the frescoes painted

to conciliate the clergy and inaugurate his entry into possession.

Early in 1481 he made the inhabitants of the valley do fealty to

him. I may say that as soon as he had entered upon possession, he

began to oppress the people by demanding tolls on all produce that

passed the castle. This the people resisted. They were also

harassed by Peter De Sax, who made incursions into the valley and

seized property, being unable to get his money out of John Jacob

Triulci.

Other reasons that make me think the frescoes were painted in 1480

are as follows. The spurs worn by the young men in the April and

May frescoes (pp. 211, 212) are about the date 1460. Their

facsimiles can be seen in the Tower of London with this date

assigned to them. The frescoes, therefore, can hardly have been

painted before this time; but they were probably painted later, for

in the St. Christopher there is a distinct hint at anatomy; enough

to show that the study of anatomy introduced by Leonardo da Vinci

was beginning to be talked about as more or less the correct thing.

This would hardly be the case before 1480, as Leonardo was not born

till 1452. By February 1481 the frescoes were already painted;

this is plain because the inscription--which, I think, may be taken

as a record made at the time that fealty was done--is scratched

over them. Peter De Sax, if he was selling his property, is not

likely to have had the frescoes painted just before he was going

away; I think it most likely, therefore, that they were painted in

1480, when the valley of Mesocco passed from the hands of the De

Sax family to those of the Triulci.

Underneath the inscription about the doing fealty there is

scratched in another hand, and very likely years after the event it

commemorates--"1548 fu liberata la Vallata." This date is

contradicted (and, I believe, corrected) by another inscription

hard by, also in another hand, which says -

"1549. La valle di Misocho compro la liberti da casa Triulcia per

2400 scuti."

This inscription is signed thus:-

[In the book there is a picture of four symbols]

Carlo a Marca had written his name along with three others in 1606

on another part of the frescoes. Here are the signatures:-

[Again, some symbols]

Two of these signatures belong to members of the Triulci family, as

appears by the trident, which translates the name. The T in each

case is doubtless for "Triulci." Four years earlier still, Carlo a

Marca had written his name, with that of his wife or fiancee, on

the fresco of St. Christopher on the facciata of the church, for we

found there -

1602 { Carlo a Marca.

{ Margherita dei Paglioni.

There is one other place where his name appears, or rather a part

of it, for the inscription is half hidden by a gallery, erected

probably in the last century.

The a Marca family still flourish in Mesocco. The curato is an a

Marca, so is the postmaster. On the walls of a house near the

convent there is an inscription to the effect that it was given by

his fellow-townsmen to a member of the a Marca family, and the best

work on the history of the valley is the work of Giovanni Antonio

Marca from which I have already quoted.

Returning to the frescoes, we found that the men of Soazza and

Mesocco did fealty again to John Jacob Triulci on the feast of St.

Bartholomew, the 24th day of August 1503; this I believe to have

been the son of the original purchaser, but am not certain; if so,

he is the Triulci who had Gaspare Boelini thrown down from the

castle walls. The people seem by another inscription to have done

fealty again upon the same day of the following year.

On the St. Christopher we found one date, 1530, scratched on the

right ankle, and several of 1607, apparently done at one time. One

date was scratched in the left-hand corner -

1498 . . .

il Conte di (Misocho?)

There are also other dates--1627, 1633, 1635, 1626; and right

across the fresco there is written in red chalk, in a bold

sixteenth or seventeenth century handwriting -

"Il parlar di li homini da bene deve valer piu che quello degli

altri."

- "The word of a man of substance ought to carry more weight than

that of other people;" and again -

"Non ha la fede ognun come tu chredi;

Non chreder almen [quello?] che non vedi"

- "People are not so worthy of being believed as you think they

are; do not believe anything that you do not see yourself."

Big with our discoveries, we returned towards our inn, Jones

leaving me sketching by the roadside. Presently an elderly English

gentleman of some importance, judging from his manner, came up to

me and entered into conversation. Englishmen do not often visit

Mesocco, and I was rather surprised. "Have you seen that horrid

fresco of St. Christopher down at that church there?" said he,

pointing towards it. I said I had. "It's very bad," said he

decidedly; "it was painted in the year 1725." I had been through

all that myself, and I was a little cross into the bargain, so I

said, "No; the fresco is very good. It is of the fifteenth

century, and the facciata was restored in 1720, not in 1725. The

old fresco was preserved." The old gentleman looked a little

scared. "Oh," said he, "I know nothing about art--but I will see

you again at the hotel;" and left me at once. I never saw him

again. Who he was, where he came from, how he departed, I do not

know. He was the only Englishman I saw during my stay of some four

weeks at Mesocco.

On the first day of my first visit to Mesocco in 1879, I had gone

on to S. Bernardino, and just before getting there, looking down

over the great stretches of pasture land above S. Giacomo, could

see that there was a storm raging lower down in the valley about

where Mesocco should be; I never saw such inky blackness in clouds

before, and the conductor of the diligence said that he had seen

nothing like it. Next morning we learnt that a water-spout had

burst on the mountain above Anzone, a hamlet of Mesocco, and that

the water had done a great deal of damage to the convent at

Mesocco. Returning a few days later, I saw where the torrent had

flowed by the mud upon the grass, but could not have believed such

a stream of water (running with the velocity with which it must

have run) to have been possible under any circumstances in that

place unless I had actually seen its traces. It carried great

rocks of several cubic yards as though they had been small stones,

and among other mischief it had knocked down the garden wall of the

convent of S. Rocco and covered the garden with debris. As I

looked at it I remembered what Signor Bullo had told me at Faido

about the inundations of 1868, "It was not the great rivers," he

said, "which did the damage: it was the ruscelli" or small

streams. So in revolutions it is not the heretofore great people,

but small ones swollen under unusual circumstances who are most

conspicuous and do most damage. Padre Bernardino, of the convent

of S. Rocco, asked me to make him a sketch of the effect of the

inundation, which I was delighted to do. It was not, however,

exactly what he wanted, and, moreover, it got spoiled in the

mounting, so I did another and he returned me the first with an

inscription upon it which I reproduce below.

First came the words-

[Ricordo a Mesocco]

Then came my sketch; and then -

[In the book there is some handwriting at this point--unfortunately

I cannot read it]

The English of which is as follows:- "View of the church, garden,

and hospice of S. Rocco, after the visitation inflicted upon them

by the sad torrent of Anzone, on the unhallowed evening of the 4th

of August 1879." I regret that the "no" of Padre Bernardino's

name, through being written in faint ink, was not reproduced in my

facsimile. I doubt whether Padre Bernardino would have got the

second sketch out of me, if I had not liked the inscription he had

written on the first so much that I wanted to be possessed of it.

Besides, he wrote me a note addressed "all' egregio pittore S.

Butler." To be called an egregious painter was too much for me, so

I did the sketch. I was once addressed as "L'esimio pittore." I

think this is one degree better even than "egregio."

The damage which torrents can do must be seen to be believed.

There is not a streamlet, however innocent looking, which is not

liable occasionally to be turned into a furious destructive agent,

carrying ruin over the pastures which at ordinary times it

irrigates. Perhaps in old times people deified and worshipped

streams because they were afraid of them. Every year each one of

the great Alpine roads will be interrupted at some point or another

by the tons of stones and gravel that are swept over it perhaps for

a hundred yards together. I have seen the St. Gothard road more

than once soon after these interruptions and could not have

believed such damage possible; in 1869 people would still shudder

when they spoke of the inundations of 1868. It is curious to note

how they will now say that rocks which have evidently been in their

present place for hundreds of years, were brought there in 1868; as

for the torrent that damaged S. Rocco when I was in the valley of

Mesocco, it shaved off the strong parapet of the bridge on either

side clean and sharp, but the arch was left standing, the flood

going right over the top. Many scars are visible on the mountain

tops which are clearly the work of similar water-spouts, and

altogether the amount of solid matter which gets taken down each

year into the valleys is much greater than we generally think. Let

any one watch the Ticino flowing into the Lago Maggiore after a few

days' heavy rain, and consider how many tons of mud per day it must

carry into and leave in the lake, and he will wonder that the

gradual filling-up process is not more noticeable from age to age

than it is.

Anzone, whence the sad torrent derives its name, is an exquisitely

lovely little hamlet close to Mesocco. Another no less beautiful

village is Doera, on the other side of the Moesa, and half a mile

lower down than Mesocco. Doera overlooks the castle, the original

hexagonal form of which can be made out from this point. It must

have been much of the same plan as the castle at Eynsford in Kent--

of which, by the way, I was once assured that the oldest inhabitant

could not say "what it come from." While I was copying the fresco

outside the chapel at Doera, some charming people came round me. I

said the fresco was very beautiful. "Son persuaso," said the

spokesman solemnly. Then he said there were some more pictures

inside and we had better see them; so the keys were brought. We

said that they too were very beautiful. "Siam persuasi," was the

reply in chorus. Then they said that perhaps we should like to buy

them and take them away with us. This was a more serious matter,

so we explained that they were very beautiful, but that these

things had a charm upon the spot which they would lose if removed

elsewhere. The nice people at once replied, "Siam persuasi," and

so they left us. It was like a fragment from one of Messrs.

Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operas.

For the rest, Mesocco is beautifully situated and surrounded by

waterfalls. There is a man there who takes the cows and goats out

in the morning for their several owners in the village, and brings

them home in the evening. He announces his departure and his

return by blowing a twisted shell, like those that Tritons blow on

fountains or in pictures; it yields a softer sound than a horn;

when his shell is heard people go to the cow-house and let the cows

out; they need not drive them to join the others, they need only

open the door; and so in the evening, they only want the sound of

the shell to tell them that they must open the stable-door, for the

cows or goats when turned from the rest of the mob make straight to

their own abode.

There are two great avalanches which descend every spring; one of

them when I was there last was not quite gone until September;

these avalanches push the air before them and compress it, so that

a terrific wind descends to the bottom of the valley and mounts up

on to the village of Mesocco. One year this wind snapped a whole

grove of full-grown walnuts across the middle of their trunks, and

carried stones and bits of wood up against the houses at some

distance off; it tore off part of the covering from the cupola of

the church, and twisted the weathercock awry in the fashion in

which it may still be seen, unless it has been mended since I left.

The judges at Mesocco get four francs a day when they are wanted,

but unless actually sitting they get nothing. No wonder the people

are so nice to one another and quarrel so seldom.

The walk from Mesocco to S. Bernardino is delightful; it should

take about three hours. For grassy slopes and flowers I do not

know a better, more especially from S. Giacomo onward. In the

woods above S. Giacomo there are some bears, or were last year.

Five were known--a father, mother, and three young ones--but two

were killed. They do a good deal of damage, and the Canton offers

a reward for their destruction. The Grisons is the only Swiss

Canton in which there are bears still remaining.

San Bernardino, 5500 feet above the sea, pleased me less than

Mesocco, but there are some nice bits in it. The Hotel Brocco is

the best to go to. The village is about two hours below the top of

the pass; the walk to this is a pleasant one. The old Roman road

can still be seen in many places, and is in parts in an excellent

state even now. San Bernardino is a fashionable watering-place and

has a chalybeate spring. In the summer it often has as many as two

or three thousand visitors, chiefly from the neighbourhood of the

Lago Maggiore and even from Milan. It is not so good a sketching

ground--at least so I thought--as some others of a similar

character that I have seen. It is not comparable, for example, to

Fusio. It is little visited by the English.

On our way down to Bellinzona again we determined to take S. Maria

in Calanca, and accordingly were dropped by the diligence near

Gabbiolo, whence there is a path across the meadows and under the

chestnuts which leads to Verdabbio. There are some good bits near

the church of this village, and some quaint modern frescoes on a

public-house a little off the main footpath, but there is no

accommodation. From this village the path ascends rapidly for an

hour or more, till just as one has made almost sure that one must

have gone wrong and have got too high, or be on the track to an

alpe only, one finds one's self on a wide beaten path with walls on

either side. We are now on a level with S. Maria itself, and

turning sharply to the left come in a few minutes right upon the

massive keep and the campanile, which are so striking when seen

from down below. They are much more striking when seen from close

at hand. The sketch I give does not convey the notion--as what

sketch can convey it?--that one is at a great elevation, and it is

this which gives its especial charm to S. Maria in Calanca.

The approach to the church is beautiful, and the church itself full

of interest. The village was evidently at one time a place of some

importance, though it is not easy to understand how it came to be

built in such a situation. Even now it is unaccountably large.

There is no accommodation for sleeping, but an artist who could

rough it would, I think, find a good deal that he would like. On

p. 226 is a sketch of the church and tower as seen from the

opposite side to that from which the sketch on p. 224 was taken.

The church seems to have been very much altered, if indeed the body

of it was not entirely rebuilt, in 1618--a date which is found on a

pillar inside the church. On going up into the gallery at the west

end of the church, there is found a Nativity painted in fresco by a

local artist, one Agostino Duso of Roveredo, in the year 1727, and

better by a good deal than one would anticipate from the epoch and

habitat of the painter. On the other side of the same gallery

there is a Death of the Virgin, also by the same painter, but not

so good. On the left-hand side of the nave going towards the altar

there is a remarkable picture of the battle of Lepanto, signed

"Georgius Wilhelmus Groesner Constantiensis fecit A.D. 1649," and

with an inscription to the effect that it was painted for the

confraternity of the most holy Rosary, and by them set up "in this

church of St. Mary commonly called of Calancha." The picture

displays very little respect for academic principles, but is full

of spirit and sensible painting.

Above this picture there hang two others--also very interesting,

from being examples of, as it were, the last groans of true art

while being stifled by academicism--or it may be the attempt at a

new birth, which was nevertheless doomed to extinction by

academicians while yet in its infancy. Such pictures are to be

found all over Italy. Sometimes, as in the case of the work of

Dedomenici, they have absolute merit--more commonly they have the

relative merit of showing that the painter was trying to look and

feel for himself, and a picture does much when it conveys this

impression. It is a small still voice, which, however small, can

be heard through and above the roar of cant which tries to drown

it. We want a book about the unknown Italian painters in out-of-

the-way Italian valleys during the times of the decadence of art.

There is ample material for one who has the time at his command.

We lunched at the house of the incumbent, a monk, who was very kind

to us. We found him drying French marigold blossoms to colour his

risotto with during the winter. He gave us some excellent wine,

and took us over the tower near the church. Nothing can be more

lovely than the monk's garden. If aesthetic people are ever going

to get tired of sun-flowers and lilies, let me suggest to them that

they will find a weary utterness in chicory and seed onions which

they should not overlook; I never felt chicory and seed onions till

I was in the monk's garden at S. Maria in Calanca. All about the

terrace or artificial level ground on which the church is placed,

there are admirable bits for painting, and if there was only

accommodation so that one could get up as high as the alpi, I can

fancy few better places to stay at than S. Maria in Calanca.

CHAPTER XIX--The Mendrisiotto

We stayed a day or two at Bellinzona, and then went on over the

Monte Cenere to Lugano. My first acquaintance with the Monte

Cenere was made some seven-and-thirty years ago when I was a small

boy. I remember with what delight I found wild narcissuses growing

in a meadow upon the top of it, and was allowed to gather as many

as I liked. It was not till some thirty years afterwards that I

again passed over the Monte Cenere in summer time, but I well

remembered the narcissus place, and wondered whether there would

still be any of them growing there. Sure enough when we got to the

top, there they were as thick as cowslips in an English meadow. At

Lugano, having half-an-hour to spare, we paid our respects to the

glorious frescoes by Bernardino Luini, and to the facade of the

duomo, and then went on to Mendrisio.

The neighbourhood of Mendrisio, or, as it is called, the

"Mendrisiotto," is a rich one. Mendrisio itself should be the

headquarters; there is an excellent hotel there, the Hotel

Mendrisio, kept by Signora Pasta, which cannot be surpassed for

comfort and all that makes a hotel pleasant to stay at. I never

saw a house where the arrangements were more perfect; even in the

hottest weather I found the rooms always cool and airy, and the

nights never oppressive. Part of the secret of this may be that

Mendrisio lies higher than it appears to do, and the hotel, which

is situated on the slope of the hill, takes all the breeze there

is. The lake of Lugano is about 950 feet above the sea. The river

falls rapidly between Mendrisio and the lake, while the hotel is

high above the river. I do not see, therefore, how the hotel can

be less than 1200 feet above the sea-line; but whatever height it

is, I never felt the heat oppressive, though on more than one

occasion I have stayed there for weeks together in July and August.

Mendrisio being situated on the railway between Lugano and Como,

both these places are within easy reach. Milan is only a couple of

hours off, and Varese a three or four hours' carriage drive. It

lies on the very last slopes of the Alps, so that whether the

visitor has a fancy for mountains or for the smiling beauty of the

colline, he may be equally gratified. There are excellent roads in

every direction, and none of them can be taken without its leading

to some new feature of interest; I do not think any English family

will regret spending a fortnight at this charming place.

Most visitors to Mendrisio, however, make it a place of passage

only, en route for the celebrated hotel on the Monte Generoso, kept

by Dr. Pasta, Signora Pasta's brother-in-law. The Monte Generoso

is very fine; I know few places of which I am fonder; whether one

looks down at evening upon the lake of Lugano thousands of feet

below, and then lets the eye wander upward again and rest upon the

ghastly pallor of Monte Rosa, or whether one takes the path to the

Colma and saunters over green slopes carpeted with wild-flowers,

and studded with the gentlest cattle, all is equally delightful.

What a sense of vastness and freedom is there on the broad heaving

slopes of these subalpine spurs. They are just high enough without

being too high. The South Downs are very good, and by making

believe very much I have sometimes been half able to fancy when

upon them that I might be on the Monte Generoso, but they are only

good as a quartet is good if one cannot get a symphony.

I think there are more wild-flowers upon the Monte Generoso than

upon any other that I know, and among them numbers of beautiful

wild narcissuses, as on the Monte Cenere. At the top of the Monte

Generoso, among the rocks that jut out from the herbage, there

grows--unless it has been all uprooted--the large yellow auricula,

and this I own to being my favourite mountain wild-flower. It is

the only flower which, I think, fairly beats cowslips. Here too I

heard, or thought I heard, the song of that most beautiful of all

bird songsters, the passero solitario, or solitary sparrow-if it is

a sparrow, which I should doubt.

Nobody knows what a bird can do in the way of song until he has

heard a passero solitario. I think they still have one at the

Hotel Mendrisio, but am not sure. I heard one there once, and can

only say that I shall ever remember it as the most beautiful

warbling that I ever heard come out of the throat of bird. All

other bird singing is loud, vulgar, and unsympathetic in

comparison. The bird itself is about as big as a starling, and is

of a dull blue colour. It is easily tamed, and becomes very much

attached to its master and mistress, but it is apt to die in

confinement before very long. It fights all others of its own

species; it is now a rare bird, and is doomed, I fear, ere long to

extinction, to the regret of all who have had the pleasure of its

acquaintance. The Italians are very fond of them, and Professor

Vela told me they will even act like a house dog and set up a cry

if any strangers come. The one I saw flew instantly at my finger

when I put it near its cage, but I was not sure whether it did so

in anger or play. I thought it liked being listened to, and as

long as it chose to sing I was delighted to stay, whereas as a

general rule I want singing birds to leave off. {32}

People say the nightingale's song is so beautiful; I am ashamed to

own it, but I do not like it. It does not use the diatonic scale.

A bird should either make no attempt to sing in tune, or it should

succeed in doing so. Larks are Wordsworth, and as for canaries, I

would almost sooner hear a pig having its nose ringed, or the

grinding of an axe. Cuckoos are all right; they sing in tune.

Rooks are lovely; they do not pretend to tune. Seagulls again, and

the plaintive creatures that pity themselves on moorlands, as the

plover and the curlew, or the birds that lift up their voices and

cry at eventide when there is an eager air blowing upon the

mountains and the last yellow in the sky is fading--I have no words

with which to praise the music of these people. Or listen to the

chuckling of a string of soft young ducks, as they glide single-

file beside a ditch under a hedgerow, so close together that they

look like some long brown serpent, and say what sound can be more

seductive.

Many years ago I remember thinking that the birds in New Zealand

approached the diatonic scale more nearly than European birds do.

There was one bird, I think it was the New Zealand thrush, but am

not sure, which used to sing thus:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

I was always wanting it to go on:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

But it never got beyond the first four bars. Then there was

another which I noticed the first day I landed, more than twenty

years since, and whose song descended by very nearly perfect

semitones as follows:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

but the semitones are here and there in this bird's song a trifle

out of tune, whereas in that of the other there was no departure

from the diatonic scale. Be this, however, as it may, none of

these please me so much as the passero solitario.

The only mammals that I can call to mind at this moment as showing

any even apparent approach to an appreciation of the diatonic scale

are the elephant and the rhinoceros. The braying (or whatever is

the technical term for it) of an elephant comprises a pretty

accurate third, and is of a rich mellow tone with a good deal of

brass in it. The rhinoceros grunts a good fourth, beginning, we

will say, on C, and dropping correctly on to the G below.

The Monte Generoso, then, is a good place to stay a few days at,

but one soon comes to an end of it. The top of a mountain is like

an island in the air, one is cooped up upon it unless one descends;

in the case of the Monte Generoso there is the view of the lake of

Lugano, the walk to the Colma, the walk along the crest of the hill

by the farm, and the view over Lombardy, and that is all. If one

goes far down one is haunted by the recollection that when one is

tired in the evening one will have all one's climbing to do, and,

beautiful as the upper parts of the Monte Generoso are, there is

little for a painter there except to study cattle, goats, and

clouds. I recommend a traveller, therefore, by all means to spend

a day or two at the hotel on the Monte Generoso, but to make his

longer sojourn down below at Mendrisio, the walks and excursions

from which are endless, and all of them beautiful.

Among the best of these is the ascent of the Monte Bisbino, which

can be easily made in a day from Mendrisio; I found no difficulty

in doing it on foot all the way there and back a few years ago, but

I now prefer to take a trap as far as Sagno, and do the rest of the

journey on foot, returning to the trap in the evening. Every one

who knows North Italy knows the Monte Bisbino. It is a high

pyramidal mountain with what seems a little white chapel on the top

that glistens like a star when the sun is full upon it. From Como

it is seen most plainly, but it is distinguishable over a very

large part of Lombardy when the sun is right; it is frequently

ascended from Como and Cernobbio, but I believe the easiest way of

getting up it is to start from Mendrisio with a trap as far as

Sagno.

A mile and a half or so after leaving Mendrisio there is a village

called Castello on the left. Here, a little off the road on the

right hand, there is the small church of S. Cristoforo, of great

antiquity, containing the remains of some early frescoes, I should

think of the thirteenth or early part of the fourteenth century.

As usual, people have scratched their names on the frescoes. We

found one name "Battista," with the date "1485" against it. It is

a mistake to hold that the English scribble their names about more

than other people. The Italians like doing this just as well as we

do. Let the reader go to Varallo, for example, and note the names

scratched up from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the

present day, on the walls of the chapel containing the Crucifixion.

Indeed, the Italians seem to have begun the habit long before we

did, for we very rarely find names scratched on English buildings

so long ago as the fifteenth century, whereas in Italy they are

common. The earliest I can call to mind in England at this moment

(of course, excepting the names written in the Beauchamp Tower) is

on the church porch at Harlington, where there is a name cut and

dated in one of the early years of the seventeenth century. I

never even in Italy saw a name scratched on a wall with an earlier

date than 1480.

Why is it, I wonder, that these little bits of soul-fossil as it

were, touch us so much when we come across them? A fossil does not

touch us--while a fly in amber does. Why should a fly in amber

interest us and give us a slightly solemn feeling for a moment,

when the fossil of a megatherium bores us? I give it up; but few

of us can see the lightest trifle scratched off casually and idly

long ago, without liking it better than almost any great thing of

the same, or ever so much earlier date, done with purpose and

intention that it should remain. So when we left S. Cristoforo it

was not the old church, nor the frescoes, but the name of the idle

fellow who had scratched his name "Battista . . . 1485," that we

carried away with us. A little bit of old world life and entire

want of earnestness, preserved as though it were a smile in amber.

In the Val Sesia, several years ago, I bought some tobacco that was

wrapped up for me in a yellow old MS. which I in due course

examined. It was dated 1797, and was a leaf from the book in which

a tanner used to enter the skins which his customers brought him to

be tanned.

"October 24," he writes, "I received from Signora Silvestre, called

the widow, the skin of a goat branded in the neck.--(I am not to

give it up unless they give me proof that she is the rightful

owner.) Mem. I delivered it to Mr. Peter Job (Signor Pietro

Giobbe).

"October 27.--I receive two small skins of a goat, very thin and

branded in the neck, from Giuseppe Gianote of Campertogno.

"October 29.--I receive three skins of a chamois from Signor

Antonio Cinere of Alagna, branded in the neck." Then there is a

subsequent entry written small. "I receive also a little gray

marmot's skin weighing thirty ounces."

I am sorry I did not get a sheet with the tanner's name. I am sure

he was an excellent person, and might have been trusted with any

number of skins, branded or unbranded. It is nearly a hundred

years ago since that little gray marmot's skin was tanned in the

Val Sesia; but the wretch will not lie quiet in his grave; he

walks, and has haunted me once a month or so any time this ten

years past. I will see if I cannot lay him by prevailing on him to

haunt some one or other of my readers.

CHAPTER XX--Sanctuary on Monte Bisbino

But to return to S. Cristoforo. In the Middle Ages there was a

certain duke who held this part of the country and was notorious

for his exactions. One Christmas eve when he and his whole

household had assembled to their devotions, the people rose up

against them and murdered them inside the church. After this

tragedy, the church was desecrated, though monuments have been put

up on the outside walls even in recent years. There is a fine bit

of early religious sculpture over the door, and the traces of a

fresco of Christ walking upon the water, also very early.

Returning to the road by a path of a couple of hundred yards, we

descended to cross the river, and then ascended again to Morbio

Superiore. The view from the piazza in front of the church is very

fine, extending over the whole Mendrisiotto, and reaching as far as

Varese and the Lago Maggiore. Below is Morbio Inferiore, a place

of singular beauty. A couple of Italian friends were with us, one

of them Signor Spartaco Vela, son of Professor Vela. He called us

into the church and showed us a beautiful altar-piece--a Madonna

with saints on either side, apparently moved from some earlier

church, and, as we all agreed, a very fine work, though we could

form no idea who the artist was.

From Morbio Superiore the ascent is steep, and it will take half-

an-hour or more to reach the level bit of road close to Sagno.

This, again, commands the most exquisite views, especially over

Como, through the trunks of the trees. Then comes Sagno itself,

the last village of the Canton Ticino and close to the Italian

frontier. There is no inn with sleeping accommodation here, but if

there was, Sagno would be a very good place to stay at. They say

that some of its inhabitants sometimes smuggle a pound or two of

tobacco across the Italian frontier, hiding it in the fern close to

the boundary, and whisking it over the line on a dark night, but I

know not what truth there is in the allegation; the people struck

me as being above the average in respect of good looks and good

breeding--and the average in those parts is a very high one.

Immediately behind Sagno the old paved pilgrim's road begins to

ascend rapidly. We followed it, and in half-an-hour reached the

stone marking the Italian boundary; then comes some level walking,

and then on turning a corner the monastery at the top of the Monte

Bisbino is caught sight of. It still looks small, but one can now

see what an important building it really is, and how different from

the mere chapel which it appears to be when seen from a distance.

The sketch which I give is taken from about a mile further on than

the place where the summit is first seen.

Here some men joined us who lived in a hut a few hundred feet from

the top of the mountain and looked after the cattle there during

the summer. It is at their alpe that the last water can be

obtained, so we resolved to stay there and eat the provisions we

had brought with us. For the benefit of travellers, I should say

they will find the water by opening the door of a kind of outhouse;

this covers the water and prevents the cows from dirtying it.

There will be a wooden bowl floating on the top. The water outside

is not drinkable, but that in the outhouse is excellent.

The men were very good to us; they knew me, having seen me pass and

watched me sketching in other years. It had unfortunately now

begun to rain, so we were glad of shelter: they threw faggots on

the fire and soon kindled a blaze; when these died down and it was

seen that the sparks clung to the kettle and smouldered on it, they

said that it would rain much, and they were right. It poured

during the hour we spent in dining, after which it only got a

little better; we thanked them, and went up five or six hundred

feet till the monastery at length loomed out suddenly upon us from

the mist, when we were close to it but not before.

There is a restaurant at the top which is open for a few days

before and after a festa, but generally closed; it was open now, so

we went in to dry ourselves. We found rather a roughish lot

assembled, and imagined the smuggling element to preponderate over

the religious, but nothing could be better than the way in which

they treated us. There was one gentleman, however, who was no

smuggler, but who had lived many years in London and had now

settled down at Rovenna, just below on the lake of Como. He had

taken a room here and furnished it for the sake of the shooting.

He spoke perfect English, and would have none but English things

about him. He had Cockle's antibilious pills, and the last numbers

of the "Illustrated London News" and "Morning Chronicle;" his bath

and bath-towels were English, and there was a box of Huntley &

Palmer's biscuits on his dressing-table. He was delighted to see

some Englishmen, and showed us everything that was to be seen--

among the rest the birds he kept in cages to lure those that he

intended to shoot. He also took us behind the church, and there we

found a very beautiful marble statue of the Madonna and child, an

admirable work, with painted eyes and the dress gilded and figured.

What an extraordinary number of fine or, at the least, interesting

things one finds in Italy which no one knows anything about. In

one day, poking about at random, we had seen some early frescoes at

S. Cristoforo, an excellent work at Morbio, and here was another

fine thing sprung upon us. It is not safe ever to pass a church in

Italy without exploring it carefully. The church may be new and

for the most part full of nothing but what is odious, but there is

no knowing what fragment of earlier work one may not find

preserved.

Signor Barelli, for this was our friend's name, now gave us some

prints of the sanctuary, one of which I reproduce on p. 240.

Behind the church there is a level piece of ground with a table and

stone seats round it. The view from here in fine weather is very

striking. As it was, however, it was perhaps hardly less fine than

in clear weather, for the clouds had now raised themselves a

little, though very little, above the sanctuary, but here and there

lay all ragged down below us, and cast beautiful reflected lights

upon the lake and town of Como.

Above, the heavens were still black and lowering. Over against us

was the Monte Generoso, very sombre, and scarred with snow-white

torrents; below, the dull, sullen slopes of the Monte Bisbino, and

the lake of Como; further on, the Mendrisiotto and the blue-black

plains of Lombardy. I have been at the top of the Monte Bisbino

several times, but never was more impressed with it. At all times,

however, it is a marvellous place.

Coming down we kept the ridge of the hill instead of taking the

path by which we ascended. Beautiful views of the monastery are

thus obtained. The flowers in spring must be very varied; and we

still found two or three large kinds of gentians and any number of

cyclamens. Presently Vela dug up a fern root of the common

Polypodium vulgare; he scraped it with his knife and gave us some

to eat. It is not at all bad, and tastes very much like liquorice.

Then we came upon the little chapel of S. Nicolao. I do not know

whether there is anything good inside or no. Then we reached Sagno

and returned to Mendrisio; as we re-crossed the stream between

Morbio Superiore and Castello we found it had become a raging

torrent, capable of any villainy.

CHAPTER XXI--A Day at the Cantine

Next day we went to breakfast with Professor Vela, the father of my

friend Spartaco, at Ligornetto. After we had admired the many fine

works which Professor Vela's studio contains, it was agreed that we

should take a walk by S. Agata, and spend the afternoon at the

cantine, or cellars where the wine is kept. Spartaco had two

painter friends staying with him whom I already knew, and a young

lady, his cousin; so we all went together across the meadows. I

think we started about one o'clock, and it was some three or four

by the time we got to the cantine, for we kept stopping continually

to drink wine. The two painter visitors had a fine comic vein, and

enlivened us continually with bits of stage business which were

sometimes uncommonly droll. We were laughing incessantly, but

carried very little away with us except that the drier one of the

two, who was also unfortunately deaf, threw himself into a

rhapsodical attitude with his middle finger against his cheek, and

his eyes upturned to heaven, but to make sure that his finger

should stick to his cheek he just wetted the end of it against his

tongue first. He did this with unruffled gravity, and as if it

were the only thing to do under the circumstances.

The young lady who was with us all the time enjoyed everything just

as much as we did; once, indeed, she thought they were going a

little too far--not as among themselves--but considering that there

were a couple of earnest-minded Englishmen with them: the pair had

begun a short performance which certainly did look as if it might

develop into something a little hazardous. "Minga far tutto," she

exclaimed rather promptly--"Don't do all." So what the rest would

have been we shall never know.

Then we came to some precipices, whereon it at once occurred to the

two comedians that they would commit suicide. The pathetic way in

which they shared the contents of their pockets among us, and came

back more than once to give little additional parting messages

which occurred to them just as they were about to take the fatal

plunge, was irresistibly comic, and was the more remarkable for the

spontaneousness of the whole thing and the admirable way in which

the pair played into one another's hands. The deaf one even played

his deafness, making it worse than it was so as to heighten the

comedy. By and by we came to a stile which they pretended to have

a delicacy in crossing, but the lady helped them over. We

concluded that if these young men were average specimens of the

Italian student--and I should say they were--the Italian character

has an enormous fund of pure love of fun--not of mischievous fun,

but of the very best kind of playful humour, such as I have never

seen elsewhere except among Englishmen.

Several times we stopped and had a bottle of wine at one place or

another, till at last we came to a beautiful shady place looking

down towards the lake of Lugano where we were to rest for half-an-

hour or so. There was a cantina here, so of course we had more

wine. In that air, and with the walk and incessant state of

laughter in which we were being kept, we might drink ad libitum,

and the lady did not refuse a second small bicchiere. On this our

deaf friend assumed an anxious, fatherly air. He said nothing, but

put his eyeglass in his eye, and looked first at the lady's glass

and then at the lady with an expression at once kind, pitying, and

pained; he looked backwards and forwards from the glass to the lady

more than once, and then made as though he were going to quit a

scene in which it was plain he could be of no further use, throwing

up his hands and eyes like the old steward in Hogarth's "Marriage a

la mode." They never seemed to tire, and every fresh incident at

once suggested its appropriate treatment. Jones asked them whether

they thought they could mimic me. "Oh dear, yes," was the answer;

"we have mimicked him hundreds of times," and they at once began.

At last we reached Professor Vela's own cantina, and here we were

to have our final bottle. There were several other cantine hard

by, and other parties that had come like ourselves to take a walk

and get some wine. The people bring their evening meal with them

up to the cantina and then sit on the wall outside, or go to a

rough table and eat it. Instead, in fact, of bringing their wine

to their dinner, they take their dinner to their wine. There was

one very fat old gentleman who had got the corner of the wall to

sit on, and was smoking a cigar with his coat off. He comes, I am

told, every day at about three during the summer months, and sits

on the wall till seven, when he goes home to bed, rising at about

four o'clock next morning. He seemed exceedingly good-tempered and

happy. Another family who owned a cantina adjoining Professor

Vela's, had brought their evening meal with them, and insisted on

giving us a quantity of excellent river cray-fish which looked like

little lobsters. I may be wrong, but I thought this family looked

at us once or twice as though they thought we were seeing a little

more of the Italians absolutely chez eux than strangers ought to be

allowed to see. We can only say we liked all we saw so much that

we would fain see it again, and were left with the impression that

we were among the nicest and most loveable people in the world.

I have said that the cantine are the cellars where the people keep

their wine. They are caves hollowed out into the side of the

mountain, and it is only certain localities that are suitable for

the purpose. The cantine, therefore, of any village will be all

together. The cantine of Mendrisio, for example, can be seen from

the railroad, all in a row, a little before one gets into the town;

they form a place of reunion where the village or town unites to

unbend itself on feste or after business hours. I do not know

exactly how they manage it, but from the innermost chamber of each

cantina they run a small gallery as far as they can into the

mountain, and from this gallery, which may be a foot square, there

issues a strong current of what, in summer, is icy cold air, while

in winter it feels quite warm. I could understand the equableness

of the temperature of the mountain at some yards from the surface

of the ground, causing the cantina to feel cool in summer and warm

in winter, but I was not prepared for the strength and iciness of

the cold current that came from the gallery. I had not been in the

innermost cantina two minutes before I felt thoroughly chilled and

in want of a greatcoat.

Having been shown the cantine, we took some of the little cups

which are kept inside and began to drink. These little cups are

common crockery, but at the bottom there is written, Viva Bacco,

Viva l'Italia, Viva la Gioia, Viva Venere, or other such matter;

they are to be had in every crockery shop throughout the

Mendrisiotto, and are very pretty. We drank out of them, and ate

the cray-fish which had been given us. Then seeing that it was

getting late, we returned together to Besazio, and there parted,

they descending to Ligornetto and we to Mendrisio, after a day

which I should be glad to think would be as long and pleasantly

remembered by our Italian friends as it will assuredly be by

ourselves.

The excursions in the neighbourhood of Mendrisio are endless. The

walk, for example, to S. Agata and thence to Meride is exquisite.

S. Agata itself is perfect, and commands a splendid view. Then

there is the little chapel of S. Nicolao on a ledge of the red

precipice. The walk to this by the village of Sommazzo is as good

as anything can be, and the quiet terrace leading to the church

door will not be forgotten by those who have seen it. Sommazzo

itself from the other side of the valley comes as on p. 247. There

is Cragno, again, on the Monte Generoso, or Riva with its series of

pictures in tempera by the brothers Giulio Cesare and Camillo

Procaccini, men who, had they lived before the days of academics,

might have done as well as any, except the few whom no academy can

mould, but who, as it was, were carried away by fluency and

facility. It is useless, however, to specify. There is not one of

the many villages which can be seen from any rising ground in the

neighbourhood, but what contains something that is picturesque and

interesting, while the coup d'oeil, as a whole, is always equally

striking, whether one is on the plain and looks towards the

mountains, or looks from the mountains to the plains.

CHAPTER XXII--Sacro Monte, Varese

From Mendrisio we took a trap across the country to Varese, passing

through Stabbio, where there are some baths that are much

frequented by Italians in the summer. The road is a pleasant one,

but does not go through any specially remarkable places.

Travellers taking this road had better leave every cigarette behind

them on which they do not want to pay duty, as the custom-house

official at the frontier takes a strict view of what is due to his

employers. I had, perhaps, a couple of ounces of tobacco in my

pouch, but was made to pay duty on it, and the searching of our

small amount of luggage was little less than inquisitorial.

From Varese we went without stopping to the Sacro Monte, four or

five miles beyond, and several hundred feet higher than the town

itself. Close to the first chapel, and just below the arch through

which the more sacred part of the mountain is entered upon, there

is an excellent hotel called the Hotel Riposo, kept by Signor

Piotti; it is very comfortable, and not at all too hot even in the

dog-days; it commands magnificent views, and makes very good

headquarters.

Here we rested and watched the pilgrims going up and down. They

seemed very good-humoured and merry. Then we looked through the

grating of the first chapel inside the arch, and found it to

contain a representation of the Annunciation. The Virgin had a

real washing-stand, with a basin and jug, and a piece of real soap.

Her slippers were disposed neatly under the bed, so also were her

shoes, and, if I remember rightly, there was everything else that

Messrs. Heal & Co. would send for the furnishing of a lady's

bedroom.

I have already said perhaps too much about the realism of these

groups of painted statuary, but will venture a word or two more

which may help the reader to understand the matter better as it

appears to Catholics themselves. The object is to bring the scene

as vividly as possible before people who have not had the

opportunity of being able to realise it to themselves through

travel or general cultivation of the imaginative faculties. How

can an Italian peasant realise to himself the notion of the

Annunciation so well as by seeing such a chapel as that at Varese?

Common sense says, either tell the peasant nothing about the

Annunciation, or put every facility in his way by the help of which

he will be able to conceive the idea with some definiteness.

We stuff the dead bodies of birds and animals which we think it

worth while to put into our museums. We put them in the most life-

like attitudes we can, with bits of grass and bush, and painted

landscape behind them: by doing this we give people who have never

seen the actual animals, a more vivid idea concerning them than we

know how to give by any other means. We have not room in the

British Museum to give a loose rein to realism in the matter of

accessories, but each bird or animal in the collection is so

stuffed as to make it look as much alive as the stuffer can make

it--even to the insertion of glass eyes. We think it well that our

people should have an opportunity of realising these birds and

beasts to themselves, but we are shocked at the notion of giving

them a similar aid to the realisation of events which, as we say,

concern them more nearly than any others, in the history of the

world. A stuffed rabbit or blackbird is a good thing. A stuffed

Charge of Balaclava again is quite legitimate; but a stuffed

Nativity is, according to Protestant notions, offensive.

Over and above the desire to help the masses to realise the events

in Christ's life more vividly, something is doubtless due to the

wish to attract people by giving them what they like. This is both

natural and legitimate. Our own rectors find the prettiest psalm

and hymn tunes they can for the use of their congregations, and

take much pains generally to beautify their churches. Why should

not the Church of Rome make herself attractive also? If she knows

better how to do this than Protestant churches do, small blame to

her for that. For the people delight in these graven images.

Listen to the hushed "oh bel!" which falls from them as they peep

through grating after grating; and the more tawdry a chapel is, the

better, as a general rule, they are contented. They like them as

our own people like Madame Tussaud's. Granted that they come to

worship the images; they do; they hardly attempt to conceal it.

The writer of the authorised handbook to the Sacro Monte at

Locarno, for example, speaks of "the solemn coronation of the image

that is there revered"--"la solenne coronazione del simulacro ivi

venerato" (p. 7). But how, pray, can we avoid worshipping images?

or loving images? The actual living form of Christ on earth was

still not Christ, it was but the image under which His disciples

saw Him; nor can we see more of any of those we love than a certain

more versatile and warmer presentment of them than an artist can

counterfeit. The ultimate "them" we see not.

How far these chapels have done all that their founders expected of

them is another matter. They have undoubtedly strengthened the

hands of the Church in their immediate neighbourhood, and they have

given an incalculable amount of pleasure, but I think that in the

Middle Ages people expected of art more than art can do. They

hoped a fine work of art would exercise a deep and permanent effect

upon the lives of those who lived near it. Doubtless it does have

some effect--enough to make it worth while to encourage such works,

but nevertheless the effect is, I imagine, very transient. The

only thing that can produce a deep and permanently good influence

upon a man's character is to have been begotten of good ancestors

for many generations--or at any rate to have reverted to a good

ancestor--and to live among nice people.

The chapels themselves at Varese, apart from their contents, are

very beautiful. They come as fresh one after the other as a set of

variations by Handel. Each one of them is a little architectural

gem, while the figures they contain are sometimes very good, though

on the whole not equal to those at Varallo. The subjects are the

mysteries of joy, namely, the Annunciation (immediately after the

first great arch is passed), the Salutation of Mary by Elizabeth,

the Nativity, the Presentation, and the Disputing with the Doctors.

Then there is a second arch, after which come the mysteries of

grief--the Agony in the Garden, the Flagellation, the Crowning with

Thorns, the Ascent to Calvary, and the Crucifixion. Passing

through a third arch, we come to the mysteries of glory--the

Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and the

Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The Dispute in the Temple is the

chapel which left the deepest impression upon us. Here the various

attitudes and expressions of the doctors are admirably rendered.

There is one man, I think he must have been a broad churchman and

have taken in the "Spectator"; his arms are folded, and he is

smiling a little, with his head on one side. He is not prepared,

he seems to say, to deny that there is a certain element of truth

in what this young person has been saying, but it is very shallow,

and in all essential points has been refuted over and over again;

he has seen these things come and go so often, &c. But all the

doctors are good. The Christ is weak, and so are the Joseph and

Mary in the background; in fact, throughout the whole series of

chapels the wicked or worldly and indifferent people are well done,

while the saints are a feeble folk: the sculptor evidently neither

understood them nor liked them, and could never get beyond

silliness; but the artist who has lately done them up has made them

still weaker and sillier by giving them all pink noses.

Shortly after the sixth chapel has been passed the road turns a

corner, and the town on the hill (see preceding page) comes into

full view. This is a singularly beautiful spot. The chapels are

worth coming a long way to see, but this view of the town is better

still: we generally like any building that is on the top of a

hill; it is an instinct in our nature to do so; it is a remnant of

the same instinct which makes sheep like to camp at the top of a

hill; it gives a remote sense of security and vantage-ground

against an enemy. The Italians seem hardly able to look at a high

place without longing to put something on the top of it, and they

have seldom done so with better effect than in the case of the

Sacro Monte at Varese. From the moment of its bursting upon one on

turning the corner near the seventh, or Flagellation chapel, one

cannot keep one's eyes off it, and one fancies, as with S. Michele,

that it comes better and better with every step one takes; near the

top it composes, as on p. 254, but without colour nothing can give

an adequate notion of its extreme beauty. Once at the top the

interest centres in the higgledy-pigglediness of the houses, the

gay colours of the booths where strings of beads and other

religious knick-knacks are sold, the glorious panorama, and in the

inn where one can dine very well, and I should imagine find good

sleeping accommodation. The view from the balcony outside the

dining-room is wonderful, and above is a sketch from the terrace

just in front of the church.

There is here no single building comparable to the sanctuary of

Sammichele, nor is there any trace of that beautiful Lombard work

which makes so much impression upon one in the church on the Monte

Pirchiriano; the architecture is late, and barocco, not to say

rococo, reigns everywhere; nevertheless the effect of the church is

good. The visitor should get the sacristan to show him a very fine

pagliotto or altar cloth of raised embroidery, worked in the

thirteenth century. He will also do well to walk some little

distance behind the town on the way to S. Maria dei fiori (St. Mary

of the flowers) and look down upon the town and Lombardy. I do not

think he need go much higher than this, unless he has a fancy for

climbing.

The Sacro Monte is a kind of ecclesiastical Rosherville Gardens,

eminently the place to spend a happy day. We happened by good luck

to be there during one of the great feste of the year, and saw I am

afraid to say how many thousands of pilgrims go up and down. They

were admirably behaved, and not one of them tipsy. There was an

old English gentleman at the Hotel Riposo who told us that there

had been another such festa not many weeks previously, and that he

had seen one drunken man there--an Englishman--who kept abusing all

he saw and crying out, "Manchester's the place for me."

The processions were best at the last part of the ascent; there

were pilgrims, all decked out with coloured feathers, and priests

and banners and music and crimson and gold and white and glittering

brass against the cloudless blue sky. The old priest sat at his

open window to receive the offerings of the devout as they passed;

but he did not seem to get more than a few bambini modelled in wax.

Perhaps he was used to it. And the band played the barocco music

on the barocco little piazza and we were all barocco together. It

was as though the clergyman at Ladywell had given out that, instead

of having service usual, the congregation would go in procession to

the Crystal Palace with all their traps, and that the band had been

practising "Wait till the clouds roll by" for some time, and on

Sunday as a great treat they should have it.

The Pope has issued an order saying he will not have masses written

like operas. It is no use. The Pope can do much, but he will not

be able to get contrapuntal music into Varese. He will not be able

to get anything more solemn than "La Fille de Madame Angot" into

Varese. As for fugues -! I would as soon take an English bishop

to the Surrey pantomime as to the Sacro Monte on a festa.

Then the pilgrims went into the shadow of a great rock behind the

sanctuary, spread themselves out over the grass and dined.

CHAPTER XXIII--Angera and Arona

From the Hotel Riposo we drove to Angera, on the Lago Maggiore.

There are many interesting things to see on the way. Close to

Velate, for example, there is the magnificent bit of ruin which is

so striking a feature as seen from the Sacro Monte. A little

further on, at Luinate, there is a fine old Lombard campanile and

some conventual buildings which are worth sparing five minutes or

so to see. The views hereabouts over the lake of Varese and

towards Monte Rosa are exceedingly fine. The driver should be told

to go a mile or so out of his direct route in order to pass

Oltrona, near Voltrone. Here there was a monastery which must once

have been an important one. Little of old work remains, except a

very beautiful cloister of the thirteenth or fourteenth century,

which should not be missed. It measures about twenty-one paces

each way: the north side has round arches made of brick, the

arches are supported by small columns about six inches through,

each of which has a different capital; the middle is now garden

ground. A few miles nearer Angera there is Brebbia, the church of

which is an excellent specimen of early Lombard work. We thought

we saw the traditions of Cyclopean masonry in the occasional

irregularity of the string-courses. The stones near the bottom of

the wall are very massive, and the west wall is not, if I remember

rightly, bonded into the north and south walls, but these walls are

only built up against it as at Giornico. The door on the south

side is simple, but remarkably beautiful. It looks almost as if it

might belong to some early Norman church in England, and the stones

have acquired a most exquisite warm colour with age. At Ispra

there is a campanile which Mr. Ruskin would probably disapprove of,

but which we thought lovely. A few kilometres further on a corner

is turned, and the splendid castle of Angera is caught sight of.

Before going up to the castle we stayed at the inn on the left

immediately on entering the town, to dine. They gave us a very

good dinner, and the garden was a delightful place to dine in.

There is a kind of red champagne made hereabouts which is very

good; the figs were ripe, and we could gather them for ourselves

and eat ad libitum. There were two tame sparrows hopping

continually about us; they pretended to make a little fuss about

allowing themselves to be caught, but they evidently did not mind

it. I dropped a bit of bread and was stooping to pick it up; one

of them on seeing me move made for it and carried it off at once;

the action was exactly that of one who was saying, "I don't

particularly want it myself, but I'm not going to let you have it."

Presently some cacciatori came with a poodle-dog. They explained

to us that though the poodle was "a truly hunting dog," he would

not touch the sparrows, which to do him justice he did not. There

was a tame jay also, like the sparrows going about loose, but, like

them, aware when he was well off.

After dinner we went up to the castle, which I have now visited off

and on for many years, and like always better and better each time

I go there. I know no place comparable to it in its own way. I

know no place so pathetic, and yet so impressive, in its decay. It

is not a ruin--all ruins are frauds--it is only decayed. It is a

kind of Stokesay or Ightham Mote, better preserved than the first,

and less furnished than the second, but on a grander scale than

either, and set in incomparably finer surroundings. The path

towards it passes the church, which has been spoiled. Outside this

there are parts of old Roman columns from some temple, stuck in the

ground; inside are two statues called St. Peter and St. Paul, but

evidently effigies of some magistrates in the Roman times. If the

traveller likes to continue the road past the church for three-

quarters of a mile or so, he will get a fine view of the castle,

and if he goes up to the little chapel of S. Quirico on the top of

the hill on his right hand, he will look down upon it and upon

Arona. We will suppose, however, that he goes straight for the

castle itself; every moment as he approaches it, it will seem finer

and finer; presently he will turn into a vineyard on his left, and

at once begin to climb.

Passing under the old gateway--with its portcullis still ready to

be dropped, if need be, and with the iron plates that sheathe it

pierced with bullets--as at S. Michele, the visitor enters at once

upon a terrace from which the two foregoing illustrations were

taken. I know nothing like this terrace. On a summer's afternoon

and evening it is fully shaded, the sun being behind the castle.

The lake and town below are still in sunlight. This, I think, is

about the best time to see the castle--say from six to eight on a

July evening, or at any hour on a gray day.

Count Borromeo, to whom the castle belongs, allows it to be shown,

and visitors are numerous. There is very little furniture inside

the rooms, and the little there is is decaying; the walls are

covered with pictures, mostly copies, and none of them of any great

merit, but the rooms themselves are lovely. Here is a sketch of

the one in which San Carlo Borromeo was born, but the one on the

floor beneath is better still. The whole of this part was built

about the year 1350, and inside, where the weather has not reached,

the stones are as sharp as if they had been cut yesterday. It was

in the great Sala of this castle that the rising against the

Austrians in 1848 was planned; then there is the Sala di Giustizia,

a fine room, with the remains of frescoes; the roof and the tower

should also certainly be visited. All is solid and real, yet it is

like an Italian opera in actual life. Lastly, there is the

kitchen, where the wheel still remains in which a turnspit dog used

to be put to turn it and roast the meat; but this room is not shown

to strangers.

The inner court of the castle is as beautiful as the outer one.

Through the open door one catches glimpses of the terrace, and of

the lake beyond it. I know Ightham, Hever, and Stokesay, both

inside and out, and I know the outside of Leeds; these are all of

them exquisitely beautiful, but neither they nor any other such

place that I have ever seen please me as much as the castle of

Angera.

We stayed talking to my old friend Signor Signorelli, the custode

of the castle, and his family, and sketching upon the terrace until

Tonio came to tell us that his boat was at the quay waiting for us.

Tonio is now about fourteen years old, but was only four when I

first had the pleasure of making his acquaintance. He is son to

Giovanni, or as he is more commonly called, Giovannino, a boatman

of Arona. The boy is deservedly a great favourite, and is now a

padrone with a boat of his own, from which he can get a good

living.

He pulled us across the warm and sleepy lake, so far the most

beautiful of all even the Italian lakes; as we neared Arona, and

the wall that runs along the lake became more plain, I could not

help thinking of what Giovanni had told me about it some years

before, when Tonio was lying curled up, a little mite of an object,

in the bottom of the boat. He was extolling a certain family of

peasants who live near the castle of Angera, as being models of

everything a family ought to be. "There," he said, "the children

do not speak at meal-times, the polenta is put upon the table, and

each takes exactly what is given him, even though one of the

children thinks another has got a larger helping than he has, he

will eat his piece in silence. My children are not like that; if

Marietta thinks Irene has a bigger piece than she has, she will

leave the room and go to the wall."

"What," I asked, "does she go to the wall for?"

"Oh! to cry; all the children go to the wall to cry."

I thought of Hezekiah. The wall is the crying place, playing,

lounging place, and a great deal more, of all the houses in its

vicinity. It is the common drawing-room during the summer months;

if the weather is too sultry, a boatman will leave his bed and

finish the night on his back upon its broad coping; we who live in

a colder climate can hardly understand how great a blank in the

existence of these people the destruction of the wall would be.

We soon reached Arona, and in a few minutes were in that kind and

hospitable house the Hotel d'Italia, than which no better hotel is

to be found in Italy.

Arona is cooler than Angera. The proverb says, "He who would know

the pains of the infernal regions, could go to Angera in the summer

and to Arona in the winter." The neighbourhood is exquisite.

Unless during the extreme heat of summer, it is the best place to

stay at on the Lago Maggiore. The Monte Motterone is within the

compass of a single day's excursion; there is Orta, also, and

Varallo easily accessible, and any number of drives and nearer

excursions whether by boat or carriage.

One day we made Tonio take us to Castelletto near Sesto Calende, to

hear the bells. They ring the bells very beautifully at Vogogna,

but, unless my recollection of a good many years ago fails me, at

Castelletto they ring them better still.

At Vogogna, while we were getting our breakfast, we heard the bells

strike up as follows, from a campanile on the side of the hill:-

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

They did this because a baby had just died, but we were told it was

nothing to what they would have done if it had been a grown-up

person.

At Castelletto we were disappointed; the bells did not ring that

morning; we hinted at the possibility of paying a small fee to the

ringer and getting him to ring them, but were told that "la gente"

would not at all approve of this, and so I was unable to take down

the chimes at Castelletto as I had intended to do. I may say that

I had a visit from some Italian friends a few years ago, and found

them hardly less delighted with our English mode of ringing than I

had been with theirs. It would be very nice if we could ring our

bells sometimes in the English and sometimes in the Italian way.

When I say the Italian way--I should say that the custom of

ringing, as above described, is not a common one--I have only heard

it at Vogogna and Castelletto, though doubtless it prevails

elsewhere.

We were told that the people take a good deal of pride in their

bells, and that one village will be jealous of another, and

consider itself more or less insulted if the bells of that other

can be heard more plainly than its own can be heard back again.

There are two villages in the Brianza called Balzano and Cremella;

the dispute between these grew so hot that each of them changed

their bells three times, so as to try and be heard the loudest. I

believe an honourable compromise was in the end arrived at.

In other respects Castelletto is a quiet, sleepy little place. The

Ticino flows through it just after leaving the lake. It is very

wide here, and when flooded must carry down an enormous quantity of

water. Barges go down it at all times, but the river is difficult

of navigation and requires skilful pilots. These pilots are well

paid, and Tonio seemed to have a great respect for them. The views

of Monte Rosa are superb.

One of the great advantages of Arona, as of Mendrisio, is that it

commands such a number of other places. There is rail to Milan,

and again to Novara, and each station on the way is a sub-centre;

there are also the steamers on the lake, and there is not a village

at which they stop which will not repay examination, and which is

not in its turn a sub-centre. In England I have found by

experience that there is nothing for it but to examine every

village and town within easy railway distance; no books are of much

use: one never knows that something good is not going to be sprung

upon one, and few indeed are the places where there is no old

public-house, or overhanging cottage, or farmhouse and barn, or bit

of De Hooghe-like entry which, if one had two or three lives, one

would not willingly leave unpainted. It is just the same in North

Italy; there is not a village which can be passed over with a light

heart.

CHAPTER XXIV--Locarno

We were attracted to Locarno by the approaching fetes in honour of

the fourth centenary of the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Fra

Bartolomeo da Ivrea, who founded the sanctuary in consequence.

The programme announced that the festivities would begin on,

Saturday, at 3.30 P.M., with the carrying of the sacred image

(sacro simulacro) of the Virgin from the Madonna del Sasso to the

collegiate church of S. Antonio. There would then be a benediction

and celebration of the holy communion. At eight o'clock there were

to be illuminations, fireworks, balloons, &c., at the sanctuary and

the adjacent premises.

On Sunday at half-past nine there was to be mass at the church of

S. Antonio, with a homily by Monsignor Paolo Angelo Ballerini,

Patriarch of Alexandria in partibus, and blessing of the crown sent

by Pope Leo XIII for the occasion. S. Antonio is the church the

roof of which fell in during service one Sunday in 1865, through

the weight of the snow, killing sixty people. At half-past three a

grand procession would convey the Holy Image to a pretty temple

which had been erected in the market-place. The image was then to

be crowned by the Patriarch, carried round the town in procession,

and returned to the church of S. Antonio. At eight o'clock there

were to be fireworks near the port; a grand illumination of a

triumphal arch, an illumination of the sanctuary and chapels with

Bengal lights, and an artificial apparition of the Madonna

(Apparizione artificiale della Beata Vergine col Bambino) above the

church upon the Sacro Monte. Next day the Holy Image was to be

carried back from the church of S. Antonio to its normal resting-

place at the sanctuary. We wanted to see all this, but it was the

artificial apparition of the Madonna that most attracted us.

Locarno is, as every one knows, a beautiful town. Both the Hotel

Locarno and the Hotel della Corona are good, but the latter is, I

believe, the cheaper. At the castello there is a fresco of the

Madonna, ascribed, I should think rightly, to Bernardino Luini, and

at the cemetery outside the town there are some old frescoes of the

second half of the fifteenth century, in a ruinous state, but

interesting. If I remember rightly there are several dates on

them, averaging 1475-80. They might easily have been done by the

same man who did the frescoes at Mesocco, but I prefer these last.

The great feature, however, of Locarno is the Sacro Monte which

rises above it. From the wooden bridge which crosses the stream

just before entering upon the sacred precincts, the church and

chapels and road arrange themselves as on p. 269.

On the way up, keeping to the steeper and abrupter route, one

catches sight of the monks' garden--a little paradise with vines,

beehives, onions, lettuces, cabbages, marigolds to colour the

risotto with, and a little plot of great luxuriant tobacco plants.

Amongst the foliage may be now and again seen the burly figure of a

monk with a straw hat on. The best view of the sanctuary from

above is the one which I give on p. 270.

The church itself is not remarkable, but it contains the best

collection of votive pictures that I know in any church, unless the

one at Oropa be excepted; there is also a modern Italian "Return

from the Cross" by Ciseri, which is very much admired, but with

which I have myself no sympathy whatever. It is an Academy

picture.

The cloister looking over the lake is very beautiful. In the

little court down below--which also is of great beauty--there is a

chapel containing a representation of the Last Supper in life-sized

coloured statues as at Varallo, which has a good deal of feeling,

and a fresco (?) behind it which ought to be examined, but the

chapel is so dark that this is easier said than done. There is

also a fresco down below in the chapel where the founder of the

sanctuary is buried which should not be passed over. It is dated

1522, and is Luinesque in character. When I was last there,

however, it was hardly possible to see anything, for everything was

being turned topsy-turvy by the arrangements which were being made

for the approaching fetes. These were very gay and pretty; they

must have cost a great deal of money, and I was told that the

municipality in its collective capacity was thought mean, because

it had refused to contribute more than 100 francs, or 4 pounds

sterling. It does seem rather a small sum certainly.

On the afternoon of Friday the 13th of August the Patriarch

Monsignor Ballerini was to arrive by the three o'clock boat, and

there was a crowd to welcome him. The music of Locarno was on the

quay playing a selection, not from "Madame Angot" itself, but from

something very like it--light, gay, sparkling opera bouffe--to

welcome him. I felt as I had done when I found the matchbox in the

sanctuary bedroom at Graglia: not that I minded it myself, but as

being a little unhappy lest the Bishop might not quite like it.

I do not see how we could welcome a bishop--we will say to a

confirmation--with a band of music at all. Fancy a brass band of

some twenty or thirty ranged round the landing stage at Gravesend

to welcome the Bishop of London, and fancy their playing we will

say "The two Obadiahs," or that horrid song about the swing going a

little bit higher! The Bishop would be very much offended. He

would not go a musical inch beyond the march in "Le Prophete," nor,

willingly, beyond the march in "Athalie." Monsignor Ballerini,

however, never turned a hair; he bowed repeatedly to all round him,

and drove off in a carriage and pair, apparently much pleased with

his reception. We Protestants do not understand, nor take any very

great pains to understand, the Church of Rome. If we did, we

should find it to be in many respects as much in advance of us as

it is behind us in others.

One thing made an impression upon me which haunted me all the time.

On every important space there were advertisements of the

programme, the substance of which I have already given. But

hardly, if at all less noticeable, were two others which rose up

irrepressible upon every prominent space, searching all places with

a subtle penetrative power against which precautions were

powerless. These advertisements were not in Italian but in

English, nevertheless they were neither of them English--but both,

I believe, American. The one was that of the Richmond Gem

cigarette, with the large illustration representing a man in a hat

smoking, so familiar to us here in London. The other was that of

Wheeler & Wilson's sewing machines.

As the Patriarch drove off in the carriage the man in the hat

smoking the Richmond Gem cigarette leered at him, and the woman

working Wheeler & Wilson's sewing machine sewed at him. During the

illuminations the unwonted light threw its glare upon the effigies

of saints and angels, but it illumined also the man in the black

felt hat and the woman with the sewing machine; even during the

artificial apparition of the Virgin Mary herself upon the hill

behind the town, the more they let off fireworks the more clearly

the man in the hat came out upon the walls round the market-place,

and the bland imperturbable woman working at her sewing machine. I

thought to myself that when the man with the hat appeared in the

piazza the Madonna would ere long cease to appear on the hill.

Later on, passing through the town alone, when the people had gone

to rest, I saw many of them lying on the pavement under the arches

fast asleep. A brilliant moon illuminated the market-place; there

was a pleasant sound of falling water from the fountain; the lake

was bathed in splendour, save where it took the reflection of the

mountains--so peaceful and quiet was the night that there was

hardly a rustle in the leaves of the aspens. But whether in

moonlight or in shadow, the busy persistent vibrations that rise in

Anglo-Saxon brains were radiating from every wall, and the man in

the black felt hat and the bland lady with the sewing machine were

there--lying in wait, as a cat over a mouse's hole, to insinuate

themselves into the hearts of the people so soon as they should

wake.

Great numbers came to the festivities. There were special trains

from Biasca and all intermediate stations, and special boats. And

the ugly flat-nosed people came from the Val Verzasca, and the

beautiful people came from the Val Onsernone and the Val Maggia,

and I saw Anna, the curate's housekeeper, from Mesocco, and the old

fresco painter who told me he should like to pay me a visit, and

suggested five o'clock in the morning as the most appropriate and

convenient time. The great procession contained seven or eight

hundred people. From the balcony of the Hotel della Corona I

counted as well as I could and obtained the following result:-

Women 120

Men with white shirts and red capes 85

Men with white shirts and no capes (?)

The music from Intra 30

Men with white shirts and blue capes 25

Men with white shirts and no capes 25

Men with white shirts and green capes 12

Men with white shirts and no capes 36

The music of Locarno 30

Girls in blue, pink, white and yellow,

red, white 50

Choristers 3

Monks 6

Priests 66

Canons 12

His Excellency Paolo Angelo Ballerini,

Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt,

escorted by the firemen, and his

private cortege of about 20 25

Government ushers (?)

The Grand Council, escorted by 22

soldiers and 6 policemen 28

The clergy without orders 30

583

In the evening, there, sure enough, the apparition of the Blessed

Virgin was. The church of the Madonna was unilluminated and all in

darkness, when on a sudden it sprang out into a blaze, and a great

transparency of the Virgin and child was lit up from behind. Then

the people said, "Oh bel!"

I was myself a little disappointed. It was not a good apparition,

and I think the effect would have been better if it had been

carried up by a small balloon into the sky. It might easily have

been arranged so that the light behind the transparency should die

out before the apparition must fall again, and also that the light

inside the transparency should not be reflected upon the balloon

that lifted it; the whole, therefore, would appear to rise from its

own inherent buoyancy. I am confident it would have been arranged

in this way if the thing had been in the hands of the Crystal

Palace people.

There is a fine old basilicate church dedicated to S. Vittore at

the north end of Locarno. It is the mother church of these parts

and dates from the eighth or ninth century. The frescoes inside

the apse were once fine, but have been repainted and spoiled. The

tower is much later, but is impressive. It was begun in 1524 and

left incomplete in 1527, probably owing to the high price of

provisions which is commemorated in the following words written on

a stone at the top of the tower inside

1527

Furm. [fromento--corn] cost lib. 6.

Segale [barley] lib. 5.

Milio [millet] lib. 4.

I suppose these were something like famine prices; at any rate, a

workman wrote this upon the tower and the tower stopped.

CHAPTER XXV--Fusio

We left Locarno by the conveyance which leaves every day at four

o'clock for Bignasco, a ride of about four hours. The Ponte

Brolla, a couple of miles out of Locarno, is remarkable, and the

road is throughout (as a matter of course) good. I sat next an old

priest, an excellent kindly man, who talked freely with me, and

scolded me roundly for being a Protestant more than once.

He seemed much surprised when I discarded reason as the foundation

of our belief. He had made up his mind that all Protestants based

their convictions upon reason, and was not prepared to hear me go

heartily with him in declaring the foundation of any durable system

to lie in faith. When, however, it came to requiring me to have

faith in what seemed good to him and his friends, rather than to me

and mine, we did not agree so well. He then began to shake death

at me; I met him with a reflection that I have never seen in print,

though it is so obvious that it must have occurred to each one of

my readers. I said that every man is an immortal to himself: he

only dies as far as others are concerned; to himself he cannot, by

any conceivable possibility, do so. For how can he know that he is

dead until he IS dead? And when he IS dead, how can he know that

he is dead? If he does, it is an abuse of terms to say that he is

dead. A man can know no more about the end of his life than he did

about the beginning. The most horrible and loathed death still

resolves itself into being badly frightened, and not a little hurt

towards the end of one's life, but it can never come to being

unbearably hurt for long together. Besides, we are at all times,

even during life, dead and dying to by far the greater part of our

past selves. What we call dying is only dying to the balance, or

residuum. This made the priest angry. He folded his arms and

said, "Basta, basta," nor did he speak to me again. It is because

I noticed the effect it produced upon my fellow-passenger that I

introduce it here.

Bignasco is at the confluence of the two main branches of the

Maggia. The greater part of the river comes down from the glacier

of Basodino, which cannot be seen from Bignasco; I know nothing of

this valley beyond having seen the glacier from the top of the pass

between Fusio and Dalpe. The smaller half of the river comes down

from Fusio, the valley of Sambucco, and the lake of Naret. The

accommodation at Bignasco is quite enough for a bachelor; the

people are good, but the inn is homely. From Bignasco the road

ascends rapidly to Peccia, a village which has suffered terribly

from inundations, and from Peccia it ascends more rapidly still--

Fusio being reached in about three hours from Bignasco. There is

an excellent inn at Fusio kept by Signor Dazio, to whose energy the

admirable mountain road from Peccia is mainly due. On the right

just before he crosses the bridge, the traveller will note the

fresco of the Crucifixion, which I have mentioned at page 140.

Fusio is over 4200 feet above the level of the sea. I do not know

wherein its peculiar charm lies, but it is the best of all the

villages of a kindred character that I know. Below is a sketch of

it as it appears from the cemetery.

There is another good view from behind the village; at sunset this

second view becomes remarkably fine. The houses are in deep cool

shadow, but the mountains behind take the evening sun, and are

sometimes of an incredible splendour. It is fine to watch the

shadows creeping up them, and the colour that remains growing

richer and richer until the whole is extinguished; this view,

however, I am unable to give.

I hold Signor Dazio of Fusio so much as one of my most particular

and valued friends, and I have such special affection for Fusio

itself, that the reader must bear in mind that he is reading an

account given by a partial witness. Nevertheless, all private

preferences apart, I think he will find Fusio a hard place to beat.

At the end of June and in July the flowers are at their best, and

they are more varied and beautiful than anywhere else I know. At

the very end of July and the beginning of August the people cut

their hay, and then for a while the glory of the place is gone, but

by the end of August or the beginning of September the grass has

grown long enough to re-cover the slopes with a velvety verdure,

and though the flowers are shorn, yet so they are from other places

also.

There are many walks in the neighbourhood for those who do not mind

mountain paths. The most beautiful of them all is to the valley of

Sambucco, the upper end which is not more than half-an-hour from

Signor Dazio's hotel. For some time one keeps to the path through

the wooded gorge, and with the river foaming far below; in early

morning while this path is in shade, or, again, after sunset, it is

one of the most beautiful of its kind that I know. After a while a

gate is reached, and an open upland valley is entered upon--

evidently an old lake filled up, and neither very broad nor very

long, but grassed all over, and with the river winding through it

like an English brook. This is the valley of Sambucco. There are

two collections of stalle for the cattle, or monti--one at the

nearer end and the other at the farther.

The floor of the valley can hardly be less than 5000 feet above the

sea. I shall never forget the pleasure with which I first came

upon it. I had long wanted an ideal upland valley; as a general

rule high valleys are too narrow, and have little or no level

ground. If they have any at all there often is too much as with

the one where Andermatt and Hospenthal are--which would in some

respects do very well--and too much cultivated, and do not show

their height. An upland valley should first of all be in an

Italian-speaking country; then it should have a smooth, grassy,

perfectly level floor of say neither much more nor less than a

hundred and fifty yards in breadth and half-a-mile in length. A

small river should go babbling through it with occasional smooth

parts, so as to take the reflections of the surrounding mountains.

It should have three or four fine larches or pines scattered about

it here and there, but not more. It should be completely land-

locked, and there should be nothing in the way of human handiwork

save a few chalets, or a small chapel and a bridge, but no tilled

land whatever. Here oven in summer the evening air will be crisp,

and the dew will form as soon as the sun goes off; but the

mountains at one end of it will keep the last rays of the sun. It

is then the valley is at its best, especially if the goats and

cattle are coming together to be milked.

The valley of Sambucco has all this and a great deal more, to say

nothing of the fact that there are excellent trout in it. I have

shown it to friends at different times, and they have all agreed

with me that for a valley neither too high nor too low, nor too big

nor too little, the valley of Sambucco is one of the best that any

of us know of--I mean to look at and enjoy, for I suppose as

regards painting it is hopeless. I think it can be well rendered

by the following piece of music as by anything else:- {33}

[At this point in the book a music score is given]

One day Signor Dazio brought us in a chamois foot. He explained to

us that chamois were now in season, but that even when they were

not, they were sometimes to be had, inasmuch as they occasionally

fell from the rocks and got killed. As we looked at it we could

not help reflecting that, wonderful as the provisions of animal and

vegetable organisms often are, the marvels of adaptation are

sometimes almost exceeded by the feats which an animal will perform

with a very simple and even clumsy instrument if it knows how to

use it. A chamois foot is a smooth and slippery thing, such as no

respectable bootmaker would dream of offering to a mountaineer:

there is not a nail in it, nor even an apology for a nail; the

surefootedness of its owner is an assumption only--a piece of faith

or impudence which fulfils itself. If some other animal were to

induce the chamois to believe that it should at the least have feet

with suckers to them, like a fly, before venturing in such

breakneck places, or if by any means it could get to know how bad a

foot it really has, there would soon be no more chamois. The

chamois continues to exist through its absolute refusal to hear

reason upon the matter. But the whole question is one of extreme

intricacy; all we know is that some animals and plants, like some

men, devote great pains to the perfection of the mechanism with

which they wish to work, while others rather scorn appliances, and

concentrate their attention upon the skilful use of whatever they

happen to have. I think, however, that in the clumsiness of the

chamois foot must lie the explanation of the fact that sometimes

when chamois are out of season, they do nevertheless actually

tumble off the rocks and get killed; being killed, of course it is

only natural that they should sometimes be found, and if found, be

eaten; but they are not good for much.

After a day or two's stay in this delightful place, we left at six

o'clock one brilliant morning in September for Dalpe and Faido,

accompanied by the excellent Signor Guglielmoni as guide. There

are two main passes from Fusio into the Val Leventina--the one by

the Sassello Grande to Nante and Airolo, and the other by the Alpe

di Campolungo to Dalpe. Neither should be attempted by strangers

without a guide, though neither of them presents the smallest

difficulty. There is a third and longer pass by the Lago di Naret

to Bedretto, but I have never been over this. The other two are

both good; on the whole, however, I think I prefer the second.

Signor Guglielmoni led us over the freshest grassy slopes

conceivable--slopes that four or five weeks earlier had been gay

with tiger and Turk's-cap lilies, and the flaunting arnica, and

every flower that likes mountain company. After a three hours'

walk we reached the top of the pass, from whence on the one hand

one can see the Basodino glacier, and on the other the great

Rheinwald glaciers above Olivone. Other small glaciers show in

valleys near Biasca which I know nothing about, and which I imagine

to be almost a terra incognita, except to the inhabitants of such

villages as Malvaglia in the Val Blenio.

When near the top of the pass we heard the whistle of a marmot.

Guglielmoni told us he had a tame one once which was very fond of

him. It slept all the winter, but turned round once a fortnight to

avoid lying too long upon one side. When it woke up from its

winter sleep it no longer recognised him, but bit him savagely

right through the finger; by and by its recollection returned to

it, and it apologised.

From the summit, which is about 7600 feet above the sea, the path

descends over the roughest ground that is to be found on the whole

route. Here there are good specimens of asbestos to be picked up

abundantly, and the rocks are full of garnets; after about six or

seven hundred feet the Alpe di Campolungo is reached, and this

again is an especially favourite place with me. It is an old lake

filled up, surrounded by peaks and precipices where some snow rests

all the year round, and traversed by a stream. Here, just as we

had done lunching, we were joined by a family of knife-grinders,

who were also crossing from the Val Maggia to the Val Leventina.

We had eaten all we had with us except our bread; this Guglielmoni

gave to one of the boys, who seemed as much pleased with it as if

it had been cake. Then after taking a look at the Lago di

Tremorgio, a beautiful lake some hundreds of feet below, we went on

to the Alpe di Cadonighino where our guide left us.

At this point pines begin, and soon the path enters them; after a

while we catch sight of Prato, and eventually come down upon Dalpe.

In another hour and a quarter Faido is reached. The descent to

Faido from the summit of the pass is much greater than the ascent

from Fusio, for Faido is not more than 2300 feet above the sea,

whereas, as I have said, Fusio is over 4200 feet. The descent from

the top of the pass to Faido is about 5300 feet, while to Fusio it

is only 3400. The reader, therefore, will see that he had better

go from Fusio to Faido, and not vice versa, unless he is a good

walker.

From Faido we returned home. We looked at nothing between the top

of the St. Gothard Pass and Boulogne, nor did we again begin to

take any interest in life till we saw the science-ridden, art-

ridden, culture-ridden, afternoon-tea-ridden cliffs of Old England

rise upon the horizon.

APPENDIX A--Wednesbury Cocking (See p. 55)

I know nothing of the date of this remarkable ballad, or the source

from which it comes. I have heard one who should know say, that

when he was a boy at Shrewsbury school it was done into Greek

hexameters, the lines (with a various reading in them):

"The colliers and nailers left work,

And all to old Scroggins' went jogging;"

being translated:

[Greek text]

I have been at some pains to find out more about this translation,

but have failed to do so. The ballad itself is as follows:

At Wednesbury there was a cocking,

A match between Newton and Scroggins;

The colliers and nailers left work,

And all to old Spittle's went jogging.

To see this noble sport,

Many noblemen resorted;

And though they'd but little money,

Yet that little they freely sported.

There was Jeffery and Colborn from Hampton,

And Dusty from Bilston was there;

Flummery he came from Darlaston,

And he was as rude as a bear.

There was old Will from Walsall,

And Smacker from Westbromwich come;

Blind Robin he came from Rowley,

And staggering he went home.

Ralph Moody came hobbling along,

As though he some cripple was mocking,

To join in the blackguard throng,

That met at Wednesbury cocking.

He borrowed a trifle of Doll,

To back old Taverner's grey;

He laid fourpence-halfpenny to fourpence,

He lost and went broken away.

But soon he returned to the pit,

For he'd borrowed a trifle more money,

And ventured another large bet,

Along with blobbermouth Coney.

When Coney demanded his money,

As is usual on all such occasions,

He cried, -- thee, if thee don't hold thy rattle,

I'll pay thee as Paul paid the Ephasians.

The morning's sport being over,

Old Spittle a dinner proclaimed,

Each man he should dine for a groat,

If he grumbled he ought to be --,

For there was plenty of beef,

But Spittle he swore by his troth,

That never a man should dine

Till he ate his noggin of broth.

The beef it was old and tough,

Off a bull that was baited to death,

Barney Hyde got a lump in his throat,

That had like to have stopped his breath,

The company all fell into confusion,

At seeing poor Barney Hyde choke;

So they took him into the kitchen,

And held him over the smoke.

They held him so close to the fire,

He frizzled just like a beef-steak,

They then threw him down on the floor,

Which had like to have broken his neck.

One gave him a kick on the stomach,

Another a kick on the brow,

His wife said, Throw him into the stable,

And he'll be better just now.

Then they all returned to the pit,

And the fighting went forward again;

Six battles were fought on each side,

And the next was to decide the main.

For they were two famous cocks

As ever this country bred,

Scroggins's a dark-winged black,

And Newton's a shift-winged red.

The conflict was hard on both sides,

Till Brassy's black-winged was choked;

The colliers were tarnationly vexed,

And the nailers were sorely provoked.

Peter Stevens he swore a great oath,

That Scroggins had played his cock foul;

Scroggins gave him a kick on the head,

And cried, Yea,--thy soul.

The company then fell in discord,

A bold, bold fight did ensue;

-, -, and bite was the word,

Till the Walsall men all were subdued.

Ralph Moody bit off a man's nose,

And wished that he could have him slain,

So they trampled both cocks to death,

And they made a draw of the main.

The cock-pit was near to the church,

An ornament unto the town;

On one side an old coal pit,

The other well gorsed around.

Peter Hadley peeped through the gorse,

In order to see them fight;

Spittle jobbed out his eye with a fork,

And said, -- thee, it served thee right.

Some people may think this strange,

Who Wednesbury never knew;

But those who have ever been there,

Will not have the least doubt it's true;

For they are as savage by nature,

And guilty of deeds the most shocking;

Jack Baker whacked his own father,

And thus ended Wednesbury cocking.

APPENDIX B--Reforms Instituted at S. Michele in the year 1478 (See

p. 105)

The palmiest days of the sanctuary were during the time that

Rodolfo di Montebello or Mombello was abbot--that is to say,

roughly, between the years 1325-60. "His rectorate," says

Claretta, "was the golden age of the Abbey of La Chiusa, which

reaped the glory acquired by its head in the difficult negotiations

entrusted to him by his princes. But after his death, either lot

or intrigue caused the election to fall upon those who prepared the

ruin of one of the most ancient and illustrious monasteries in

Piedmont." {34}

By the last quarter of the fifteenth century things got so bad that

a commission of inquiry was held under one Giovanni di Varax in the

year 1478. The following extracts from the ordinances then made

may not be unwelcome to the reader. The document from which they

are taken is to be found, pp. 322-336 of Claretta's work. The text

is evidently in many places corrupt or misprinted, and there are

several words which I have looked for in vain in all the

dictionaries--Latin, Italian, and French--in the reading-room of

the British Museum which seemed in the least likely to contain

them. I should say that for this translation, I have availed

myself, in part, of the assistance of a well-known mediaeval

scholar, the Rev. Ponsonby A. Lyons, but he is in no way

responsible for the translation as a whole.

After a preamble, stating the names of the commissioners, with the

objects of the commission and the circumstances under which it had

been called together, the following orders were unanimously agreed

upon, to wit:-

"Firstly, That repairs urgently required to prevent the building

from falling into a ruinous state (as shown by the ocular testimony

of the commissioners, assisted by competent advisers whom they

instructed to survey the fabric), be paid for by a true tithe, to

be rendered by all priors, provosts, and agents directly subject to

the monastery. This tithe is to be placed in the hands of two

merchants to be chosen by the bishop commendatory, and a sum is to

be taken from it for the restoration of the fountain which played

formerly in the monastery. The proctors who collect the tithes are

to be instructed by the abbot and commendatory not to press harshly

upon the contributories by way of expense and labour; and the money

when collected is, as already said, to be placed in the hands of

two suitable merchants, clients of the said monastery, who shall

hold it on trust to pay it for the above-named purposes, as the

reverends the commendatory and chamberlain and treasurer of the

said monastery shall direct. In the absence of one of these three

the order of the other two shall be sufficient.

"Item, it is ordered that the mandes, {35} or customary alms, be

made daily to the value of what would suffice for the support of

four monks.

"Item, that the offices in the gift of the monastery be conferred

by the said reverend the lord commendatory, and that those which

have been hitherto at the personal disposition of the abbot be

reserved for the pleasure of the Apostolic See. Item, that no one

do beg a benefice without reasonable cause and consonancy of

justice. Item, that those who have had books, privileges, or other

documents belonging to the monastery do restore them to the

treasury within three months from the publication of these

presents, under pain of excommunication. Item, that no one

henceforth take privileges or other documents from the monastery

without a deposit of caution money, or taking oath to return the

same within three months, under like pain of excommunication.

Item, that no laymen do enter the treasury of the monastery without

the consent of the prior of cloister, {36} nor without the presence

of those who hold the keys of the treasury, or of three monks, and

that those who hold the keys do not deliver them to laymen. Item,

it is ordered that the places subject to the said monastery be

visited every five years by persons in holy orders, and by

seculars; and that, in like manner, every five years a general

chapter be held, but this period may be extended or shortened for

reasonable cause, and the proctors-general are to be bound in each

chapter to bring their procurations, and at some chapter each monk

is to bring the account of the fines and all other rights

appertaining to his benefice, drawn up by a notary in public form,

and undersigned by him, that they may be kept in the treasury, and

this under pain of suspension. Item, that henceforth neither the

office of prior nor any other benefice be conferred upon laymen.

The lord abbot is in future to be charged with the expense of all

new buildings that are erected within the precincts of the

monastery. He is also to give four pittances or suppers to the

convent during infirmary time, and six pints of wine according to

the custom. {37} Furthermore, he is to keep beds in the monastery

for the use of guests, and other monks shall return these beds to

the chamberlain on the departure of the guests, and it shall be the

chamberlain's business to attend to this matter. Item, delinquent

monks are to be punished within the monastery and not without it.

Item, the monks shall not presume to give an order for more than

two days' board at the expense of the monastery, in the inns at S.

Ambrogio, during each week, and they shall not give orders for

fifteen days unless they have relations on a journey staying with

them, or nobles, or persons above suspicion, and the same be

understood as applying to officials and cloistered persons. {38}

"Item, within twelve months from date the monks are to be at the

expense of building an almshouse in S. Ambrogio, where one or two

of the oldest and most respected among them are to reside, and have

their portions there, and receive those who are in religion. Item,

no monk is to wear his hair longer than two fingers broad. {39}

Item, no hounds are to be kept in the monastery for hunting, nor

any dogs save watch-dogs. Persons in religion who come to the

monastery are to be entertained there for two days, during which

time the cellarer is to give them bread and wine, and the pittancer

{40} pittance.

"Item, women of bad character, and indeed all women, are forbidden

the monk's apartments without the prior's license, except in times

of indulgence, or such as are noble or above suspicion. Not even

are the women from San Pietro, or any suspected women, to be

admitted without the prior's permission.

"The monks are to be careful how they hold converse with suspected

women, and are not to be found in the houses of such persons, or

they will be punished. Item, the epistle and gospel at high mass

are to be said by the monks in church, and in Lent the epistle is

to be said by one monk or sub-deacon.

"Item, two candelabra are to be kept above the altar when mass is

being said, and the lord abbot is to provide the necessary candles.

"Any one absent from morning or evening mass is to be punished by

the prior, if his absence arises from negligence.

"The choir, and the monks residing in the monastery, are to be

provided with books and a convenient breviary {41} . . . according

to ancient custom and statute, nor can those things be sold which

are necessary or useful to the convent.

\* \* \*

"Item, all the religious who are admitted and enter the monastery

and religion, shall bring one alb and one amice, to be delivered

into the hands of the treasurer and preserved by him for the use of

the church.

\* \* \*

"The treasurer is to have the books that are in daily use in the

choir re-bound, and to see that the capes which are unsewn, and all

the ecclesiastical vestments under his care are kept in proper

repair. He is to have the custody of the plate belonging to the

monastery, and to hold a key of the treasury. He is to furnish in

each year an inventory of the property of which he has charge, and

to hand the same over to the lord abbot. He is to make one common

pittance {42} of bread and wine on the day of the feast of St.

Nicholas in December, according to custom; and if it happens to be

found necessary to make a chest to hold charters, &c., the person

whose business it shall be to make this shall be bound to make it.

"As regards the office of almoner, the almoner shall each day give

alms in the monastery to the faithful poor--to wit, barley bread to

the value of twopence current money, and on Holy Thursday he shall

make an alms of threepence {43} to all comers, and shall give them

a plate of beans and a drink of wine. Item, he is to make alms

four times a year--that is to say, on Christmas Day, on

Quinquagesima Sunday, and at the feasts of Pentecost and Easter;

and he is to give to every man a small loaf of barley and a grilled

pork chop, {44} the third of a pound in weight. Item, he shall

make a pittance to the convent on the vigil of St. Martin of bread,

wine, and mincemeat dumplings, {45}--that is to say, for each

person two loaves and two . . . {46} of wine and some leeks,--and

he is to lay out sixty shillings (?) in fish and seasoning, and all

the servants are to have a ration of dumplings; and in the morning

he is to give them a dumpling cooked in oil, and a quarter of a

loaf, and some wine. Item, he shall give another pittance on the

feast of St. James--to wit, a good sheep and some cabbages {47}

with seasoning.

"Item, during infirmary time he must provide four meat suppers and

two pints {48} (?) of wine, and a pittance of mincemeat dumplings

during the rogation days, as do the sacristan and the butler. He

is also to give each monk one bundle of straw in every year, and to

keep a servant who shall bring water from the spring for the

service of the mass and for holy water, and light the fire for the

barber, and wait at table, and do all else that is reasonable and

usual; and the said almoner shall also keep a towel in the church

for drying the hands, and he shall make preparation for the mandes

on Holy Thursday, both in the monastery and in the cloister.

Futhermore, he must keep beds in the hospital of S. Ambrogio, and

keep the said hospital in such condition that Christ's poor may be

received there in orderly and godly fashion; he must also maintain

the chapel of St. Nicholas, and keep the chapel of St. James in a

state of repair, and another part of the building contiguous to the

chapel. Item, it shall devolve upon the chamberlain to pay yearly

to each of the monks of the said monastery of St. Martin who say

mass, except those of them who hold office, the sum of six florins

and six groats, {49} and to the treasurer, precentor, and surveyor,

{50} to each one of them the same sum for their clothing, and to

each of the young monks who do not say mass four florins and six

groats. And in every year he is to do one O {51} for the greater

priorate {52} during Advent. Those who have benefices and who are

resident within the monastery, but whose benefice does not amount

to the value of their clothes, are to receive their clothes

according to the existing custom.

"Item, the pittancer shall give a pittance of cheese and eggs to

each of the monks on every day from the feast of Easter to the

feast of the Holy Cross in September--to wit, three quarters of a

pound of cheese; but when there is a principal processional duplex

feast, each monk is to have a pound of cheese per diem, except on

fast days, when he is to have half a pound only. Also on days when

there is a principal or processional feast, each one of them,

including the hebdomadary, is to have five eggs. Also, from the

feast of Easter to the octave of St. John the Baptist the pittancer

is to serve out old cheese, and new cheese from the octave of St.

John the Baptist to the feast of St. Michael. From the feast of

St. Michael to Quinquagesima the cheese is to be of medium quality.

From the least of the Holy Cross in September until Lent the

pittancer must serve out to each monk three quarters of a pound of

cheese, if it is a feast of twelve lessons, and if it is a feast of

three lessons, whether a week-day or a vigil, the pittancer is to

give each monk but half a pound of cheese. He is also to give all

the monks during Advent nine pounds of wax extra allowance, and it

is not proper that the pittancer should weigh out cheese for any

one on a Friday unless it be a principal processional or duplex

feast, or a principal octave. It is also proper, seeing there is

no fast from the feast of Christmas to the octave of the Epiphany,

that every man should have his three quarters of a pound of cheese

per diem. Also, on Christmas and Easter days the pittancer shall

provide five dumplings per monk per diem, and one plate of sausage

meat, {53} and he shall also give to each of the servants on the

said two days five dumplings for each several day; and the said

pittancer on Christmas Day and on the day of St. John the Baptist

shall make a relish, {54} or seasoning, and give to each monk one

good glass thereof, that is to say, the fourth part of one {55} for

each monk--to wit, on the first, second, and third day of the feast

of the Nativity, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, and the

Purification of the Blessed Virgin; and the pittancer is to put

spice in the said relish, and the cellarer is to provide wine and

honey, and during infirmary time those who are being bled are to

receive no pittance from the pittancer. Further, from the feast of

Easter to that of the Cross of September, there is no fast except

on the prescribed vigils; each monk, therefore, should always have

three quarters of a pound of cheese after celebration on a week-day

until the above-named day. Further, the pittancer is to provide

for three mandes in each week during the whole year, excepting

Lent, and for each mande he is to find three pounds of cheese.

From the feast of St. Michael to that of St. Andrew he is to

provide for an additional mande in each week. Item, he is to pay

the prior of the cloister six florins for his fine {56} . . . and

three florins to the . . . . {57} and he should also give five eggs

per diem to the hebdomadary of the high altar, except in Lent.

Further, he is to give to the woodman, the baker, the keeper of the

church, the servants of the Infirmary, the servant at the

Eleemosynary, and the stableman, to each of them one florin in

every year. Item, any monks who leave the monastery before vespers

when it is not a fast, shall lose one quarter of a pound of cheese

even though they return to the monastery after vespers but if it is

a fast day, they are to lose nothing. Item, the pittancer is to

serve out mashed beans to the servants of the convent during Lent

as well as to those who are in religion, and at this season he is

to provide the prior of the cloister and the hebdomadary with

bruised cicerate; {58} but if any one of the same is hebdomadary,

he is only to receive one portion. If there are two celebrating

high mass at the high altar, each of them is to receive one plate

of the said bruised cicerate.

"As regards the office of cantor, the cantor is to intone the

antiphon 'ad benedictus ad magnificat' at terce, {59} and at all

other services, and he is himself to intone the antiphons or

provide a substitute who can intone them; and he is to intone the

psalms according to custom. Also if there is any cloistered person

who has begun his week of being hebdomadary, and falls into such

sickness that he cannot celebrate the same, the cantor is to say or

celebrate three masses. The cantor is to lead all the monks of the

choir at matins, high mass, vespers, and on all other occasions.

On days when there is a processional duplex feast, he is to write

down the order of the office; that is to say, those who are to say

the invitatory, {60} the lessons, the epistle of the gospel {61}

and those who are to wear copes at high mass and at vespers. The

cantor must sing the processional hymns which are sung on entering

the church, but he is exempt from taking his turn of being

hebdomadary by reason of his intoning the offices; and he is to

write down the names of those who celebrate low masses and of those

who get them said by proxy; and he is to report these last to the

prior that they may be punished. The cantor or his delegate is to

read in the refectory during meal times and during infirmary time,

and he who reads in the refectory is to have a quart [?] of bread,

as also are the two junior monks who wait at table. The cantor is

to instruct the boys in the singing of the office and in morals,

and is to receive their portions of bread, wine and pittance, and

besides all this he is to receive one florin for each of them, and

he is to keep them decently; and the prior is to certify himself

upon this matter, and to see to it that he victuals them properly

and gives them their food.

"The sacristan is to provide all the lights of the church whether

oil or wax, and he is to give out small candles to the hebdomadary,

and to keep the eight lamps that burn both night and day supplied

with oil. He is to keep the lamps in repair and to buy new ones if

the old are broken, and he is to provide the incense. He is to

maintain the covered chapel of St. Nicholas, and the whole church

except the portico of the same; and the lord abbot is to provide

sound timber for doors and other necessaries. He is to keep the

frames {62} of the bells in repair, and also the ropes for the

same, and during Lent he is to provide two pittances of eels to the

value of eighteen groats for each pittance, and one other pittance

of dumplings and seasoning during rogation time, to wit, five

dumplings cooked in oil for each person, and one quart of bread and

wine, and all the house domestics and serving men of the convent

who may be present are to have the same. At this time all the

monks are to have one quarter of a pound of cheese from the

sacristan. And the said sacristan should find the convent two

pittances during infirmary time and two pints {63} of wine, and two

suppers, one of chicken and salt meat, with white chestnuts,

inasmuch as there is only to be just so much chicken as is

sufficient. Item, he is to keep the church clean. Item, he has to

pay to the keeper of the church one measure of barley, and eighteen

groats for his clothes yearly, and every Martinmas he is to pay to

the cantor sixty soldi, and he shall place a {64} . . . or boss

{65} in the choir during Lent. Also he must do one O in Advent and

take charge of all the ornaments of the altars and all the relics.

Also on high days and when there is a procession he is to keep the

paschal candle before the altar, as is customary, but on other days

he shall keep a burning lamp only, and when the candle is burning

the lamp may be extinguished.

\* \* \*

"As touching the office of infirmarer, the infirmarer is to keep

the whole convent fifteen days during infirmary time, to wit, the

one-half of them for fifteen days and the other half for another

fifteen days, except that on the first and last days all the monks

will be in the infirmary. Also when he makes a pittance he is to

give the monks beef and mutton, {66} sufficient in quantity and

quality, and to receive their portions. The prior of the cloister,

cantor, and cellarer may be in the infirmary the whole month. And

the infirmarer is to keep a servant, who shall go and buy meat

three times a week, to wit, on Saturdays, Mondays, and Wednesdays,

but at the expense of the sender, and the said servant shall on the

days following prepare the meat at the expense of the infirmarer;

and he shall salt it and make seasoning as is customary, to wit, on

all high days and days when there is a processional duplex feast,

and on other days. On the feast of St. Michael he shall serve out

a seasoning made of sage and onions; but the said servant shall not

be bound to go and buy meat during Advent, and on Septuagesima and

Quinquagesima Sundays he shall serve out seasoning. Also when the

infirmarer serves out fresh meat, he is to provide fine salt. Also

the said servant is to go and fetch medicine once or oftener when

necessary, at the expense of the sick person, and to visit him. If

the sick person requires it, he can have aid in the payment of his

doctor, and the lord abbot is to pay for the doctor and medicines

of all cloistered persons.

"On the principal octaves the monks are to have seasoning, but

during the main feasts they are to have seasoning upon the first

day only. The infirmarer is not bound to do anything or serve out

anything on days when no flesh is eaten. The cellarer is to do

this, and during the times of the said infirmaries, the servants of

the monastery and convent are to be, as above, on the same footing

as those who are in religion, that is to say, half of them are to

be bled during one fifteen days, and the other half during the

other fifteen days, as is customary.

"Item, touching the office of cellarer, it is ordered that the

cellarer do serve out to the whole convent bread, wine, oil, and

salt; as much of these two last as any one may require reasonably,

and this on all days excepting when the infirmarer serves out

kitchen meats, but even then the cellarer is to serve his rations

to the hebdomadary. Item, he is to make a pittance of dumplings

with seasoning to the convent on the first of the rogation days;

each monk and each servant is to have five dumplings uncooked with

his seasoning, and one cooked with [oil?] and a quart of bread and

wine, and each monk is to have one quarter of a pound of cheese.

Item, upon Holy Thursday he is to give to the convent a pittance of

leeks and fish to the value of sixty soldi, and . . . {67} Item,

another pittance upon the first day of August; and he is to present

the convent with a good sheep and cabbages with seasoning. Item,

in infirmary time he is to provide two pittances, one of fowls and

the other of salt meat and white chestnuts, and he is to give two

pints of wine. Item, in each week he is to give one flagon [?].

{68} Item, the cellarer is to provide napkins and plates at meal

times in the refectory, and he is to find the bread for making

seasoning, and the vinegar for the mustard; and he is to do an O in

Advent, and in Lent he is to provide white chestnuts, and cicerate

all the year. From the feast of St. Luke to the octave of St.

Martin he is to provide fresh chestnuts, to wit, on feasts of

twelve lessons; and on dumpling days he is to find the oil and

flour with which to make the dumplings.

"Item, as to the office of surveyor, it is ordered that the

surveyor do pay the master builder and also the wages of the day

labourers; the lord abbot is to find all the materials requisite

for this purpose. Item, the surveyor is to make good any plank or

post or nail, and he is to repair any hole in the roofs which can

be repaired easily, and any beam or piece of boarding. Touching

the aforesaid materials it is to be understood that the lord abbot

furnish beams, boards, rafters, scantling, tiles, and anything of

this description; {69} the said surveyor is also to renew the roof

of the cloister, chapter, refectory, dormitory, and portico; and

the said surveyor is to do an O in Advent.

"Item, concerning the office of porter. The porter is to be in

charge of the gate night and day, and if he go outside the convent,

he must find a sufficient and trustworthy substitute; on every

feast day he is {70} . . . to lose none of his provender; and to

receive his clothing in spring as though he were a junior monk; and

if he is in holy orders, he is to receive clothing money; and to

have his pro rata portions in all distributions. Item, the said

porter shall enjoy the income derived from S. Michael of Canavesio;

and when a monk is received into the monastery, he shall pay to the

said porter five good sous; and the said porter shall shut the

gates of the convent at sunset, and open them at sunrise."

The rest of the document is little more than a resume of what has

been given, and common form to the effect that nothing in the

foregoing is to override any orders made by the Holy Apostolic See

which may be preserved in the monastery, and that the rights of the

Holy See are to be preserved in all respects intact. If doubts

arise concerning the interpretation of any clause they are to be

settled by the abbot and two of the senior monks.

Footnotes:

{1} Vol. iii. p. 300.

{2} "I know that my Redeemer liveth."--"Messiah."

{3} Suites de Pieces, set i., prelude to No. 8.

{4} Dettingen Te Deum.

{5} In the index that Butler prepared in view of a possible second

edition of Alps and Sanctuaries occurs the following entry under

the heading "Waitee": "All wrong; 'waitee' is 'ohe, ti.'" He was

subsequently compelled to abandon this eminently plausible

etymology, for his friend the Avvocato Negri of Casale-Monferrato

told him that the mysterious "waitee" is actually a word in the

Ticinese dialect, and, if it were written, would appear as

"vuaitee." It means "stop" or "look here," and is used to attract

attention. Butler used to couple this little mistake of his with

another that he made in The Authoress of the Odyssey, when he said,

"Scheria means Jutland--a piece of land jutting out into the sea."

Jutland, on the contrary, means the land of the Jutes, and has no

more to do with jutting than "waitee" has to do with waiting.--R.

A. S.

{6} Treatise on Painting, chap. cccxlix.

{7} See Appendix A.

{8} Curiosities of Literature, Lond. 1866, Routledge & Co., p.

272.

{9} Ivanhoe, chap. xxiii., near the beginning.

{10} Handel's third set of organ concertos, No. 6.

{11} "Storia diplomatica dell' antica abbazia di S. Michele della

Chiusa," by Gaudenzio Claretta. Turin, 1870. Pp. 8, 9.

{12} "Storia diplomatica dell' antica abbazia di S. Michele della

Chiusa," by Gaudenzio Claretta. Turin, 1870. P. 14.

{13} Handel; slow movement in the fifth grand concerto.

{14} For documents relating to the sanctuary, see Appendix B, P.

309.

{15} "Well, my dear sir, I am sorry you do not think as I do, but

in these days we cannot all of us start with the same principles."

{16} "It may be for a hundred, or for five hundred years, or for a

thousand, or even ten thousand, but it will not be eternal; for God

is a strong man--great, generous, and of large heart."

{17} "If a person has not got an appetite . . . "

{18} The waiter's nickname no doubt was Cristo, which was softened

into Cricco for the reason put forward below.--R. A. S.

{19} "Cricco is a rustic appellation, and thus religion is not

offended."

{20} "Religion and the magnificent panorama attract numerous and

merry visitors."

{21} "And the milk [in your coffee] does for you instead of soup."

{22} Butler said of this drawing that it was "the hieroglyph of a

lost soul."--R. A. S.

{23} "Dalle meraviglie finalmente che sono inerenti al simulacro

stesso."--Cenni storico-artistici intorno al santuario di Oropa.

(Prof. Maurizio Marocco. Turin, Milan, 1866, p. 329.)

{24} Marocco, p. 331.

{25} "Questa e la festa popolare di Gragha, e pochi anni addietro

ancora ricordava in miniature le feste popolari delle sacre

campestri del medio evo. Da qualche anno in qua, il costume piu

severo che s' introdusse in questi paesi non meno che in tutti gli

altri del Piemonte, tolse non poco del carattere originale di

questa come di tante altre festivita popolesche, nelle quali

erompeva spontanea da tutti i cuori la diffusive vicendevolezza

degli affetti, e la sincera giovalita dei sentimenti. Cio non

pertanto, malgrado si fatta decadenza la festa della Madonna di

Campra e ancor al presente una di quelle rare adunanze

sentimentali, unica forse nel Biellese, alle quali accorre

volentieri e ritrova pascolo appropriato il cristiano divoto non

meno che il curioso viaggiatore." (Del Santuario di Graglia

notizie istoriche di Giuseppe Muratori. Torino, Stamperia reale,

1848, p. 18.)

{26} Samson Agonistes.

{27} "Venus laughing from the skies."

{28} Jephthah.

{29} I cannot give this cry in musical notation more nearly than

as follows:- [At this point in the book a music score is given]

{30} "Such as ye are, we once were, and such as we are, ye shall

be."

{31} Lugano, 1838.

{32} Butler always regretted that he did not find out about Medea

Colleone's passero solitario in time to introduce it into Alps and

Sanctuaries. Medea was the daughter of Bartolomeo Colleone, the

famous condottiere, whose statue adorns the Campo SS. Giovanni e

Paolo at Venice. Like Catullus's Lesbia, whose immortal passer

Butler felt sure was also a passero solitario, she had the

misfortune to lose her pet. Its little body can still be seen in

the Capella Colleone, up in the old town at Bergamo, lying on a

little cushion on the top of a little column, and behind it there

stands a little weeping willow tree whose leaves, cut out in green

paper, droop over the corpse. In front of the column is the

inscription,--"Passer Medeae Colleonis," and the whole is covered

by a glass shade about eight inches high. Mr. Festing Jones has

kindly allowed me to borrow this note from his "Diary of a Tour

through North Italy to Sicily."--R. A. S.

{33} Handel's third set of organ Concertos, No. 3.

{34} "Storia diplomatica dell' antica abbazia di S. Michele della

Chiusa," by Gaudenzio Claretta. Turin, Civelli & Co. 1870. p.

116.

{35} "Item, ordinaverunt quod fiant mandata seu ellemosinae

consuetae quae sint valloris quatuor prebendarum religiosorum omni

die ut moris est." (Claretta, Storia diplomatica, p. 325.) The

mandatum generally refers to "the washing of one another's feet,"

according to the mandate of Christ during the last supper. In the

Benedictine order, however, with which we are now concerned, alms,

in lieu of the actual washing of feet, are alone intended by the

word.

{36} The prior-claustralis, as distinguished from the prior-major,

was the working head of a monastery, and was supposed never, or

hardly ever, to leave the precincts. He was the vicar-major of the

prior-major. The prior-major was vice-abbot when the abbot was

absent, but he could not exercise the full functions of an abbot.

The abbot, prior-major, and prior-claustralis may be compared

loosely to the master, vice-master, and senior tutor of a large

college.

{37} "Item, quod dominus abbas teneatur dare quatuor pitancias seu

cenas conventui tempore infirmariae, et quatuor sextaria vini ut

consuetum est" (Claretta, Storia diplomatica, p. 326). The

"infirmariae generales" were stated times during which the monks

were to let blood--"Stata nimirum tempora quibus sanguis monachis

minuebatur, seu vena secabatur." (Ducange.) There were five

"minutiones generales" in each year--namely, in September, Advent,

before Lent, after Easter, and after Pentecost. The letting of

blood was to last three days; after the third day the patients were

to return to matins again, and on the fourth they were to receive

absolution. Bleeding was strictly forbidden at any other than

these stated times, unless for grave illness. During the time of

blood-letting the monks stayed in the infirmary, and were provided

with supper by the abbot. During the actual operation the brethren

sat all together after orderly fashion in a single room, amid

silence and singing of psalms.

{38} "Item, quod religiosi non audeant in Sancto Ambrosio

videlicet in hospiciis concedere ultra duos pastos videlicet

officiariis singulis hebdomadis claustrales non de quindecim diebus

nisi forte aliquae personae de eorum parentela transeuntes aut

nobiles aut tales de quibus verisimiliter non habetur suspicio eos

secum morari faciant, et sic intelligatur de officiariis et de

claustralibus" (Claretta, Storia diplomatica, p. 326).

{39} The two fingers are the barber's, who lets one finger, or

two, or three, intervene between the scissors and the head of the

person whose hair he is cutting, according to the length of hair he

wishes to remain.

{40} "Cellelarius teneatur ministrare panem et vinum et

pittanciarius pittanciam" (Claretta, Stor. dip., p. 327).

Pittancia is believed to be a corruption of "pietantia."

"Pietantiae modus et ordo sic conscripti . . . observentur. In

primis videlicet, quod pietantiarius qui pro tempore fuerit omni

anno singulis festivitatibus infra scriptis duo ova in brodio

pipere et croco bene condito omnibus et singulis fratribus . . .

tenebitur ministrare." (Decretum pro Monasterio Dobirluc., A.D.

1374, apud Ducange.) A "pittance" ordinarily was served to two

persons in a single dish, but there need not be a dish necessarily,

for a piece of raw cheese or four eggs would be a pittance. The

pittancer was the official whose business it was to serve out their

pittances to each of the monks. Practically he was the maitre

d'hotel of the establishment.

{41} Here the text seems to be corrupt.

{42} That is to say, he is to serve out rations of bread and wine

to everyone.

{43} "Tres denarios."

{44} "Unam carbonatam porci." I suppose I have translated this

correctly; I cannot find that there is any substance known as

"carbonate of pork."

{45} "Rapiolla" I presume to be a translation of "raviolo," or

"raviuolo," which, as served at San Pietro at the present day, is a

small dumpling containing minced meat and herbs, and either boiled

or baked according to preference.

{46} "Luiroletos." This word is not to be found in any

dictionary: litre (?).

{47} "Caulos cabutos cum salsa" (choux cabotes?)

{48} "Sextaria."

{49} "Grossos."

{50} "Operarius, i.e. Dignitas in Collegiis Canonicorum et

Monasteriis, cui operibus publicis vacare incumbit . . . Latius

interdum patebant operarii munera siquidem ad ipsum spectabat

librorum et ornamentorum provincia." (Ducange.) "Let one priest

and two laymen be elected in every year, who shall be called

operarii of the said Church of St. Lawrence, and shall have the

care of the whole fabric of the church itself . . . but it shall

also pertain to them to receive all the moneys belonging to the

said church, and to be at the charge of all necessary repairs,

whether of the building itself or of the ornaments." (Statuta

Eccl. S. Laur. Rom. apud Ducange.)

{51} O. The seven antiphons which were sung in Advent were called

O's. (Ducange.)

{52} "Pro prioratu majori." I have been unable to understand what

is here intended.

{53} "Carmingier."

{54} "Primmentum vel salsam."

{55} "Biroleti." I have not been able to find the words

"carmingier," "primmentum," and "biroletus" in any dictionary.

"Biroletus" is probably the same as "luiroletus" which we have met

with above, and the word is misprinted in one or both cases.

{56} "Item, priori claustrali pro sua dupla sex florinos."

"Dupla" has the meaning "mulcta" assigned to it in Ducange among

others, none of which seem appropriate here. The translation as

above, however, is not satisfactory.

{57} "Pastamderio." I have been unable to find this word in any

dictionary. The text in this part is evidently full of misprints

and corruptions.

{58} "Ciceratam fractam." This word is not given in any

dictionary. Cicer is a small kind of pea, so cicerata fracta may

perhaps mean something like pease pudding.

{59} Terce. A service of the Roman Church.

{60} "Invitatorium." Ce nom est donne a un verset qui se chante

ou se recite au commencement de l'office de marines. Il varie

selon les fetes et meme les feries. Migne. Encyclopedie

Theologique.

{61} "Epistolam Evangelii." There are probably several misprints

here.

{62} "Monnas." Word not to be found.

{63} "Sextaria."

{64} Word missing in the original.

{65} "Borchiam." Word not to be found. Borchia in Italian is a

kind of ornamental boss.

{66} "Teneatur dare religiosis de carnibus bovinis et montonis

decenter."

{67} "Foannotos." Word not to be found.

{68} "Laganum."

{69} "Enredullas hujusmodi" [et res ullas hujusmodi?].

{70} "In processionibus deferre et de sua prebenda nihil perdat

vestiarium vere suum salvatur eidem sicut uni monacullo."

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