

# **Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol**

## **Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys**

**Edwards, Amelia Ann Blanford**

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Chapter III. Longarone to Cortina

"We shall not meet with many inns so good as this, where we are going," he says, grimly triumphant. "Good night, ladies!" — and with this parting shot, retires.

My bedroom that night measures about thirty-five feet in length by twenty-five in breadth, and is enlivened by five windows and four doors. The windows look out variously upon street, courtyard, and stables. The doors lead to endless suites of empty, shut-up rooms, and all sorts of intricate passages. 'Tis as ghostly, echoing, suicidal a place to sleep in as ever I saw in my life!

## CHAPTER III.

### LONGARONE TO CORTINA.

The Pic Gallina—A communicative Priest—The Timber Trade—The smallest Church in Italy—Castel Lavazzo—Perarolo—A Vision of the Antelao—The Zigzag of Monte Zucco—Tai Cadore—One of the finest Drives in Europe—The Glories of the Ampezzo Thal—The Pelmo—The Rochetta—The Landslip of 1816—The Antelao—The Croda Malcara—Sorapis—We cross the Austrian Frontier—The Bec di Mezzodi—The Tofana—Monte Cristallo—Cortina—Arrival at Ghedina's Inn—"Il Tuckett's" Name proves a Word of Might—A thorough Tyrolean Hostelry—Preparations for the *Sagra*.

LONGARONE, seen at six o'clock on a grey, dull morning, looked no more attractive than at dusk the evening before. There had been thunder and heavy rain in the night, and now the road and footways were full of muddy pools. The writer, however, was up betimes, wandering alone through the wet streets; peeping into the tawdry churches; spelling over the framed and glazed announcements of births, deaths, and marriages at the Prefettura; sketching the Pic Gallina, a solitary conspicuous peak over against the

mouth of the Val Vajont, on the opposite bank of the Piave; and seeking such scattered crumbs of information as might fall in her way.

To sketch, even so early as six A.M., without becoming the nucleus of a crowd, is, of course, impossible; and the crowd this time consisted of school children of all ages, quite as "untameable," and almost as numerous, as the flies of Santa Croce. Presently, however, came by a mild, plump priest in a rusty *soutane*, who chased the truants off to the parish school-house, and himself lingered for a little secular chat by the way.

He had not much to tell; yet he told the little that he knew pleasantly and readily. The parish, he said, numbered about three thousand souls — a pious, industrious folk mainly supported by the timber trade, which is the staple of these parts. This timber, being cut, sold, and branded in the Ampezzo Thal, is floated down the Boita to its point of confluence with the Piave at Perarolo, and thence, carried by the double current, comes along the valley of the Piave and the Val di Mel, to be claimed by its several purchasers along the banks, and caught as it passes by. Thus it is that every village by the way is skirted by saw-mills and timber-yards, and that almost every man is a carpenter. He then went on to tell me that my peak was called the Pic Gallina, or Hen's beak; that there existed a practicable short cut for pedestrians by way of the Val Vajont to Udine and the Trieste railway; that the "gran' Tiziano" was born on the banks of the Piave higher up, at Pieve di Cadore; that the Dolomites were the highest mountains in the world (which I am afraid I pretended to believe);

that the large church in the Piazza was the church of the Concezione; that the little church at the back, dedicated to San Liberale, was the smallest church in Italy (which no doubt was true, seeing that you might put it inside St. Lawrence, Undercliff, and yet leave a passage to walk round); and finally, that Castel Lavazzo, seen from a point about a quarter of a mile farther on, was the most picturesque view in the valley, and the best worth sketching. Having delivered himself of which information, apocryphal and otherwise, he lifted his shovel-hat with quite the air of a man of the world, and bade me good morning.

Of course I went at once in search of the view of Castel Lavazzo, and finding it really characteristic of the Val di Piave, succeeded in sketching it before it was time to return to breakfast.

By nine, we were on the road again, following the narrow gorge that was soon to lead us into the real world of Dolomite. The morning was now alternately bright and showery, and the dark, jagged peaks that closed in the distance were of just that rich, deep, incredible ultra-marine blue that Titian loved and painted so often in his landscape backgrounds.

At Termine, a little timber-working hamlet noisy with saw-mills, about a mile beyond Castel Lavazzo, the defile narrows so suddenly that one gigantic grey and golden crag seems to block the end of the village street. The women here are handsome, and wear folded cloths upon their heads as in the hills near Rome; and the men wear wooden clogs, as at Lugano. A slender waterfall wavers down the face of a cliff on the opposite side of the river. Primitive breakwaters, like huge baskets of rude wicker-work filled with stones,

here stem the force of the torrent brawling through its narrow bed; and some of these have held their place so long that young trees have had time to take root and flourish in them. Next comes Ospitale, another little brown-roofed hamlet perched on a green rise like Castel Lavazzo, with the usual cluster of saw-mills and saw-pits down by the water's edge; and now, entering the commune of Perarolo in a smart shower, we rattle through a succession of tiny villages built in the Swiss way, with wooden balconies, outer stair-cases, and deep projecting eaves. In most of these places, it being now between ten and eleven o'clock A.M., the good people are sitting in their doorways dining primitively out of wooden bowls.

So we go on; and so the Piave, greenish grey in colour, interrupted by a thousand rapids, noisy, eager, headlong, comes ever rushing towards us, and past us, and away to the sea. So, too, the brown and golden pine-trunks come whirling down with the stream. It is curious to watch them in their course. Some come singly, some in crowds. Some blunder along sideways in a stupid, buffeted, bewildered way. Some plunge madly up and down. Some run races. Some get tired, rest awhile under shelter of the bank, and then, with a rouse and a shake, dash back again into the throng. Others creep into little stony shallows, and there go to sleep for days and weeks together; while others, again, push straight ahead, nose first, as if they knew what they were about, and were bent on getting to their journey's end as quickly as possible.

Nearing Perarolo, glimpses of the peaks, aiguilles and snow-fields of Monte Cridola (8,474 feet), the highest point of the Premaggiore range, are now and

then seen to the right, through openings in the lower mountains. Monte Zucco abruptly blocks the end of the gorge. Country carts upon the road, women working in the fields, a party of children scrambling and shouting among the bushes by the wayside, now indicate that we are not far from a more thickly inhabited place than any of the preceding villages. Then the road takes a sudden turn, and Perarolo, with its handsome new church, new stone bridge, public fountain, extensive wood-yards, and general air of solid prosperity, comes into view.

Yet a few yards farther, and a second bridge is crossed—a new valley rich in wood and water opens away to the left—and a wonderful majestic vision, draped in vapours and hooded in clouds, stands suddenly before us!

The coachman, preparing his accustomed *coup de théâtre*, is not allowed to speak. We know at once in what Presence we are. We know at once that yonder vague and shadowy mass which soars beyond our sight and seems to gather up the slopes of the valley as a robe, can be none other than the Antelao.

A grand, but a momentary sight! The coachman, with a jealous glance at the open maps and guide-books that have forestalled his information, whips on his horses, and in another moment valley and mountain are lost in the turn of the road, and we are fast climbing the hill leading to the great zigzag of Monte Zucco. Still we have seen, however imperfectly, the loftiest of all the giants of Cadore; we have seen the mouth of the famous Ampezzo Thal, and we begin to feel that it is not all a dream, but that we are among the Dolomites at last.

And now, for a weary while, partly on foot and partly in the carriage, we toil on and on, up the new road constructed of late years by the Emperor Ferdinand. The Piave, here quite choked by a huge, stationary mass of pine-trunks, winds unheard some hundreds of feet below. Perarolo, the great centre of all this timber trade, dwindles to a toy hamlet in the valley. New peaks rise on the horizon. New valleys glitter in the distance. Still the road climbs—winds among vast slopes of pine-forest—makes the entire circuit of Monte Zucco, and finally, with one long, last pull, reaches the level of the upper plateau.

Here, at Tai Cadore, a tiny village backed by cultivated slopes, we are to take our midday rest. Here, too, we catch our first glimpse of Titian's birth-place, Pieve di Cadore, a small white hamlet nestled in a fold of the hills close under a ruined castle on a wooded knoll, about a mile away. Now Pieve di Cadore was down in our route as a special excursion to be taken hereafter from Cortina in the Ampezzo valley; but our impatience was great, and the sun was shining brilliantly, and our first thought was to employ these two hours' rest in walking there and back, and just seeing (though it were only the outside of it) the house in which the great painter was born.

It was first necessary, however, to take luncheon at Tai; which we did, seated at a bare deal table in an upper room of the clean little inn, beside a window commanding a magnificent view of the Pre-maggiore range. Meanwhile the capricious sky clouded over again; and by the time we should have been ready to start, the rain was coming down so heavily

that Pieve di Cadore was unavoidably left to be seen later on.

A little way beyond Tai Cadore begins one of the finest drives in Europe. The road enters the Ampezzo Thal at an elevation which can scarcely be less than 1250 feet above the foaming Boita; and a close, lofty, richly wooded valley, like a sublimer Val d'Anzasca, opens the way to more rugged scenery beyond. Vast precipices tower above; scattered villages cling to the green slopes half way down; and brilliant passages of light and shadow move rapidly over all. Now one peak is lighted up, and now another. Here a brown roof, wet from the last shower, glistens like silver in the sunshine; there a grassy slope fringed with noble chestnuts glows in a green and golden light; while on yonder opposite height, a dark fir-forest shows blue and purple in angry storm shadow.

At Venas, the overhanging eaves, outer staircases, and balustraded balconies, are wholly Swiss; while inscriptions such as "*Qui si vende Vino d'Asti, Coloniale, ed altri generi,*" remind us that, although close upon the Austrian frontier, we are not yet out of Italy.

And now the valley widens. The Antelao, still obscured by floating mists, again comes into sight—a near mass of clustered pinnacles; then the Pelmo on the opposite side of the valley, uplifted in the likeness of a mighty throne canopied by clouds, and approached by a giant staircase, each step of which is a precipice laden with eternal snow and trodden only by the chamois hunter; next, on the same side as the Pelmo but farther up the valley, appears the Rochetta—a chain of wild confused crags, like a line of broken



battlements, piled high on huge buttresses of sward and pine-forest.

Between the small wayside hamlets of Vodo and Borca, the road is cut through an enormous slope of stony débris, the scene of a bergfall which fell from the Antelao in 1816, and overwhelmed two villages on the opposite bank of the Boita. More sudden, and almost more cruel, than the lava from Vesuvius, it came down, as almost every bergfall comes down, at dead of night, crushing the sleepers in their beds and leaving not a moment for escape.

Two great mounds of shattered limestone, each at least 100 feet in height, mark the site of the lost villages; and, strange to tell, the torrent, instead of being dammed and driven back as at Serravalle, flows on its way unimpeded save by a few Titanic boulders. How so tremendous a fall could have crossed the stream in sufficient volume to bury every house, church and campanile on the other side, and yet have failed to fill up the bed of the intervening torrent, is infinitely mysterious. I inquired then and later whether the stream might not have been temporarily choked, and afterwards cleared by the labour of the other Ampezzan communities; but though all whom I asked seemed to think such a task impossible of fulfilment at any time, none could answer me.

"It happened, Signora, fifty-six years ago," was the invariable answer. "Chi lo sa?"

Was that so long a time? It seemed strange that, after the lapse of little more than half a century, every detail of so terrible a catastrophe should be forgotten in a place where events were necessarily few.

And now, following the great sweep of the road,

we make at least one-third of the circuit of the Antelao, which becomes momentarily grander, and changes its aspect and outline with every turn. The snow on this side finds no resting place, save on a scant ledge here and there; and the mountain consists apparently of innumerable jagged buttresses, huge slopes of shaley *débris*, and an infinitely varied chain of pallid peaks and pinnacles. Some of these are almost white; some of a pale sulphurous yellow streaked with violet; some splashed with a vivid, rusty red, indicating the presence of iron. One keen, splintered *aiguille*, sharp as a lance and curved as a shark's tooth, looked like a scimitar freshly dipped in blood.

Now, at San Vito, the Antelao begins to be left behind, and the long ridge of the Croda Malcora, with its highest peak, Sorapis, standing boldly out against a background of storm-cloud, enters on the scene. A little farther yet, and the Austrian frontier is reached. A striped pole, alternately black and yellow, like a leg of one of the Pope's guard, bestrides the road in front of a dilapidated little custom-house. Here some three or four ragged-looking Austrian soldiers are playing at bowls, while a couple of officers lounging on a bench outside the door, smoke their cigarettes and watch the game. One of these, very tall, very shabby, very dirty, with a glass screwed into his eye and a moustache about eighteen inches in length, saunters up to the carriage door. Being assured, however, that we carry nothing contraband, he lifts his cap with an indescribable air of fashionable languor, and bids the coachman drive on.

From this point, the invisible political line being passed, one observes an immediate change not only

in the costumes, but in the build and features of the people. They are a taller, fairer, finer race. The men wear rude capes of undressed skins. The women (no longer bare-legged, no longer *coiffées* with red and yellow handkerchiefs) wear a kind of Bernese dress consisting of a black petticoat, a black cloth bodice like a tightly fitting waistcoat, white linen undersleeves reaching to the elbow, a large blue apron, and a round felt hat, like a man's.

By this time the Pelmo is out of sight, the Rochetta is left behind, Sorapis is passed, and still new mountains rise against the horizon. To the left—a continuation, indeed, of the Rochetta—the Bec di Mezzodi and the ridge of Beccolungo, stand out like a row of jagged teeth. On a line with these, but at least a mile farther up the valley, the huge bulk of the Tofana looms up in sullen majesty, headed by a magnificent precipice, like a pyramid of red granite. While to the right, Monte Cristallo, a stupendous chevaux de frise of grey and orange pinnacles, forms a grand background to the clustered roofs, lofty campanile, and green pasturages of Cortina.

For at last we are in sight of the place which is to be our head-quarters for the next week, and the wonderful drive is nearly at an end. Already, within the compass of some fifteen English miles (*i. e.*, from Tai to Cortina), we have seen six of the most famous Dolomites, three on the right bank and three on the left of the Boita. Four out of the six exceed 10,500 feet in height; while the Antelao\* is, I believe, dis-

\* The relative altitudes of the Ampezzo Dolomites, as nearly as has yet been ascertained, are as follows:—Antelao, 10,838 feet; Sorapis, 10,798 feet; Tofana, 10,724 feet; Cristallo, 10,644 feet; Pelmo, 10,377 feet; and La Rochetta, 7,793 feet.

tanced by only two of its rivals, namely, the Marmolata and the Cimon della Pala. The new and amazing forms of these colossal mountains; their strange colouring; the mystery of their formation; the singularity of their relative positions, each being so near its neighbour, yet in itself so distinct and isolated; the curious fact that they are all so nearly of one height; their very names, so unlike the names of all other mountains, high-sounding, majestic, like relics of a pre-historic tongue—all these sights and facts in sudden combination confuse the imagination, and leave one bewildered at first by the variety and rapidity with which impression after impression has been charged upon the memory. It was therefore almost with a sense of relief that, weary with wonder and admiration, we found ourselves approaching the end of the day's journey.

And now the road, which has been gradually descending for many miles, enters Cortina at about a hundred feet above the level of the Boita. First comes a scattered house or two—then a glimpse of the old church, the cemetery, and the public shooting-ground, in a hollow down near the river—then a long irregular street of detached homesteads, hostelries, and humble shops—the new campanile, the pride of the village, 250 feet in height—the post-house at the corner of a little piazza containing a public fountain—and finally, being the last house in the place, the Aquila Nera, a big substantial albergo built in true Tyrolean fashion, like a colossal Noah's ark, with rows upon rows of square windows with bright green shutters, and a huge roof with jutting eaves that looks as if it ought to take off like a lid to let out the animals inside.

This, then, is our destination, and here we arrive towards close of day, rattling through the village and dashing up to the door with our driver's usual flourish, just as if the greys, instead of having done thirty-five miles to-day and thirty-four yesterday, were quite fresh, and only now out of the stable. The Ghedinas, a father and two sons, come out, not with much alacrity, to bid us welcome. The writer, however, mentions a name of might—the name of Francis Fox Tuckett; and behold! it acts upon the sullen trio like a talisman. Their good-will breaks forth in a ludicrous medley of Italian and German. How! the Signora is a friend of “Il Tuckett”—of the “gran’ brave Signore” whose achievements are famed throughout all these valleys? Gott im Himmel! shall not the whole house be at her disposal? Ecco! the Aquila Nera will justify the recommendation of “il brave Tuckett!”

Hereupon we alight. The old landlord puts out an enormous brown paw; we shake hands all round; the Kellnerinn is summoned; the best rooms are assigned to us; the cooks (and there seem to be plenty of them in the huge gloomy kitchen) are set to work to prepare supper; a table is laid for us on the landing, which, as we find henceforth, is the place of honour in every inn throughout the Dolomite Tyrol; and all that the Aquila Nera contains is laid under contribution for our benefit.

It is a thorough Tyrolean hostelry, by no means scrupulously clean, yet better provided and more spacious than one would have expected to find even in this, the most important village of the district. The bedrooms are immense, though scantily furnished. A few small mats of wolf and chamois skins are laid

about here and there; but there is not such a thing as a carpet in the house. At the Dépendance, however—a new building on the opposite side of the road, charmingly decorated with external frescoes by one of the younger Ghedinas who is an artist in Vienna—there are smaller rooms to be had, with good iron bedsteads and some few modern comforts. But we knew nothing of this till a day or two after, when we were glad to move into the more quiet house, though at the cost of having always to cross over for meals.

In the way of food, a kind of rough plenty reigns. Luxuries, of course, are out of the question; but of veal, sausage, eggs, cheese, and sauer-kraut there is abundance. Drovers, guides, peasant-farmers and travellers of all grades are eating, drinking, smoking, all day long in the public rooms, of which there are at least four in the lower floors of the big house. The kitchen chimney is smoking, the cooks are cooking, the taps are running "from morn till dewy eve." We, arriving at dewy eve, come in for an all-pervading atmosphere of tobacco and garlic—the accumulated incense of the day's sacrifices.

With all this plenty, however, and all this custom, the wealthiest and most fastidious traveller must fare off the same meats and drinks as the poorest. The only foreign wine that Ghedina keeps in his cellar is a rough Piedmontese vintage called *Vino Barbera*, which costs about two francs the bottle. If you do not like that, you must drink beer; or thin country wine, either red or white; or an inexpressibly nauseous spirit distilled from the root of a small plant nearly resembling the ordinary *Plantago major*, or common English plantain. An inferior kind of Kirschwasser is,

I believe, also to be had; but as for brandy, I doubt if there is one drop to be found in the whole country between Belluno and Bruneck.

For the rest, the inn is well enough, though one feels the want of a mistress in the establishment. Ghedina *père* is a wealthy widower, and his three stalwart sons, all unmarried, live at home and attend, in a grim unwilling way, to the housekeeping and stabling. Their horses, by the way, are first-rate—far too good for rough country work; while in the adjoining outbuildings are to be found a capital landau, a light chaise, some three or four caretini, and—a side saddle! How this article, in itself neither rare nor beautiful, came presently to occupy the foremost place in our affections and desires; how we fought for its possession against all comers; how we begged it, borrowed it, and finally stole it, will be seen hereafter.

Meanwhile, arriving late and tired, we were glad to accept the big rooms in the big house; to put up with the atmosphere; to sup on the landing; to hear the downstairs revellers going away long after we were in bed; and even to be waked by the wild cry of the village watchman at intervals all through the dark hours of the night. It was not, perhaps, quite so agreeable to be aroused next morning at earliest dawn by a legion of carpenters in the street below flinging down loads of heavy planks, driving in posts by the wayside, hammering, shouting, and making noise enough to wake not only the living but the dead. For this, however, as for every discomfort, there was compensation at hand; and our satisfaction was great on being told that the grand yearly Sagro, or church-

festival, would be celebrated a few days hence, and that our noisy friends outside were already beginning to erect booths in preparation for the annual fair which is held at the same time. It is the most important fair in all this part of the Austrian and Italian Tyrol, and is attended by an average concourse of from twelve to fifteen hundred peasants from every hill and valley for nearly thirty miles round about Cortina.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT CORTINA.

Cortina, its Situation, Climate, and Trade—A Messa Cantata—The Village Cemetery—A first Ascent—The Ghedinas and their Art—An unknown Mountain—An Afternoon-stroll—The Antelao—Pleasant Tyrolean Ways—Strolling Acrobats—Dissolution of Partnership between ourselves and the Courier—Difficulties arising therefrom—Santo Siorpaes—The Side-saddle Question again—A Tyrolean "Caretta"—Near View of the Tofana—Amazing Costumes—The Pezzés—Summit of the Tre Sassi Pass—The Marmolata—The "Signora Cuoca."

SITUATED on the left bank of the Boita which here runs nearly due north and south, with the Tre Croce Pass opening away behind the town to the east, and the Tre Sassi Pass widening before it to the west, Cortina lies in a comparatively open space between four great mountains, and is therefore less liable to danger from bergfalls than any other village not only in the Val d'Ampezzo but in the whole adjacent district. For the same reason it is cooler in summer than either Caprile, Agordo, Primiero, or Predazzo; all of which, though more central as stopping places and in many respects more convenient, are yet somewhat too closely hemmed in by surrounding heights.

The climate of Cortina is temperate throughout the