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Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys

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Chapter VI. Auronzo and Val Buona

the time we were despatching our uncomfortable mid-day meal, and was only driven off by help of Giuseppe when we went out again presently to sketch and stroll about the town and the castle hill for another couple of hours, before pursuing our journey to Auronzo.

CHAPTER VI.

AURONZO AND VAL BUONA.

Domegge and Lozzo—The Legend of Monte Cornon—Tre Ponti—The Antiquity of the Piave—The Val d'Auronzo—Native Politeness—Villa Grande and Villa Piccola—"L'Altro Albergo"—An unprepossessing Population—The Marmarole—A deserted Silver Mine—The new Road—Difficulties overcome—Val Buona—The "Cirque" of the Croda Malcora—Bastian the Solitary—The Misurina Alp—A Mountain Tarn—The Tre Croce Pass.

THE view of Cadore upon which one looks back from the bend of the road half a mile out of the town on the way to Calalzo, and again from the Ponte della Molina, about another mile farther on, is one of the finest of its kind in all this part of Tyrol. At the same time, it has in it very little of the Tyrolean element. Pictorially speaking, it is a purely Italian subject, majestic, harmonious, classical; with just sufficient sternness in the mountain forms to give sublimity, but with no outlines abrupt or fantastic enough to disturb the scenic repose of the composition. In the foreground we have the ravine of the Molina spanned by a picturesque old bridge, at the farther end of which a tiny chapel clings to an overhanging ledge of cliff. In the middle distance, seen across an intervening chasm of misty valley, the little far-away town of Cadore glistens on its strange saddle-back ridge,

watched over as of old by its castle on the higher slope above. Farthest of all, rising magnificently against the clear afternoon sky, the fine pyramidal mass of Monte Pera closes in the view. For light and shadow, for composition, for all that goes to make up a landscape in the grand style, the picture is perfect. Nothing is wanting—not even the foreground group to give it life; for here come a couple of bullock trucks across the bridge, as primitive and picturesque as if they had driven straight out of the fifteenth century. It is just such a subject as Poussin might have drawn, and Claude have coloured.

At Domegge, about three and a half miles from Cadore, we come upon a village almost wholly destroyed a few months back by fire. It is now one mass of black and shapeless ruin; but it will not long remain so, for the whole population, men, women, and little children, swarm like bees about a burnt hive, casting away rubbish, carrying loads of stones, mixing mortar, and helping to rebuild their lost homes. New foundations and new walls are already springing up, and by this present time, a second Domegge has doubtless risen on the ashes of the first.

Lozzo, the next village, about two miles farther up the valley, was burnt down in just the same way a year or two ago, and is now most unpicturesquely new, solid, and comfortable. Perhaps to be burnt out is, on the whole, the best fate that can befall the inhabitants of any of these ancient timber-built hamlets; for their dwellings are then replaced by substantial stone-built houses. As it is, what with danger from fire and danger from bergfalls, the smaller Tyrolean "paesi" are by no means safe or pleasant places to

live in, and may stand comparison in point of insecurity with Portici, Torre del Greco, or any others of the Vesuvian villages.

Now the road, which has been very bad all the way from Cadore, slopes gradually down towards the bed of the torrent, passing within sight of Lorenzago to the right, and under the impending precipices of Monte Cornon to the left. Mountain and village has each its legend. Lorenzago, picturesquely perched on one of the lower slopes of Monte Cridola, claims to be the scene of the martyrdom of Saint Florian, a popular Tyrolean saint, whose intercession is supposed to be of especial efficacy in cases of fire; while Monte Cornon is said to derive its name from an incident in the history of Cadore thus related by Mr. Gilbert:—"Along the slopes above this gorge, in the war of 1509, a division of Maximilian's troops was cautiously advancing, when the notes of a horn (corno) broke suddenly from the misty mountain side. It was but a casual herdsman sounding, as is still the custom there at certain seasons, to warn off bears; but supposing themselves to be attacked by the Cadore people, panic seized the invaders, and they fled the way they came, over the Santa Croce pass to Sexten."—*Cadore*, p. 92.

The same rustic horn, sounded for the same purpose, may be heard here on quiet autumn evenings to this day, what time the bears come prowling down to rob orchards in the valley; and it is remarkable that there are more bears in the district about Monte Cornon, Comelico, and the Gail Thal, than in any other part of the Alps.

A little way beyond the village of Lozzo, we cross

the Piave and continue along the left bank as far as its point of junction with the Anziei at Tre Ponti—a famous triple bridge consisting of three bold arches, each ninety feet in span, and all resting on a single central pier. To the left, winding away between richly wooded heights, lies the valley of Auronzo; while to the right the Upper Piave, its grey waters shrunken to half their previous volume, come hurrying down a bare and stony channel from its source in the Carnic Alps.

And now, having tracked it for many a mile of its long course since first we saw it widening across the plain near Conegliano, we are to bid a last farewell to the Piave. It was then not very far from its grave in the Adriatic; it is now about as distant from its cradle in the fastnesses of Monte Paralba. A curious old historical writer, one Dottore Giorgio Piloni of Belluno, who evolved a dull book in a dull style just one hundred and sixty years ago, speaks of the Piave not only as the largest and most important, but also as the “most ancient,” river of the province, and seeks to identify it with the river Anassum* mentioned by Pliny in his chapter on the Venetian territory. He urges in proof of its antiquity, the depth of its bed and the height of its banks, “whereby,” says he, “it may plainly be proved that this Piave cannot be a new river, as in other instances one sees may happen by intervention of earthquakes and other accidents.” The good Doctor when he wrote this had evidently

* “Nasce la Piave nelle Alpi Taurisane sopra quel paese che per essere montuoso con greco vocabulo Cadore si chiama: si come il fiume ancora ha preso da Greci il nome di Anaxo; che vuole in quella lingua dire fiume che per il corso suo veloce non può esser all’ indietro navigato.”—*Istoria di Giorgio Piloni. Libro Secondo. Venezia, 1707.*

never visited the scene of the great bergfall in the gorge of Serravalle, or seen the basin of the Piave at Capo di Ponte.

Taking the right bank of the Anziei, we now enter the Val d'Auronzo. The bad road which began at Cadore ends at Tre Ponti, and once more the horses have a fine, new, broad post-road beneath their feet. The sun by this time is dropping westward; the trees fling long shadows aslant the sloping sward; the gnats come out in clouds; and the air is full of evening scents and sounds. It has been a long day, and nearly twelve hours have gone by since we started from Cortina in the morning. How much longer have we yet to be upon the road before we reach Auronzo?

Being asked this question, the driver, whose politeness is such that it never permits him to give a direct answer to anything, touches his hat with his whip-handle, and replies that it is "as the Signora pleases." (Come lei piace, Signora.)

"But how many kilometres have we yet before us?"

He coughs apologetically. Kilometres! *Con rispetto*, it is by no means a question of kilometres. With horses like these, kilometres go for nothing.

"Ebbene!—as a question of time, then:—how soon shall we be at Auronzo? In an hour? In an hour and a half? Before dusk?"

The driver shrugs his shoulders; looks round in a helpless way, as if seeking some means of escape; touches his hat again, and stammers:—

"Come lei piace, Signora!"

Come lei piace! It is the formula by which all his ideas are bounded. He has no opinions of his

own. He would die rather than express himself with decision about anything. Ask him what you will—the name of a village, the hour of the day, the state of the weather, his own name, age and birthplace, and he will inevitably reply: "Come lei piace." It is his invariable answer, and the effort to extract any other from him is sheer waste of breath.

The distance, however, proves to be only four miles. In about half an hour from the Tre Ponti, we come to a bend in the road, and lo! there lies a large, rambling village straggling along the near bank of the Anziei; a big mosque-like church with a glittering white dome; an older looking campanile peering above the brown roofs at the farther extremity of the place; and beyond all these, a vista of valley threaded by a deep, dark torrent fringed with sullen pine-woods. It is not the village of Auronzo, however, it is not the valley, nor the torrent, nor the pine-woods that make the beauty and wonder of the view:—it is the encircling array of mountain summits standing up rank above rank, peak beyond peak, against the clear, pale, evening sky. Farthest and strangest, at the remote end of the valley, rise the Drei Zinnen, now showing distinctly as three separate obelisks. A soft haze through which the sun is shining, hangs over the distance; and the Drei Zinnen, belted by luminous bands of filmy horizontal cloud, look like icebergs afloat in a sea of golden mist.

It is one of those rare and radiant effects that one may travel for a whole summer without seeing, and which, when they do occur, last but a few moments. Before we had reached the first cottages, the golden

light was gone, and the vapours had turned grey and ghostly.

Auronzo is divided into an upper and a lower village, known respectively as the Villa Grande and the Villa Piccola. Villa Piccola, which one reaches first on entering from the Tre Ponti side, is a modern suburb to Villa Grande. The houses of this modern suburb are large and substantial, reminding one of the houses at Ober Ammergau; and some are decorated in the same way with rough religious frescoes. To Villa Piccola belong both the large new church with the dome, and the albergo—a clean looking house lying a little way back from the road on the left hand, close against the parsonage.

Driving up to this inn, we find some four or five chaises and caretini drawn up in front of the house; a knot of men and women gathered round the door; faces of other men and women looking out from the upper windows; and an unwonted air of bustle and festivity about the place. The landlady, a hard-featured dame in rusty black, standing at the door with her arms a-kimbo, shakes her head as we draw up, and does not give Giuseppe time to speak.

She cannot take us in—not she! Couldn't take in the King of Italy, if he came this evening. Impossible. She has a wedding party from Comelico, and her house is quite full. Ecco! There is another albergo higher up, in Villa Grande. We shall probably find room there. If not?—well, she can't say! She supposes we must go back the way we have come.

Giuseppe and the driver look blank. They mutter something in low voices about "l'altro albergo;" and

my ear detects an ominous emphasis on the "altro." The landlady purses up her mouth; the travellers in possession (all in their gayest holiday clothes) survey us with an insolent air of triumph; the coachman gathers up his reins; and we drive on, quite discomfited.

With the scattered homesteads of Villa Piccola the good road ends abruptly, and becomes a mere stony cart-track full of ruts and rubble. Then, all at once, we find ourselves in the midst of a foul, closely-packed labyrinth of old timber houses, ruinous, smoke-blackened, dilapidated, compared with which the meanest villages we have as yet passed through are clean and promising. Here squalid children shout, and sprawl, and beg; slatternly women lean from upper windows; and sullen, fierce-looking men lounging in filthy doorways stare in a grim unfriendly way as the carriage lurches past. This is Villa Grande.

Another moment, and, turning a sharp corner, we draw up before a bare desolate-looking house standing a little apart from the rest, with a walled-off bowling ground on one side, in which some six or eight men are playing at ball, and a score or two of others looking on. This is our albergo.

We look at Giuseppe—at the house—at each other.

"Is there no other place to which we can go for the night?" we ask, aghast.

Giuseppe shakes his head. This and the inn at Villa Piccola are the only two in the place. If we do not stay here, we have no resource but to go back to Tai Cadore, a distance of at least fourteen, if not fifteen, English miles.

At this crisis, out comes a tall, smiling, ungainly woman, with an honest face and a mouth full of large, shining teeth—an anxious, willing, cheerful body, eager to bid us welcome; eager to carry any number of bags and rugs; brimming over with good-will and civility. She leads the way up an extremely dirty flight of stairs; across a still dirtier loft full of flour-sacks, cheeses, and farming implements; and thence up a kind of step-ladder that leads to a landing furnished with the usual table and chairs, linen press and glass-cupboard. Opening off this landing are some two or three very bare but quite irreproachable bedrooms with low whitewashed walls, and ceilings about seven feet from the ground. The floors, the bedding, the rush-bottomed chairs are all as scrupulously clean as the lower part of the establishment is unscrupulously the reverse. Carpets and curtains of course there are none. What is wanting in personal comforts is made up for, however, in the way of spiritual adornments. The walls are covered with prints of saints and martyrs in little black frames; while over the head of each bed there hangs a coloured lithograph of the Madonna displaying a plump pink heart stuck full of daggers, and looking wonderfully like a Valentine.

Here, then, we may take up our quarters and be at peace; and here, upon the landing, we are presently served with hot cutlets, coffee, eggs, and salad, all of very tolerable quality. While this meal is in preparation, we watch the players in the bowling ground. Our driver, having attended to his horses, strips off his coat and joins in the game. Giuseppe smokes his cigar, and looks gravely on. By and by the dusk closes round; the players disperse; and we, who have

to be upon the road again by 8.30 A.M., are glad to go to rest, watched over by our respective Madonnas.

Whether seen by evening grey or morning sunshine, the upper village of Auronzo is as unprepossessing, disreputable-looking a place as one would care to become acquainted with either at home or abroad. Rambling about next morning before breakfast, I saw nothing but dirt and poverty under their least picturesque aspect. The people looked sullen, scowling, and dissolute; the houses overcrowded; the surrounding country not half cultivated. I afterwards learned that the commune was poor, in debt, and over-populated; and that the inhabitants bore an indifferent reputation.

It was pleasant enough, at all events, to drive off again in the cool, bright morning, our horses' heads turned once again towards the hills.

And now, Auronzo being left behind, the scenery becomes grander with each mile of the way. Every opening gorge to right and left discloses fresh peaks and glimpses of new horizons. The pine slopes, last evening so gloomy, are outlined in sunshine this morning; and the torrent ripples along its bed of glittering white pebbles, like a blue ribbon with a silver border.

The valley from this point looks like a cul de sac. The road runs up to the foot of a great barrier of stony débris at the base of Monte Giralba on the one side, and there, to all appearance, ends abruptly; Monte Rosiana (locally known as Monte Rugiana) puts forth a gigantic buttress on the other; while the Col Agnello, a wild pile of peaks not far short of 10,000 feet in height, rises, an impassable barricade, between the two. It is not till one has driven quite up to this

point that the valley, instead of being hopelessly blocked, is found to turn off sharply to the left, narrowing to a mere gorge, and winding round the western flank of Monte Rosiana.

Now, some little distance farther on, we pass the desolate hamlet of Tavesiaji, a cluster of half-ruined cottages at the mouth of a wild glen leading to a perilous and rarely-trodden pass behind the Col Agnello. And now the road plunges all at once into a dense, fragrant tract of pine-forest, musical with the singing of birds; pierced here and there by shafts of quivering sunlight; and all alive with little brown squirrels darting to and fro among the pendant fir-cones. By and by, a great cloven peak comes up above the tree-tops to the left, shutting out half the sunshine; and then a broad glade opens suddenly in the wood, revealing what looks at first sight like a range of new and colossal mountains, the lower spurs of which are only separated from us by the bed of the Anzei.

At this point the driver pulls up, and, turning half round upon his box, says with all the exaggerated politeness of a Master of the Ceremonies in a provincial Assembly Room:—

“Con rispetta, Signora—il Marmarole.”

Being thus formally introduced to our new Dolomite, we would fain achieve a better view of it than is possible from this point. All we see of it, indeed, is a vast mass towering up indefinitely beyond the pine-forest, and, facing us, a huge slope of reddish brown earth piled up to a height of some five or seven hundred feet against the mountain side. This slope of rubble, dotted over here and there with

wooden sheds, marks the site of an extensive lead and silver mine, now abandoned; and a tiny hole in the face of the cliff above, no bigger apparently than a keyhole, is pointed out as the entrance to the principal shaft.

So we go on, always in the green shade of the forest, till we come to a little group of cottages known collectively as the Casa di San Marco; a name recalling the old days of Venetian sovereignty, and still marking the frontier between Italy and Austria. Here, there being no officials anywhere about, we pass unquestioned under the black and yellow pole, and so arrive in a few moments at the opening point of the new government road which old Ghedina had given us directions to follow as far as it went.

This new government road, carried boldly up and through a steep hill-side of pine-forest, is considered—and no doubt with justice—to be an excellent piece of work; but old Holborn Hill with all the paving stones up would have been easy driving compared with it. As yet, indeed, it is not a road, but a rough clearing some twenty feet in width, full of stones and rubble and slags of knotted root, with the lately-felled pine-trunks lying prostrate at each side, like the ranks of slain upon a battle-field. No vehicle, it seems, has yet been brought this way, and though we all alight instantly, it seems doubtful whether the carriage can ever be got up. The horses, half maddened by clouds of gad-flies, struggle up the rugged slope, stopping every now and then to plunge and kick furiously. The landau rocks and rolls like a ship at sea. Every moment the road becomes worse, and the blaze of noonday heat more intolerable. Presently we come

upon a gang of road-makers some two hundred in number, women and children as well as men, swarming over the banks like ants, clearing, levelling, and stone-breaking. They pause in their work, and stare at us as if we were creatures from another world.

"You are the first travellers who have come up this way," says the overseer, as we pass by. "You must be Inglese!"

At length we reach a point where the road ceases altogether; its future course being marked off with stakes across a broad plateau of smooth turf. This plateau—a kind of natural arena in the midst of an upper world of pine-forest—is hemmed closely in by trees on three sides, but sinks away on the left into a wooded dell down which a clear stream leaps and sparkles. We look round, seeing no outlet, save by the way we have come, and wondering what next can be done with the carriage. To our amazement, the driver coolly takes the leader by the head and makes straight for the steep pitch dipping down to the torrent.

"You will not attempt to take the carriage down into that hole!" exclaims the writer.

"Con rispetta, Signora, there is no other way," replies the driver, deferentially.

"But the horses will break their legs, and the carriage will be dashed to pieces!"

"Come lei piace, Signora," says the driver, dimly recognising the truth of this statement.

We are standing now on the brink of the hollow, the broken bank shelving down to a depth of about thirty feet; the torrent tumbling and splashing at the

bottom; and the opposite bank rising almost as abruptly beyond.

“Are we bound to get it across here?” I ask.

“Con rispetta, yes, Signora. That is to say, it can be sent back to Cortina all the way round by Auronzo and Pieve di Cadore. It is as the Signora pleases.”

Now it pleases neither of the Signoras to send the carriage back by a round of something like forty-five miles; so, after a hurried consultation, we decide to have the horses taken out, and the carriage hauled across by men. Giuseppe is thereupon despatched for a reinforcement of navvies; and thus, by the help of some three or four stalwart fellows, the landau is lifted bodily over; the horses are led across and re-harnessed; and, after a little more pushing and pulling, a rough cart-track on the other side of this Rubicon is gained in safety.

Yet a few yards farther, and we emerge upon another space of grassy Alp—a green, smooth, sloping amphitheatre of perhaps some eighty acres in extent—to the East all woods; to the West all mountains; with one lonely little white house nestling against the verge of the forest about a quarter of a mile away. This amphitheatre is the Val Buona; that little white house is the cottage of Bastian the wood-ranger; yonder pale gigantic pinnacles towering in solitary splendour above the tree-tops to the rear of the cottage, are the crests of the Cristallo. But above all else, it is the view to the Westward that we have come here to see—the famous “cirque” of the Croda Malcora. And in truth, although we have already beheld much that is wild and wonderful in the world

of Dolomite, we have as yet seen nothing that may compare with this.

The green sward slopes away from before our feet and vanishes in a chasm of wooded valley of unknown depth and distance; while beyond and above this valley, reaching away far out of sight to right and left, piled up precipice above precipice, peak above peak; seamed with horizontal bars of snow-drift; upholding here a fold of glittering glacier; dropping there a thread of misty waterfall; cutting the sky-line with all unimaginable forms of jagged ridge and battlement, and reaching as it seems midway from earth to heaven, runs a vast unbroken chain of giant mountains. But what mountains? Familiar as we have become by this time with the Ampezzo Dolomites, there is not here one outline that either can recognise. Where, then, are we? And what should we see if we could climb yonder mighty barrier?

It takes some minutes' consideration and the help of the map, to solve these questions. Then, suddenly, all becomes clear. We are behind the Croda Malcora; directly behind Sorapis; and looking straight across in the direction of the Pelmo, which, however, is hidden by intervening mountains. The Antelao should be visible to the left, but is blocked out by the long and lofty range of the Marmarole. Somewhere away to the right, in the gap that separates this great panorama from the nearer masses of the Cristallo, lies the Tre Croce pass leading to Cortina. The main feature of the view, however, is the Croda Malcora; and we are looking at it from the back. Seen on this side, it shows as a sheer wall of impending precipice, too steep and straight to afford any resting places for

the snow, save here and there upon a narrow ledge or shelf, scarce wide enough for a chamois. On the Ampezzo side, however, it flings out huge piers of rock, so that the Westward and Eastward faces of it are as unlike as though they belonged to two separate mountains. This form, as I by and by discover, is of frequent occurrence in Dolomite structure; the Civita affording, perhaps, the most remarkable case in point.

Having looked awhile at this wonderful view, we are glad once more to escape out of the blinding sunshine into the shade of the pine-woods. Here, by the help of rugs and cloaks, we make a tent in which to rest for a couple of hours during the great heat of the day; and so, taking luncheon, studying our books and maps, listening to the bees among the wild-flowers and to the thrushes in the rustling boughs overhead, we fancy ourselves in Arcadia, or the Forest of Arden. Meanwhile, the woodman's axe is busy among the firs on the hillside, and now and then we hear the crash of a falling tree.

The forester who lives in the white cottage yonder comes by and by to pay his respects to the Signore. His name is Bastian, and he turns out to be a brother of Santo Siorpaes. He also has been a soldier, and is glad now and then, when opportunity offers, to act as guide. He lives in this lost corner of the world the whole year round. It is "molto tristo," he says; especially in winter. When autumn wanes, he provisions his little house as if for a long siege, laying in store of flour, cheese, sausage, coffee and the like. Then the snow comes, and for months no living soul ventures up from the valleys. All is white and silent, like death. The snow is as high as himself—some-

times higher; and he has to dig a trench about the house, that the light may not be blocked out of the lower windows. There was one winter, he says, not many years ago, when the falls were so sudden and so heavy, that he never went to bed at night without wondering whether he should be buried alive in his cottage before morning.

While he is yet speaking, a band of road-makers comes trooping by, whistling, and laughing, and humming scraps of songs. They are going back to work, having just eaten their mid-day mess of polenta; and their hearts are glad with wine—the rough red wine that Bastian sells at the cottage for about three kreutzers the litro, and which we at luncheon found quite undrinkable.

“The place is full of life now, at all events,” says L., consolingly.

He looks after them, and shakes his head.

“Yes, Signora,” he replies; “but their work here will soon be done, and then it will seem more solitary than ever.”

The man is very like Santo, but has nothing of Santo’s animation. The lonely life seems to have taken all that brightness out of him. His manner is sad and subdued; and when he is not speaking, he has just that sort of lost look that one sees in the faces of prisoners who have been a long time in confinement.

At two o’clock, we break up our camp, and prepare to start again. The polite driver, mindful of a possible *buono-mano*, comes to take leave, and is succeeded by the lad Giovanni, who has journeyed up from Cortina to meet us with the promised saddle-horses.

And now our old friend the tall chesnut appears upon the scene with the Pezzé side-saddle on his back, followed by an equally big black horse with the Ghedina saddle; whereupon, having Giuseppe and Giovanni in attendance, we mount and ride away—not without certain shrewd suspicions that our gallant steeds are carrying ladies for the first time. Big as they are, they climb, however, like cats, clambering in a wonderful way up the steep and stony slope of fir-forest that rises behind Bastian's cottage and leads to the Misurina Alp beyond.

Three quarters of an hour of this rough work brings us to a higher level than we have yet reached, and lands us on an immense plateau of rich turf hemmed in on both sides by an avenue of rocky summits. Those to the right are the Cime Cadino, or Cadine-spitzen. Those on the left are the lower crags of the Cristallo mass, above which, though unseen from here, towers the gigantic Piz Popena. And this vast prairie-valley, so high, so solitary, all greenest grass below, all bluest sky above, undulating away into measureless distance, is the Misurina Alp.* As much perhaps as a thousand head of cattle are here feeding in the rich pastures. Presently we pass the "Stabilimento," or *Vacherie* as it would be called in France;—a cluster of substantial wooden buildings, where the herdsmen live in summer, making and storing the cheeses which form so important an item in the wealth of the district.

At length, when we have journeyed on and on for

* The word Alp is used here and always in its local sense, as signifying a mountain pasture. It may be as well to remark at the same time that the word "Col" stands in these parts for a hill, and is derived from Collo; while a mountain pass (called in Switzerland a Col) is here called a Forcella.

what seems an interminable distance, we come upon a circular hollow in the midst of which nestles the Misurina lake—a green, transparent, tranquil tarn, fed as we are told by thirty springs, and rich in salmon trout and otters. The place is inconceivably still, beautiful, and solitary. Dark rushes fringe the borders of the lake, and are doubled by reflection. Three cows stand drowsing in the water, motionless. Not a ripple disturbs its glassy surface. Not a sound stirs the air. Yonder, where the vista opens Northwards, appear the cloudy summits of the Drei Zinnen; here where the grassy lawn slopes down to the water's edge, the very sunshine seems asleep. The whole scene has a breathless unreality about it, as if it were a mirage, or a picture.

Having rested here awhile, we retrace our steps the whole length of the plateau, and then, dismounting, strike across on foot over a long slope of bog and rock, till we gain the mule-track leading by the Tre Croce pass to Cortina. An easy ascent winding up and round the edge of a pine forest, now carries us over the shoulder of the Cristallo, which here assumes quite a new aspect, and instead of appearing as one united mass, divides into three enormous blocks, each block in itself a mountain.

For a long way, the Eastward view still commands the range of the Marmarole and the Circa Malcora. Then by degrees, as we work round towards the West, the Marmarole is gradually lost to sight, and the Malcora crags begin to show themselves in profile. At last the summit of the pass is gained, with its three crosses; and all the familiar peaks of the Ampezzo side rise once more in magnificent array against the

sunset:—to the left, the Pelmo and Rochetta; to the right, a corner of Monte Lagazuoi and the three summits of the Tofana; straight ahead the Bec di Mezzodi, Monte Nuvolau, and beyond the gap of the Tre Sassi pass, the far-off snow slope of the Marmolata.

The road from here to Cortina, though not steep, is long and rough—so rough that we are glad to dismount presently and finish the homeward journey on foot. As we go down, a number of wayside crosses, some rudely fashioned in wood, some of rusty iron, attract our attention by their frequency on either side of the path. They are monuments to the memory of travellers lost in the sudden snow-storms that make these passes so perilous in winter-time and spring.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPRILE.

Importance of Cortina as a Dolomite Centre—Our Departure for Caprile—The “Signora Cuoca” again—Castel d’Andraz—Finnazzer’s Inn—The Upper Valley of the Cordevole—A Succession of Rain-storms—A Cordial Welcome—Caprile—The Game of Pallo—Austrians and Italians—The Civita—The Lake of Alleghe—The great Bergfalls of 1771—The Rape of the Side-saddle—The Col di Santa Lucia—Titian’s Lost Fresco—Sunset on the Civita.

THE time at length came when we must bid good-bye to Cortina. It was a place in which many more days might have been spent with pleasure and profit. The walks were endless; the sketching was endless; the climate perfect. Still we had already overstayed the time originally set apart in our programme for the Ampezzo district; we had made all the most accessible excursions about the neighbourhood; and with the whole of that great Italian Dolomite centre that lies