Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys

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Chapter VII. Caprile

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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 goodbye 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

beyond the Tre Sassi ridge yet unexplored, it was plain that we could ill afford to linger longer on the Austrian border.

At the same time, Cortina, just because it lies upon the border, is in danger of being too hastily dismissed by travellers coming in from the Conegliano side. Marvellous as its surrounding mountains are, a stranger is apt to conclude that they but open the way to still greater marvels, and to regard the Ampezzo Thal as only the threshold of Wonderland. Even Mr. Gilbert, visiting Cortina for the first time in 1861, as he himself tells, stayed only one night there, and never ceased to regret the omission till another Tyrolean tour enabled him to repair it. For myself, looking back in memory across that intervening sea of peaks and passes which lies between Botzen and Cortina, I am inclined to place the Ampezzo Dolomites in the very first rank, both as regards position and structure. The mountains of Primiero are more extravagantly wild in outline; the Marmolata carries more ice and snow; the Civita is more beautiful; the solitary giants of the Seisser Alp are more imposing; but, taken as a group, I know nothing, whether for size, variety, or picturesqueness, to equal that great circle which, within a radius of less than twelve miles from the doors of the Aquila Nera, includes the Pelmo, Antelao, Marmarole, Croda Malcora, Cristallo and Tofana.

It was time, however, as I have said, for us to be moving onward. A practised mountaineer would doubtless find more than enough employment for a whole season within this one area; but we, who were not mountaineers in any sense of the word, had now done our duty very fairly by the place, and so (not without

reluctance) were bound to seek fresh woods and pastures new. Nothing, in short, could have been pleasanter than staying—except going.

Our next point being Caprile, it was arranged that we should ride over the Tre Sassi pass and send the luggage by caretta. Giuseppe, always economical, proposed a second caretta for the Signoras, adding that the char-road was "a little rough" on the side of Caprile. We, however, had already found it more than a little rough on the side of Cortina, and, being impressed with a lively recollection of the horrors of that drive, declined to pursue the experiment any farther.

Also, it was necessary to make sure of Ghedina's side-saddle. By taking horses and riding over the pass, we should at least get it as far as Caprile. Possession, so far, would be something gained. I am bound to confess that beyond that point our intentions, though vague, were decidedly felonious.

The morning was exquisite when we started. The caretta went first, driven by our polite friend of the other day, and we followed about half an hour later. The procession consisted of two riding-horses (Fuchs, the chesnut, and Moro, the black), a mule for the maid, the two elder Ghedinas, Giuseppe, and Giovanni. The Ghedinas were there to lead the horses when necessary, and to bring them home to-morrow; while Giovanni — inasmuch as the mule's present rider had never before mounted anything more spirited than a Sorrento donkey — had strict orders to stay by that animal's head, and never to leave his post for an instant. And indeed a less inexperienced rider might well have been excused a shade of nervousness, for

the road was often steep, and often skirted the brink of very unpleasant-looking precipices; while the promised "basta," destitute alike of rail and pommel, proved to be neither more nor less than a bundle of cushions and sheepskins strapped upon a man's saddle, with no real support save a stirrup.

In this order, then, we finally started, taking our former route in the direction of Falzarego, and casting many a backward glance at the mountains we were leaving behind us.

Arrived once more at the little Hospice, the "Signora Cuoca" was welcomed with acclamations. Again, leaving the public room for the use of the men, we took possession of the padrona's bright little kitchen; again the eggs and butter, the glittering brass pan, the long brass ladle and the big apron were produced; and again the author covered herself with glory. It may have been the peculiar quality of the air on this particular pass, or it may have been the result of an exaggerated degree of self-approbation; but those Falzarego eggs did certainly seem, on both occasions, to transcend in delicacy and richness of flavour all other eggs with which the present writer ever had the pleasure of becoming acquainted.

It was our destiny to be overtaken by rain and mist on the Tre Sassi. Before we left the Hospice, a few uncertain drops were already beginning to fall, and by the time we reached the summit, the Marmolata was gleaming in the same ghostly way as before, through fast-gathering vapours.

From this point, all is new. Skirting first the base of Monte Lagazuoi, then of the abrupt crag locally known as the Sasso d'Istria, we pass close above some

large unmelted snow-drifts, and so down into a steep romantic glen traversed by a clear torrent "musical with many a fall" and crossed every here and there by a narrow bridge of roughly hewn pine trunks. Sometimes where there is no bridge the water sparkles all across the path, and those on foot have to spring from stone to stone as best they may. Dark firs and larches, growing thicker and closer as the dell dips deeper, make a green gloom overhead. Ferns, mosses, and wild flowers grow in lush luxuriance all over the steep banks, and carpet every hollow. Gaunt peaks are seen now and then through openings in the boughs, as if suspended high up in the misty air. And ever the descending path winds in and out among huge boulders covered with bushes and many-coloured lichens.

And now, as we go on, the sky darkens more and more. Then a light steady mist begins to fall; the mist turns to rain; the rain becomes a storm; and the mountains echo back a long, low peal of distant thunder. Meanwhile the road has become very steep and slippery, and the horses keep their feet with difficulty. Then the glen turns and widens, and Castel d'Andraz—a shattered, blank-eyed ruin perched high upon a pedestal of crag — comes suddenly into sight. Steep precipices skirt the ruin on one side, and upland pastures on the other; a green valley opens away beyond; and the grassy slope beside the bridle-path is full of large wild orange lilies and crimson dog-roses that flame like jewels in a ray of sunshine which breaks at this moment through the clouds. Not even the sheets of rain still pelting pitilessly down, can blot out the wonderful beauty of the view, or reconcile me

to the impossibility of stopping then and there to sketch it.

We ride on, however, for fully three-quarters of an hour more, stumbling over wet stones and sliding down steps hewn in the solid rock, till at length the little hamlet of Andraz,* half hidden among trees and precipices, and framed in overhead by a magnificent fragment of rainbow, appears in welcome proximity close beneath our feet. Another turn of the road, and we are there. The men are wet through; the horses are streaming; the rain runs in rivers off our waterproof cloaks; our umbrellas are portable gargoyles. In this state we alight at the door of Finazzer's tiny hostelry and "birraria" — a very small, clean, humble place; where, having taken off our wettest outer garments and dried ourselves thoroughly at a blazing kitchen fire, we order hot coffee and prepare to make the best of our position till the sky clears again.

Never was there such a toy parlour as that into which we are ushered on coming out of the kitchen! It is all pine-wood—new, bright, fragrant, cinnamon-coloured pine-wood, shining like gold. Walls, floor, ceiling are all alike. And it is perfectly square, too, in every way, like a beautiful little new box of Sorrento or Tunbridge ware. You might have turned it up endwise, or sidewise, or topsy-turvy, and but for the altered position of the door, I would defy the most sagacious architect to find out the difference. Then the chairs, the tables, the corner cupboards, the clock-case, are all of the same material: — everything in the room, in short, is pine-wood, except the grate.

* The castle and hamlet of Andraz are also known, and frequently called by the name of Buchenstein.

There are certain toy-stalls in the Soho Bazaar where, at the cost of a few shillings, one may at any time buy just such wooden boxes full of just such wooden furniture, in miniature.

By and by the rain ceases; the clouds part; the sun breaks out; the horses are brought round; and for the third time that day, we again push on for Caprile.

And now, not far below this point, the valley of Andraz debouches into the upper valley of the Cordevole—the fairest and most sylvan we have yet seen; a valley less Italian in character than the Val d'Auronzo, more Swiss than the Ampezzo Thal; rich in corn, maize, hemp, flax and pasture; and bounded in the far distance by great shadowy mountains patched and streaked with snow, about whose flanks rent storm-clouds drift and gather, like the waves of an angry sea. That one of these is the Boé (which we come to know hereafter as a bastion of the Sella plateau) and that another is the Monte Padon, are facts to be taken for the present upon trust. The Marmolata is also dimly traceable now and then; and presently a blurred, gigantic mass so enveloped in mist as to show no definite outline of any kind, is pointed out as the Civita.

Meanwhile, the bridle-path, carried at an immense height along the shoulder of Monte Frisolet, follows every curve of the mountain — now commanding the valley of Livinallungo to the north-west—now coming in sight of a corner of the blue lake beyond Caprile to the south—now winding along the face of an almost vertical precipice—now skirting the borders of a pine-forest—now striking across a slope of greenest pasture;

and at every turn disclosing some new vista more beautiful than the last. Tiny villages, some a thousand feet below, some a thousand feet above the level of our path, are scattered far and wide, each with its little white church and picturesque campanile. Sometimes one, sometimes another of these, stands out for a few moments in brilliant sunshine; then, as the clouds drive by, sinks away again into shadow. These vivid alternating passages of light and shade followed by the intense gloom of another gathering storm now coming rapidly up from the valleys behind the Marmolata, altogether defy description.

And now, anxious if possible to escape another drenching, we hurry on; stared at by all who meet us, as if no such cavalcade had ever before found its way along this mountain track. Passing presently through the little village of Collaz, we attract the whole population to their doors and windows; and two very old priests, standing by the church door, pull off their hats and bow to the ground as we ride by.

Then, as before, a light mist begins to fall, and turns presently to a heavy rainstorm that becomes heavier the longer it lasts. Then, too, the path gets steep and stony, and the horses, which have for some time been showing signs of fatigue, slip and stumble at every step. As for the black, being frightened by a flash of very vivid lightning, he becomes suddenly restive, and all but carries the writer at a single bound into the gulf below. Hereupon we dismount and, letting the horses go down by the road, make our way in rain, wind, thunder and lightning, down a narrow zigzag path at the bottom of which, some 300

feet below, appear the roofs and the church-spire of Caprile.

The Pezzés had given us up hours ago; but seeing our wretched little party coming along the village street, drenched, draggled, and miserable, rush down in a body to meet and welcome us on the threshold—old Signora Pezzé, gentle and cordial; young Signora Pezzé, still with a rose in her hair; the two sons whom we already know, and all the helps and hangers on of the establishment. The men and horses arrive close upon our heels; but the caretta, left behind long since upon the road, never appears till some two hours later, having turned quite over on the edge of a precipice and deposited all our bags and rugs at the bottom of a steep and muddy gully, from which they were with difficulty recovered.

Meanwhile a good fire is quickly lighted; wet clothing is taken to the kitchen to be dried; a hot supper is put in preparation; and all the discomforts of the journey are forgotten.

Now the Pezzé's is a large old rambling stone house, and consists, in fact, of three houses thrown into one. The floors are some of stone and some of wood; the rooms are at all sorts of levels; the windows are very small, and full of flowers. An old metal sign—as old, apparently, as the days of the Falieri—swings at the corner outside; and a balcony of antique Italian wrought-iron juts out over the doorway. The public room on the first floor is panelled with oak and contains a fine carved ceiling; while the landings, as usual, are arranged as places to dine in. A set of rooms however, including the unwonted luxury of a comfortable private sitting-room, were

assigned to us on the second floor; and these we retained during all the time that we made Caprile our head-quarters. In the sitting-room we had a sofa, a round table, a cheffonier, and even a bookcase containing Guicciardini's History of Italy, and a Teatro Francese in thirty volumes. Here also were Ball's Guide-books, and Gilbert's "Dolomite Mountains" presented to Signora Pezzé by the authors. On the walls, amid a variety of little framed prints and photographs, we found portraits of F. F. T., and his sisters; in the visitors' book, the handwriting of J. A. S., of the N's, of the W's and of other friends who had passed by in foregoing years. The place, in short, was warm with pleasant memories. No wonder that it seemed like home from the first; and was home, while it lasted.

At Caprile, the traveller finds himself again in Italy. Coming down on foot in the pelting storm, we had crossed the frontier, it seemed, a little way above the zigzag. The village is but just over the border; and yet the houses and the people are as thoroughly Italian as if buried alive in the heart of the Apennines. It lies in a deep hollow at the foot of four mountains and at the junction of four valleys. The four mountains are the Monte Frisolet, the Monte Migion, the Monte Pezza, and the Monte Fernazza, locally known as the Monte Tos. The four valleys are the Val di Livinallungo, the Val Fiorentino, the Val Pettorina, and the Val d'Alleghe, or Cordevole. Each of the three first of these valleys (to say nothing of a fourth and apparently nameless tributary coming down a rocky glen behind the village) brings its torrent to swell the flood of the Cordevole which, a couple of

miles lower down, flows southward through the lake of Alleghe on its way to join the Piave in the Val di Mel.

The village, murky and unprepossessing at first sight, consists of one straggling street partly built upon arches. The church (which is in nowise remarkable, unless for the decorations of the organ loft, on which is profanely painted a medallion head of the Apollo Belvedere surrounded by bouquets of flutes, fiddles and tambourines) is situated on a rising ground near the foot of the zigzag. At the farther end of the village on the side of Alleghe stands the column of St. Mark, commemorative of the old time when Caprile, like Cadore, owned the sovereignty of the Doge and the Council of Ten. The Venetian lion on the top—a battered mediæval bronze—was robbed some years ago of his wings, and the commune has talked of replacing them ever since. A carved shield on the front of the column is charged with the arms of Caprile, and beneath it a square stone tablet bears the following inscription:—

SCIPIONI . BENZONO . PAT$^{S}_{.}$. VEN$^{S}_{.}$. SER$^{I}_{.}$. SENATI .
VENE . COMISS . SUPER . FINIBUS . BENEFICENTISS .
CAPRILENSES . AERE . PVB . POS . ANNO . MDCIX.

The little piazza in which this roadside monument stands is called the Contrada di San Marco. The torrent runs close behind it on the one side; the International Dogana overlooks it on the other. In this open space, the young men of the village play at Pallo all day long. To a looker-on, this game which in summer forms the absorbing occupation of half the

middle-class youth of Italy, would seem to be governed by no laws whatever, but to consist simply in tossing the ball from player to player. They use no bats; they mark off no boundaries; they make no running. Their interest in it, however, and their excitement are unbounded. They begin immediately after breakfast and go on till dusk; and when they are not playing, they are smoking cigarettes and looking on.

The Italians and Austrians profess now-a-days to be the best friends in the world, especially at these little frontier posts where they are brought into perpetual contact; but I observed that the young men of Caprile, although their favourite playing-ground lay just under the windows of the Dogana, never invited the Austrian soldiers to take part in the game. These latter, standing about with their hands in their pockets, or sitting on the steps of the column, watched the players in a melancholy way, and looked as if they found life dull at Caprile.

The first sight that one goes out of doors to see is, of course, the Civita; the first walk or drive one takes is to the lake of Alleghe. As they both lie in the same direction, and as the best view of the mountain is gained from the road leading to the lake, if not from the actual borders of the lake, most of the few travellers who come this way content themselves with despatching both in a single morning, and then believe that they have "done" Caprile.

The grand façade of the Civita—a sheer, magnificent wall of upright precipice, seamed from crown to foot with thousands of vertical fissures, and rising in a mighty arch towards the centre—faces to the north-west, looking directly up the Cordevole towards

Caprile, and filling in the end of the valley as a great organ-front fills in the end of a Cathedral aisle. Towards evening it takes all the glow of the sunset. In the morning, while the sun is yet low in the east, it shows through a veil of soft blue shade, vague and unreal as a dream. It was thus I first saw it. I had gone rambling out through the village before breakfast, and suddenly the Civita rose up before me like a beautiful ghost, draped in haze against a background of light. I thought it then, for simple breadth and height, for symmetry of outline, for unity of effect, the most ideal and majestic-looking mountain I had ever seen; and I think so still.

The lake of Alleghe lies about two miles S.S.E. of Caprile, in a green amphitheatre at the foot of the Civita, the Monte Pezza, and the Monte Fernazza. The way to it lies along the left bank of the Cordevole, which here flows in a broad, strong current, and is bordered on the side of the char-road by a barren, pebbly tract sparsely overgrown with weeds and bushes.

The river is dark, and deep, and brown; the lake, which is but an expansion of the river, is of a wonderful greenish blue—sapphire streaked with emerald. The river is always rushing on at a headlong, irresistible pace; the lake, except when the wind sweeps straight up the valley, is as placid as a sheet of looking-glass. The river—an aggregate of many tributaries—is as old, probably, as the mountains whence its many sources flow; the lake is new—a thing of yesterday. For a hundred years are as yesterday in the world's history, and where the lake of Alleghe now mirrors the clouds and the mountains, there were orchards

and cornfields, farms and villages, only one hundred and two years ago. A great bergfall from the Monte Pezza—or rather two successive bergfalls—caused all this ruin, and created all this beauty. These terrible catastrophes, as all travellers know, are common to mountain countries; but among these Dolomite valleys the bergfalls seem to have occurred, and seem still to occur, with greater frequency and on a more tremendous scale than elsewhere. You cannot walk or drive for ten miles in any direction without coming upon some such scene of ruin. It may have happened last year; or ten, or fifty, or a hundred years ago; or it may have happened in pre-historic ages. Your guide in general knows nothing about it. You ask him when it happened. He shrugs his shoulders, and answers "Chi lo sa?" But there, at all events, lie the piled rocks with their buried secrets, and often there is no outward difference to show which fell within the memory of man, and which before the date of man's creation.

The history of the lake of Alleghe has, however, been handed down with unusual accuracy. The date of the calamity, and the extent of the damage done, are registered in certain parish books and municipal records; and these again are supplemented by deeds and papers preserved by private families in the villages round about. Most of these families, and among them the Pezzés of Caprile, can tell of ancestors whose houses and lands were buried in the great fall of 1771.

This was how it happened:—

The Monte Pezza, of which I shall have more to say hereafter, lies to the West of the lake, being the

largest of the four mountains already mentioned as surrounding the hollow in which Caprile is built. Northwards it breaks away in abrupt precipices, culminating in a fine rocky summit some 8,000 feet above the level of the sea; but on the side nearest the lake it slopes down in a succession of rich woods, pastures, and picturesque ravines. Skirting the opposite shore, one sees a vast, treacherous, smooth-looking slope of slatey rock, like a huge bald patch, extending all along the crest of the ridge on this side. It was from thence the fall came; it was this crest that slid away, slowly at first, and then with terrible swiftness, down into the valley.

The first disaster happened in the month of January, 1771. A charcoal-burner, it is said, who had been at work up in the woods, came down towards close of day, white and breathless, calling on those in the plain to save themselves, for the mountain was moving. A swift runner with the fear of death behind him, he fled from village to village, raising the cry as he went. But no one believed him. There were four villages then where now there is the lake. Incredulous of danger, the people of those four villages went to bed that evening as usual, and in the dead of night the whole side of the mountain came down with a mighty rush and overwhelmed the sleepers, not one of whom escaped. Two of the villages were buried, two were drowned; for the waters of the Cordevole, driven suddenly back, spread out as in the case of the Piave, and formed the lake as we now see it. The two buried hamlets lay close under the foot of the mountain at the Southern end of the basin, where the great masses of débris now lie piled in huge confusion. Al-

leghe, the chief place of the district, was situated somewhere about the middle of the lake, and is wholly lost to sight. The fourth village stood on a slope at the North end close against that point where the Cordevole now flows into the lake.

Four more months went by, and then, on the 21st of May, there came a second downfall. This time the waters of the lake were driven up the valley with great violence, and destroyed even more property than before. In the little village which is now called Alleghe, and has been so called ever since the first Alleghe was effaced, the whole East end and choir of the present church were swept away, and the organ was carried to a considerable distance up the glen. At the same moment—for the whole lake seems to have surged up suddenly as one wave—a tree was hurled in through the window of the room in which the curé was sitting at dinner, and the servant waiting upon him was killed on the spot. The choir has been rebuilt since then; and the organ, repaired and replaced, does duty to this day. No monument or tablet, so far as I could learn, has ever been erected to the memory of those who perished in these two great disasters; but a catafalque is dressed, and candles are lighted, and a solemn commemorative mass for the souls of the lost and dead is performed in the church at Alleghe on the 21st of May in every year.

We had been told that in winter when the lake was frozen and the ice not too thick, and in summer on very calm days, the walls and roofs of one of the submerged villages might yet be seen, like the traditional towers of the drowned city of Lyonesse, far down below the surface of the water. An oven and a flight of

stone steps, according to one of the young Pezzés, were distinctly visible; to say nothing of other less credible stories. At length, one delicious, idle, sunny afternoon, having nothing of importance to do elsewhere, we took a boat and went out upon the lake, just to test the truth of these traditions with our own eyes. Not a breath stirred when we started from Caprile; but by the time the boat was found and we were embarked in it, a light breeze had sprung up, and the whole surface of the water was in motion. Every moment, the breeze freshened and the ripple grew stronger. The withered little old woman and the rosy-cheeked girl who were rowing, bent to their oars and pulled with all their might; but, having crossed the debouchure of the river, declared themselves unable to pull us round the headland. The water by this time was quite rough, and we landed at the nearest point with difficulty. Scrambling up and along the bank for some distance, we came presently to a kind of little promontory from whence, notwithstanding the roughness of the surface, we could distinctly trace a long reach of wall and some three or four square enclosures—evidently the substructures of several houses.

"If it had been smooth enough and we could have rowed over yonder," said the old woman, pointing towards a more distant reach, "the Signoras might have seen houses with their roofs still on and their chimneys standing. They are all there—deep, deep down!"

"Have you yourself seen them?" I asked.

"Seen them? Eh, signora, I have seen them with these eyes, hundreds of times. Dio mio! there are those in Alleghe who have seen stranger sights than I.

There are those living who have seen the old parish church with its belfry, all perfect, out yonder in the middle of the lake where it is deep water. There are those living" (here her voice dropped to an awe-struck whisper) "who have heard the bells tolling under the water at midnight for the unburied dead!"

I have told the story of this little expedition out of its due place, in order to bring under one head all that I succeeded in gleaning at various times about the great bergfall of 1771. It certainly did not come off till we had been established for some two or three weeks at Caprile, and had once or twice been absent upon distant excursions.

Our first day at the Pezzé's was spent in strolling about the neighbourhood, and seeing after mules. Also in getting rid of the two Ghedinas, who were returning to Cortina with their horses, but not, if we could help it, with their side-saddle. How this delicate and difficult matter was at last negotiated matters little now. Enough that, being simple men with but few words at command, they were ultimately talked out of their convictions, and so departed—leaving the precious object behind them. We promised of course to pay for the hire of it; we promised to return it as soon as we succeeded in getting another; we promised everything possible and impossible, and were crowned with that success which is not always the reward of virtue.

"The Padre will be furious with us," said the younger brother somewhat ruefully, as he pocketed his buona-mano and turned to leave the room.

It occurred to me that this was highly probable, and that Ghedina père might not be altogether a pleasant person to deal with under those circumstances.

The poor fellows went away with evident reluctance, followed by Giovanni and the mule. We watched them down the street, and only breathed freely when they were fairly out of sight.

That same afternoon, having engaged the exclusive services of a local guide and a couple of mules for as long and as often as we might require them during our sojourn in these parts, we walked to the Col di Santa Lucia, a famous point of view in the neighbouring Val Fiorentino. Our way thither lay up yesterday's zigzag—a damp, muddy groove wriggling up the face of a steep hillside, about as pleasant to walk in as a marrow-spoon, and not much wider. Once arrived at the top, we left the valley of Andraz upon the left, and turned off towards the right—still, as yesterday, winding along the great pine-slopes of Monte Frisolet, but following the Eastward instead of the Westward face of the mountain.

It was uphill nearly all the way. Giuseppe, however, had provided two stout alpenstocks of his own cutting, and with this good help we pushed forward rapidly. The path lay half in shade and half in sunshine, commanding now a peep into the depths of the valley below; now a view of the great "slide"* on the opposite shoulder of Monte Fernazza; and now a backward glimpse of the Civita seen above a crowd of intervening hill-tops. Thus at the end of a long pull of rather less than an hour and a half, we found ourselves some 1500 feet above the level from which

* A mountain "slide" is sometimes (as in the case of the famous slide at Alpnacht) a scientifically constructed incline paved with pine-trunks, down which the felled timber from the upper forests is shot into the valley without the labour and expense of transport. The slide of Monte Fernazza, however, is a mere forest-clearing about 40 feet in width and 800 or 900 in length, carried down the face of an almost perpendicular hill-side.

we had started, and close upon the Col di Santa Lucia—a curious saddle-backed hill like a lion couchant, keeping guard just at the curve of the Val Fiorentino. His neck is crested with a straggling line of Swiss-looking wooden houses, and his head is crowned by a picturesque little white church. He looks straight down towards the Pelmo, which closes the end of the valley magnificently, like a stupendous castle with twin-towers reaching to the clouds. One would like to know what demi-god piled those bastions; and why the lion crouched there, waiting for ever to spring upon him when he should venture out from his stronghold; and if he is still imprisoned in the heart of the mountain. But the answer to these questions would have to be sought in the cloudland of uncreated myths.

Followed by all the children in the place, we made our way into the churchyard, and there, at the extreme end of the little promontory, sat upon the wall to enjoy the view. A glance at the map showed that the Ampezzo Thal lay just beyond the Pelmo, and that we were now looking at the mountain from exactly the reverse side. Seen from over yonder, it had resembled a mighty throne; from here, as I have said, it showed as two enormous towers, tawny against the deep blue of the sky. A little white cloud resting lightly against the top of the farthest tower looked like a flag of truce floating from the battlements. Farther to the left, the curved beak of the Antelao, like the prow of a Roman galley, peeped out, faint and distant, above a bank of gathering cumulus. The Val Fiorentino, green and sunny and sprinkled with white villages, opened up, like a beautiful avenue, to

the very foot of the Pelmo; while northward, the valley of Codalunga met the descending slopes of Monte Gusella, and showed a streak of winding path leading down from the pass. Travellers who come that way from Cortina instead of by the Tre Sassi, have a rugged and somewhat uninteresting road to climb, and, for the sake of this one view which can afterwards be so easily reached from Caprile, lose the scenery of the exquisite upper Val Cordevole—perhaps the loveliest of all the Dolomite valleys.

Turning away at last from the view, we went in search of the house of the Curé of Santa Lucia, upon the outer walls of which, as the story goes, there once existed a fresco by Titian—painted, it was said, in return for the hospitality with which he was entertained there when weatherbound in winter on his way to Venice. Schaubach tells how it represented "Death with his scythe, surrounded by symbols of earthly vanity"; and furthermore adds that, having been barbarously whitewashed by some Paroco of the last century, it was with difficulty recovered. Where, however, Mr. Ball and Mr. Gilbert had, as they tell us, both failed, the present writer could scarcely hope for success. A carved "stemma," or coat of arms, over a side-door was all the parsonage had to show, and no trace of the fresco was anywhere discernible.

I shall not soon forget that evening walk back to Caprile—the golden splendour of the sky—the sweet scent of the new-mown hay. Neither shall I forget the two tired pedestrians all knapsacks, beards and knickerbockers, making for Caprile; nor the shy little maid in the iron-spiked shoes, timid and silent, keeping goats by the path-side; nor the goats themselves, who

had no mauvaise honte, and were almost too friendly; nor, above all, that wonderful rose-coloured vision that broke upon us as we turned down again into the valley—that vision of the Civita, looking more than ever like a mighty organ, with its million pipes all gilded in the light of the sunset. The sky above was all light; the wooded hills below were all shade. Monte Pezza, soaring out from a mist of purple haze, caught the rich glow upon its rocky summit. Caprile nestled snugly down in the hollow. The little village of Rocca, high on a green plateau, lifted its slender campanile against the horizon; while yet farther away, a couple of tender grey peaks, like hooded nuns, looked up to the Eastern sky, as if waiting for the evening star to rise. Then the rose-colour paled upon the lower crags; and the radiant cloud-wreath hovering midway across the face of the Civita like an amber and golden scarf, turned grey and ghostlike. A few moments more, and the last flush faded. The sky turned a tender, greenish grey, flecked with golden films. The birds became silent in their nests. The grasshoppers burst into a shrill chorus. The torrent —steel-coloured now, with here and there a gleam of silver—rushed on, singing a wild song, and eager for the sea. Presently a feeble old peasant came across the pine-trunk bridge, staggering under a load of hay that left only his legs visible; and was followed by his wife, a brisk old woman with five hats piled upon her head, one on the top of another, and a sheaf of rakes and scythes under her arm.

So we lingered, spell-bound, till at last the gloaming came and drove us homeward. Some hours later, the clouds that we had seen gathering about the Antelao

came up, bringing with them rain and heavy thunder; whereupon the ringers got up and rang the church bells all night long while the storm lasted.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT CAPRILE.

Unsettled Weather—Processions and Bells—Resources of Caprile—History of Caprile in the Middle Ages—The free State of Rocca—Local Notabilities—The Gorge of Sottoguda—The Sasso di Ronch—Clementi and the two Nessols—The Goatherd's Cross—The King and Queen of the Dolomites—A Mountain in Ruins—The Sasso Bianco—A tempting Proposal—Legends of the Sasso di Ronch.

THE good people of Caprile were difficult to please in the matter of weather. The bells having rung all night, the population turned out next morning in solemn procession at five A.M. to implore the Virgin's protection against storms. The clouds cleared off accordingly, and a magnificent morning followed the tempest. At midday, however, the procession formed again, and with more ceremony than before—a tall barefooted contadino in a tumbled surplice coming first, with a huge wooden crucifix; then a shabby priest with his hat on, intoning a litany; then two very small and very dirty boys in red capes, carrying unlighted lanthorns on poles; lastly, a long file of country folks marching two and two, the men first, the women next, the children last, all with their hats in their hands and all chanting. In this order they wound slowly round the village, beginning at the Contrada di San Marco.

"What is the procession for now?" I asked, turning to a respectable-looking peasant who was washing down a cart under an archway.

"They are going up to the church to pray for rain,