

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol

Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys

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Leipzig, 1873

Chapter X. Primiero to Predazzo

CHAPTER X.

PRIMIERO TO PREDAZZO.

Primiero and its History—The early Silver-Workers and their Offering—Transacqua and its Titian—The Primiero Dolomites—The Val di Canali—Monte Pavione and the Vette di Feltre—Monte Arzon—The Ponte dello Schios—A Primiero Progressionist—The coming Tenor—Signor Sartoris and the Art of Apiculture—The Upper Valley of the Cismone—San Martino di Castrozza—A Scene for a Ghost Story—The Cimon della Pala—The Costonzella Pass—The Hospice of Paneveggio—The Val Travignolo—Predazzo.

THE town of Primiero lies partly in the plain, and partly climbs the hill on which the church is built. The houses in the flat have a semi-Venetian character, like the houses at Ceneda and Longarone. The houses on the hill are of the quaintest German Gothic, and remind one of the steep-roofed, many-turreted mediæval buildings in Albrecht Dürer's backgrounds. This curious juxtaposition of dissimilar architectural styles is accounted for by the fact that Primiero, in itself more purely Italian than either Caprile or Agordo, became transferred to Austria and partly colonized by German operatives about the latter end of the 14th Century. The Tedeschi, drafted thither for the working of a famous silver mine, took root, acquired wealth, built the church, and left their impress on the place, just as the Romans left theirs in Gaul, and the Greeks in Sicily.

The early history of Primiero—how it became subject first to the Goths; then to the Lombards; next (A.D. 1027) to the Bishops of Trent; next again (A.D. 1300) to the Scaligieri of Verona; then (A.D. 1315) to Prince Charles of Luxembourg; and finally to an Archduke

of the House of Hapsburg—is but a repetition of the history of most places along the line of the Bellunese frontier. That the valley was at least twice or thrice invaded, and Castel Pietra as often besieged, by the Venetians is also matter of history. It does not appear, however, that Primiero ever became an actual appanage of the great Republic, although the neighbouring village of Transacqua (which is indeed almost a suburb of Primiero, and is only separated from the town by the Cismone and a meadow or two) was ceded to, and held by, Venice in undisputed right for a length of time both before and after the date when the rest of the valley passed into the strong grasp of Austria—a grasp unloosened to this day.

For Primiero—so Italian in its scenery, its climate, its language, its national type—is Austrian still. We passed the frontier somewhere about half-way between the village of Gosalda and the osteria on the Cereda pass; but there was no black and yellow pole to mark the boundary, and we re-entered the dominions of the Emperor Francis Joseph without knowing it.

So lately as last summer—the month of July, 1872—Primiero was as inaccessible for wheeled vehicles as Venice. Whatever there may be now, there was then no line of unbroken carriage-road leading to or from the valley in any direction. Be your destination what it might, you could drive but a few miles this way, or a few miles that; and then must take to either the Alpenstock or the saddle. In short, every avenue to the outer world was barred by a circle of passes, all of which were practicable for mules, but not one practicable throughout for even caretтини. A fine military road is, however, now in course of construction

between Primiero and Predazzo, so that a direct communication for vehicles will soon be established with Neumarkt on the Botzen and Brenner line. This road was already open last summer as far as the Hospice of San Martino, and was in progress for some miles farther. Perhaps by now it may reach as far as the Val Travignolo.

Another excellent road runs southward from Primiero to Pontetto, the limit of the Austrian frontier; but there, unfortunately, it is joined on the Italian side by a steep and very rough mule-track, which continues as far as Fonzaso. From Fonzaso, however, another carriage-road leads to Feltre, and at Feltre one is in the centre of a network of fine highways radiating to Belluno, Treviso, Bassano and Trient.

Less than ten years ago, Primiero was even more primitive than now. The daily posts, we are told, came in and went out on mule-back. No rattle of wheels disturbed the silent streets; no wheel-tracks scarred the pavement. At night, the good townsfolk went about with little twinkling lanthorns, and hung an oil-lamp here and there outside their doors. Things are not quite so Arcadian now. The letter-bags are carried for at least a few miles down the valley in a light caretta; the rattling of wheels has ceased to be regarded as a phenomenon; a gasometer has been erected near (too near) the entrance to the town; and the inhabitants are doing all they can to get a telegraphic wire in connection with Feltre.

The town is very clean, cheerful and picturesque. In the piazza on the flat, and in some of the side-streets (for there are side-streets in Primiero), one sees many large and really good houses. They call them

Palazzos. Some of these are built over great cavernous arched entrances, and lighted by Venetian twin-windows with ogive arched tops and twisted pillars. Some are enriched with elegant balconies of wrought iron; and on one door I observed an elaborate knocker and two handles in the form of half-length female figures of exquisite workmanship.

The German houses going up the hill—the foot-pavement of which, by the way, consists of squares of wood—are quite different. They have tiny windows filled with circular glass panes about three inches in diameter, and high steep roofs pierced by rows of dormers and surmounted by fantastic weather-cocks. The ancient Fürst Amt, with its quaint oriel turrets, loop-holed walls, mediæval windows, and rows of frescoed shields charged with faded armorial bearings, would be quite in its proper place if transported to Würzburg or Ulm. This curious building, which stands at the top of the hill just over against the church, was erected by the early silver-workers, probably as a kind of fortified guard-house, and as a place of deposit for their store of precious metal.

Many houses, both on the hill and down in the flat, are decorated externally with friezes and arabesques of a simple character; while over almost every house-door is painted up this pious phrase:—"Christus Nobiscum Stat."

Our first day in Primiero befell upon a Sunday. The church-bells began ringing merrily before five A.M., and went on till ten. The streets were thronged with peasants in their holiday clothes; and in the piazza sat a group of country-women with baskets of crimson cherries, little golden pears, and green lettuces

for sale. It was a gay and animated scene. The men with their knee-breeches, white stockings, conical felt hats, and jackets loosely thrown across one shoulder like a cloak, looked as if they had just stepped out of one of Pinelli's etchings. Some wore a crimson sash about the waist, and some a bunch of flowers and feathers in the hat. The women wore white cloths upon their heads tied corner-wise, and had the hair cut across the forehead in a Sévigné fringe. Their voices were curiously alike—soft, and deep, and guttural. Looking in at the church-door while mass was being performed, I saw the whole nave as one sea of white head-dresses, and for the moment fancied myself peeping once more into the chapel of the Beguinage at Bruges.

It is a gloomy church; externally more Tyrolean than German, with an unusually high steep roof and lofty spire; internally, of a severe, well-proportioned, thirteenth-century Gothic. Two recessed and canopied state-pews of old carved oak stand on either side of the principal entrance, facing the East window and the altar; and the armorial bearings of the silver-workers are emblazoned again on the walls of the chancel.

Having heard much of a certain antique silver Monstranz (or portable shrine for the exhibition of the Host) made of the pure silver of the Primiero mines and presented to the church by these same silver-workers some six hundred years ago, we waited till the congregation had dispersed, and then asked to be permitted to see it. A grave and gentlemanly young priest received us in the sacristy, and the Monstranz was taken out of a great oak press, as old

apparently as the church itself. This curious historical relic, preserved uninjured throughout all the vicissitudes of the middle ages, stands about two feet high—a light Gothic spire, in form somewhat like the spire of Milan Cathedral; surmounted by a gilt cross; and wrought into a multitude of delicate little pinnacles enclosing tiny niches peopled with figures of Evangelists and Saints.

Our curiosity gratified, we thanked the young Paroco and took our leave; whereupon, drawing himself up in a stately fashion, he wished us “*Viaggio sano, buon divertimento, e salute*”:—a kind of limited benediction fitted for the dismissal of well-dressed heretics.

It was impossible not to be continually startled that Sunday morning by the repeated discharges of musketry and small cannon which kept waking the mountain echoes round about, especially just before and after high mass. These came from the little hamlet of Transacqua on the other side of the Cis-mone, where the villagers were making high festa in honour of the arrival of a new Paroco. Walking that way towards evening, we found a green triumphal arch erected at the opening of the Transacqua road on the farther end of the bridge, and another at the entrance to the village. The porch was also festooned with garlands and devices.

All was now still. The Paroco had gone to his new home, and the villagers to their cottages. We strolled into the empty church, and saw by a little written notice wafered against the door, that it was dedicated to St. Mark—as might be expected in a parish that had once been a dependency of Venice.

"The Signoras have come to see our Titian," said a croaking voice at my elbow; "but it is too dark—too dark! It should be seen at midday, when the light comes in through the side-window."

I turned, and saw a shrivelled, slipshod sexton, all in black, with a big key in his hand. He had come to lock the church up, and found the forestieri inside.

Every insignificant little town, every obscure village that has ever belonged to Venice has its pretended Titian to show. Setting aside the Titians of Pieve di Cadore, which are unquestionably genuine, and one at Zoppé of which I shall have to tell by and by, there are dozens of others scattered through the country which it would be flattery to describe as even copies. There was one to be seen the other day, for instance, at Cencenighe; but having heard that it was more than doubtful, we preferred resting in the shelter of the albergo to toiling up to the church in the broiling sunshine.

The altar-piece at Transacqua is an ideal portrait of St. Mark, only the head and hands of which, however, are claimed as the work of Titian. It is said to have been presented to the church by one of the Doges of Venice. It looks a poor thing, seen thus in the gathering dusk; but the light is so bad that one may as well give its authenticity the benefit of the doubt.

The view from the bridge at evening, looking over towards Castel Pietra and the mountains at the head of the Primiero valley, is singularly wild and beautiful. The Cima Cimedà, bristling all over with peaks and pinnacles, like a porcupine; the Sas Maor, a mighty

double-headed monster, compared by Mr. Leslie Stephen to the upraised finger and thumb of a gigantic hand; the Cima di Ball, so called after the dauntless author of the "Alpine Guide;" and a long array of other summits, many of which are nameless to this day, here climb against the sky in strangest outline, and take the last glow of the Western sun.

I name them here from after knowledge; but, so many and so bewildering are these Primiero Dolomites, that it is not till one has been a day or two in the place, and has seen them again and again from various points of view, that one comes to identify them with anything like certainty. The Sas Maor—a corruption of Sasso Maggiore, or Great Rock—must, however, be excepted from this general assertion. It is a mountain which, once seen, can never be mistaken for any other; but which, at the same time, is only to be viewed under its most extraordinary aspect from either the Val Pravitale or the Val di Canali*—two diverging forks of the great upper valley behind Castel Pietra.

We devoted the Monday following our arrival to the Val di Canali, which is undoubtedly the great sight of Primiero. The way thither lies through Tonadigo, along the road by which we came down that weary Saturday evening, and up the stony steep crowned by Castel Pietra. Once at the top we bear away almost due north, leaving to the right the path leading to the Cereda pass, and striking up behind the castle along

* This use of the word "Canali," as applied to streams and torrents flowing in their own natural beds, affords a curious instance, among many others, of how the impress of Venetian thought yet lingers throughout these parts of Southern Tyrol. To the citizen of Venice, every river and rivulet was a canal; and where Venice gave her laws, she gave her phraseology also.

the left bank of a rapid torrent rushing down toward the valley.

Having followed this track for about three-quarters of an hour, we emerge upon an open space of grassy lawn about a mile in breadth by perhaps a mile and a-half in length, at the upper end of which stands a modest white house surrounded by sheds and farm-buildings. This little summer residence has been built of late years by Count Welsperg, who also owns a "palazzo" in Primiero, and whose ancestors (once seigneurs of all the valley, with power of life and death over their vassals) erected yonder castle which, perched on its inaccessible rock like St. Simeon Stylites on his solitary pillar, yet keeps watch and ward at the mouth of the valley. Dark fir-slopes enclose this pleasant prairie round about; the torrent brawls unseen in a bushy hollow to the left; cows and goats browse here and there on the green turf; while the whole pastoral scene is "set," as it were, in a cirque of Dolomite peaks of the first magnitude—a cirque with which the Circa Malcora, grand as it is, will not bear a moment's comparison. For the mountains surrounding the Val Buona lie out in a wide amphitheatre; but here the shattered walls of Dolomite, all grey and sulphur-streaked, and touched with rusty red, close in upon the valley in two long serried ranks, not more than a mile and a-half apart at their widest point, and narrowing till they meet in the form of an acute angle at the head of the glen.

Here, where the sward is smooth and the space yet broad between, two converging lines of peaks are already arrayed before our eyes—one extending nearly due East and West; the other running up from the

South-East to meet it. The first is far the grandest. Beginning with the Cima Cimedà—from behind which the Sas Maor shoots out its extraordinary impending thumb, more off the perpendicular than the leaning tower of Pisa—the chain leads on in one unbroken sweep, giving first a more distant glimpse of the Palle di San Martino; coming next upon the magnificent Cima di Fradusta; next after that upon two nameless lower peaks broken up into sheafs of splintered arrow-heads; lastly upon the Cima di Canali, apparently loftiest of all the range as seen from this point.*

* The loftiest of all the Primiero peaks (and indeed of all known Dolomites, except the Marmolata, which is supposed to exceed it by about 50 or 60 feet) is the Cimon della Pala, rising 11,000 feet above the level of the sea. But the Cimon della Pala is not seen from the Val di Canali, but lies up north of the Palle di San Martino in the upper valley of the Cismone. The relative heights of those peaks visible from the Val di Canali, as far as at present ascertained, are as follows:—Sas Maor about 10,000 feet; Palle di San Martino, 10,643 feet; Cima di Fradusta, something over 10,500 feet; Cima di Canali, about the height of the last named, but probably a few feet loftier. The height of the Sasso di Campo, which closes the head of the valley, is estimated at about 9,900 feet. Of these, so far as I have been able to gather from Alpine-Club authorities, the Sas Maor, Palle di San Martino, and Sasso di Campo have certainly not yet been ascended. In the last published edition of Ball's Guide to the Eastern Alps, 1870, p. 454, the Val di Canali is thus described:—"The main branch of the Cismone descending from nearly due N., receives a torrent from the N.E., issuing from Val di Canali. In the fork between these two branches rises the wonderful group of Dolomite peaks which must ever make this one of the most extraordinary of mountain valleys. Whatever fantastic forms that rock may assume elsewhere, they are here surpassed in boldness and strangeness. Of the five or six highest, all much exceeding 10,000 feet in height, there is but one that seems accessible. The others are mere towers or obelisks of rock, with sheer vertical faces, or else, as the highest peak, fashioned like a ruinous wall, abruptly broken away at one end, and cleft at frequent intervals along the ridge by chasms that appear perfectly impassable. In rock-climbing it is never safe to declare any place impracticable without actual trial. Narrow ledges and clefts give footing to a bold climber on many a seemingly impracticable declivity; but the writer's impression as to the Primiero peaks is confirmed by two of the most experienced mountaineers, Mr. F. F. Tuckett and Melchior Anderegg."

This reference to Mr. Tuckett's verdict is also alluded to in Mr. Leslie Stephens's article on "The Peaks of Primiero" in the *Alpine Journal* for February, 1870. The same story was repeated to myself by a Primiero guide, with the further addition that "il Tuckett" had said the Sas Maor could never be climbed "till a bridge was thrown across the chasm that divides the lower

No glaciers find a resting place among these perpendicular precipices. Only a narrow ledge outlined in white, or a tiny intermediate plateau sheeted with dazzling snow, serves here and there to mark the line of eternal frost.

Two small but very curious features in the scene deserve mention: these are two circular holes, one just piercing the top of a solitary sabre-blade splinter jutting out from a buttress of the anonymous peak next before the Cima di Canali on the left of the valley; and another precisely similar peep-hole piercing a precisely similar sabre-blade jutting out from a spur of the Sasso Ortiga on the right of the valley, precisely opposite. What may be the actual diameter of these strange holes, I am unable to guess; but they look as clean cut, and about as large as the shot-hole made by a large cannon-ball. Anyone who has ever visited the valley of Grindelwald will remember a similar orifice, locally known as Martinsloch, in the crest of the Eigher.

Waiting here only long enough to get the accompanying outline of the range as seen from Count Welsperg's meadow, we again push on; for clouds are already beginning to gather about the summit of the Cima di Canali, and we are still far from the head of the valley. Hence the path lies for a long way in the shade of the fir-woods; then by the side of the torrent bed—here very wide, and bordered by a broad tract

from the higher peak." All these tales, however, Mr. Tuckett, in reply to my own direct enquiry, emphatically refutes; adding that he never critically examined the Primiero peaks with a view to ascending any of them, and never at any time expressed any such opinion on the subject as that quoted by Messrs. Leslie and Ball.—A. B. E.

of glaring white stones; then through more woods, with openings here and there through which the great mountains are seen to be ever closing in, nearer and loftier. For the farther one penetrates up this wonderful glen, the more overwhelming is the effect, till the whole culminates at last in a scene of savage grandeur unsurpassed, if I may venture to say so, by even the great *impasse* at Macugnana.

By the time we reach this ultimate point, however, the rapid mists have already gathered in a way which, though it enhances the mystery and sublimity of the view, is yet sufficiently disappointing at the end of more than three hours' journey. The Sasso di Campo, which we are destined never to see clearly, is so shrouded in dense vapours that only the lower flanks of it are seen reaching up into the gloom. The huge Cima di Canali, visible less than an hour ago, towers overhead, already half lost in a heavy grey cloud. A long serrated line of stony Col uniting these two great masses, shows all striated and ribbed by the action of pre-historic glaciers. Green pastures, and above these, dark fir-woods, climb to about one third of the height of the Cima di Canali; while innumerable threads of white waterfall are seen leaping from ledge to ledge and wavering down the cliffs in every direction. These waters, gathered into three roaring torrents, hence rush down from three different points, and unite somewhat lower in one broad impetuous stream. The sound of them fills the air like the roaring of the sea upon an ironbound coast. The fir-trees shiver, as if a storm were at hand. I doubt if a more lonely, desolate, and tremendous scene is to be found this side of the Andes.

So many interesting excursions may be made from Primiero, that the traveller who has only two or three days to dispose of cannot hope to achieve even the half of them. The place, indeed, is one to be chosen for a lengthened sojourn, and treated as headquarters till the neighbourhood is exhausted. We regretted at the time that it was not in our power to do so. The ascent of Monte Pavione (an uncommon looking mountain in shape like a stunted pyramid, lying away to the S.W. of Primiero, and forming the highest point of the range known as the Vette di Feltre) is said not to be difficult. The view from the summit commands the whole sweep of the Adriatic coast from the mouth of the Isonza at the head of the Gulf of Trieste on the one side, to Chioggia, twenty miles south of Venice, on the other. Many rarest plants are also to be found on the mountain, amongst which the following are enumerated by Ball:—*Anemone baldensis*, *Anemone narcissiflora*, *Ranunculus Seguieri* and *Ranunculus Thora*, *Delphinium montanum*, *Papaver pyrenaicum*, *Arabis pumila*, *Alyssum Wulfenianum*, *Cochlearia brevicaulis*, *Alsine lanceolata*, *Alsine graminifolia*, *Cerastium tomentosum*, *Phaca frigida*, *Potentilla nitida*, *Saxifraga petraea*, *Valeriana elongata*, *Plarmica oxyloba*, *Scorzonera purpurea*, *Pæderota Ageria*, *Pæderota Bonarota*, *Pedicularis rosea*, *Primula Facchinii*, *Cortusa Matthioli*, *Avena Hostii*, and *Asplenium Seelosii*. This excursion involves a night, and a hay-bed, in a châlet on the Agnerola Alp at the foot of the Pavione rocks; but this is a difficulty that would not have deterred us, had we been travelling in a larger party.

The ascent of Monte Arzon, a mountain rising about 8,700 feet, and situated in a fine central position

about three miles N.W. of Primiero, is also strongly recommended by the local guides.

A very interesting excursion, however, and one which can be accomplished all the way on mules, is to the Ponte dello Schios on Monte Vederne, a small wooded mountain bordering the west bank of the Cismone, about three miles below Primiero. The way thither lies along the main road as far as the villages of Mezzano and Imer; thence over the Cismone bridge, and up a rough caretta track all black underfoot from charcoal droppings, which skirts the pine-slopes overhanging the gorge of the Noana. The path rises and winds continuously. The Primiero valley is left behind and soon lost to sight. The torrent down below becomes inaudible. We meet a train of mules laden with huge black sacks of charcoal, and have to back up against the rock to let them pass. They, however, according to the nature of mules, prefer the brink of the precipice, and pick their way past with half their bulky burdens overhanging the abyss.

At length, when we have mounted to a height of perhaps fifteen hundred feet above the valley, we pass under an impending roof of rock, and find ourselves at the mouth of a gigantic cavern which looks as if it might have been scooped out by some mighty water-power ages ago, when the world was yet unfinished. Beyond this cavern there rises a semi-circular wall of vertical precipice, at the end of which a small cascade leaps out over the ledge and is dispersed in mist before it reaches the brown pool below. Our path turns abruptly into and round the inside of the cavern, and then along a giddy wooden shelf supported on pine-trunks driven into the face of the rock-wall opposite,

This is the Ponte dello Schios. The shelf looks horribly unsafe, but is extremely picturesque; and the whole scene, though on a grander scale, reminds one of the cavern and wooden gallery at Tivoli. A little carved and painted Christ under a pent-house roof is fixed against the rock, just at the beginning of the bridge; and an old white-haired man coming down that way, pulls off his hat and stays to mutter an Ave as we pass.

From this point, a short ascent of about another thousand feet would bring us out, we are told, upon the Agnerola Alp; but we dare go no farther, for the sun is already near setting, and we fear to be overtaken by the dusk. Still it is none the less tantalising to find that we have made nearly one third of the ascent to Monte Pavione without knowing it.

Leaving Primiero for Predazzo . . . but stay; how can I leave Primiero without one word of Signor Prospero?—Signor Prospero, genial, fussy, courteous, enthusiastic, indefatigable, voluble; Signor Prospero, whose glory it is to be a member of the Italian Club Alpino; who believes the British nation to be the most enlightened that the sun shines upon; who so worships the very names of Ball and Leslie Stephens that he all but takes his hat off when he mentions them, as if they were his patron saints; who vaguely imagines that every English tourist must be in some way or other illustrious; that all our autographs are worth having; and that the universal family of Smith represents the flower of the human race!

Shall I ever forget that blazing afternoon when, gaitered, white-hatted, his garments buttoned all awry

and a striped silk umbrella under his arm, he escorted me to Signor Sartoris's museum and apiary?—or that evening when he came to call, and we entertained him on the landing, and he talked for two hours without stopping about State Education, the Darwin theory, the Calculating Machine, Capital punishment, Pre-historic Man, the Atlantic cable, Universal Suffrage, Positivism, the Solar Spectrum, the Alabama claims, the sources of the Nile, the Prussian military system, Liberty of the Press, the Armstrong gun, the Suez canal, the Eruption of Vesuvius, and the Rights of Women! A kindly, benevolent, public-spirited old man, eager to promote something like culture and progress in his native town, and interested in all that stirs the great outer world beyond his ken! To establish a more rapid system of postal communication, to get the wire brought over from Feltre, to improve the teaching in the Primiero schools, and to found a local newspaper—these are among the dreams that he is striving to realise. The little Teatro Sociale (for Primiero has its tiny amateur theatre and corps dramatique) is of his creation, and under his management. The new road to Predazzo would not have been put in hand, probably, for the next ten years, but for the energy with which he was continually agitating the question in Primiero.

"Ecco, signora," he said, unconsciously quoting the dying words of Goethe, "what we want in our little valley is *more light*. Our people are not poor, but they dwell in the darkness of ignorance. We have schools for the children, it is true; but then what is to be done with their parents who regard geography as an invention of—*con rispetto*—the Devil?"

I think it was that same evening, when all the lamps were out and the little world of Primiero had well-nigh dropped into its first sound sleep, that we heard a delicious tenor, rich and sweet and powerful, ring out suddenly through the silence of the night. It began a little distance off—died away—came back again—then ceased close under our windows. The air was Verdi's, hackneyed and commonplace enough; but the voice was fresh and faultless, and belonged, as we learned next day, to young Bonetti, the second son of our landlady. He told us that his name was already entered on the books of the Conservatoire of Milan, and that he was to begin his vocal studies in November. It is said that so fine a voice has not been heard within the walls of the Academy for more than a quarter of a century.

With regard to Signor Sartoris, just named, he seems to have raised Apiculture to the dignity of a science. Self-taught, he has discovered how to regulate the productiveness of the race, and is said to be able, unhurt and unstung, to take in his hand and transfer from hive to hive the Queen-bee and her court. How far this may be true I cannot say; but I saw his museum and his apiary—the former a collection of all the bees, beetles, butterflies, woods, minerals, and chemical products of the district—the other a Ghetto of hives, one hundred and fifty in number, containing a population of several millions of bees, the whole packed into a tiny back-garden less than an eighth of an acre in extent. His father and sister show these things with pardonable pride; but Signor Sartoris no longer lives in Primiero. Though not yet thirty years of age, he has been appointed

Director of a Government apiary at Milan, and is there developing his system with extraordinary success.

And now we must say farewell to Primiero and all its notabilities; we must say farewell and be going again, for there are yet many places to be seen and many miles to be traversed, and the pleasantest tours and the brightest summers cannot last for ever. So away we ride again, one bright early morning, overwhelmed with good wishes and kind offices, and presented by Signora Bonetti with a parting testimonial in the form of a big cake—so big that it can hardly be got into the basket.

Our way lies by the new military road as far as it is yet completed, and along the Val Cismone—that great valley which descends from the north-west, running parallel with the Val Pravitale, and divided from it by the range that ends with the Cima Cimedà. Following almost the same course at first as the old road, and crossing the stream near Siror (where may yet be seen the entrance to the ancient silver-mine), the new “strada” then strikes up in a series of bold zigzags, and is carried at a great height along the precipitous slopes bordering the west bank of the torrent. Up here all is silent, all is solitary. A couple of Austrian gendarmes—a little group of cantonniers at work upon the road—a tiny donkey staggering under a gigantic load of hay; these are all the living things we meet for hours. But the great mountains on the opposite side of the valley keep us solemn company during many a mile—a wonderful chain of Dolomite peaks, less incredible in outline, perhaps,

than those of the Val di Canali, but rising to a more uniformly lofty elevation.

One by one, we pass them in review. First comes the Cima Cimedà, called by Mr. Gilbert the Procession Mountain, but, to my thinking, more like some strange petrified sea-monster bristling all over with gigantic feelers; next come the mighty leaning towers of the Sas Maor; then the Cima Cimerla (so called from the Cimerla woods below), the Cima Pravitale, and the Cima di Ball, three names as yet not entered in the maps; lastly the vast perpendicular wall of the Palle di San Martino, which rises grander and steeper with every foot of the road, and seems to fill the scene. At length, however, we turn away from this great panorama, through a pine-wood and across a green undulating Alp all ablaze with gorgeous golden lilies; and so arrive at the tiny church and rambling Hospice of San Martino.

Arriving here after four hours of easy riding, we pause to take half-an-hour's rest before attacking the Costonzella pass. It is a large, dirty, ruinous place—once a monastery; then a feudal residence; now an inn and farm-house combined. It was built somewhere about the middle of the eleventh century, while Edward the Confessor was yet reigning here in England, and when the Bishops of Trent were lords of Primiero. It was these spiritual rulers who erected the church, the monastery, and the Hospice, and dedicated them to San Martino.

Having ordered coffee, we are shown up into a big upper room at the end of a wilderness of passages. It has been a grand room once upon a time

—perhaps the prior's own snugger; perhaps a guest-chamber for travellers of distinction. The walls and ceiling are all oak, panelled in sunk squares ornamented with bosses and richly carved. A carved shield charged with the Welsperg arms in faded gold and colours commemorates the time when the building had ceased to be a monastery and become a baronial residence. Old family portraits of dead-and-gone Welspergs hang all awry upon the walls and stand piled in corners, draped in cobwebs and loaded with the dust of years—courtiers in flowing wigs, prelates in lace, doughty commanders in shining cuirasses. A certain “Princess Canonicus” in a religious dress, with long white hands that Vandyke might almost have painted, must have been pretty in her day, if the old limner did not flatter her. These bygone lords and ladies, together with a curious old porcelain stove in blue and white Delft, two squalid beds, a deal table, and four straw-bottomed chairs, are all the furniture the room contains. It ought to be a haunted chamber, and is the very place in which to lay the scene of a ghost story. The whole house, indeed, has a fine murderous look about it, and is as solitary, forlorn, and mediæval a place as any sensation novelist could desire for a *mise en scène*.

The good road ends at San Martino; that is to say, it extends in an unfinished, impassable state for another two or three miles; but we strike straight up the Col by a wild glen and over a grassy slope thick with crimson Alp-roses, till all at once we find ourselves on the summit of the pass, standing just below the base of the Cimon della Pala. The air up here

is cold and rare. The pass rises to a height of 6,657 feet; the stupendous Dolomite wall above our heads towers up to 11,000 feet, of which more than 3000 feet are sheer, overhanging precipice. In form it is like a gigantic headstone, with a pyramidal coping-stone on the top. Terrific vertical fissures which look as if ready to gape and fall apart at any moment, give a frightful appearance of insecurity to the whole mass. Not the Matterhorn itself, for all its cruel look and tragic story, impresses one with such a sense of danger, and such a feeling of one's own smallness and helplessness, as the Cimon della Pala.

Looking back from this elevation in the direction of Primiero, we get a wonderful view of the Palle di San Martino, the Sas Maor, and the summits of the Val di Canali; beyond these the Pavione and the Vette di Feltre; and beyond these again, a vast troubled sea of pale blue and violet peaks some of which encompass the lake of Garda, and some watch over the towers of Verona.

And now the clouds, which for the last hour or two have been gathering at our heels, begin driving up the pass and scudding across the face of the great Dolomite. Soon all the lower summits are obscured; the vapours roll up in angry masses; and the huge peaks now vanish, now look out fitfully, in gloom and storm-cloud.

Passing an unfinished building (presumably a new Hospice) on the top of the pass, we emerge upon the Costonzella Alp. Here an entirely new panorama is unfolded before our eyes. The great prairie undulates away to a vast distance underfoot; to the

North opens another sea of peaks terminating with the summits beyond Innspruck; to the East lie wooded hills and rich pasturages; to the West a steep descent of apparently interminable pine-forest bounded by a new range of dark, low, purple peaks streaked here and there with snow. The loftiest and nearest of these is the Monte Colbricon. It needs no geological knowledge to see at once that these new mountains are not Dolomite; or that we are, in fact, entering upon the first outlying porphyries of Predazzo.

The path now turns abruptly to the left and plunges down through the steep pine forest. Somewhere among those green abysses, half-way between here and Predazzo, lies the Hospice of Paneveggio, where we are to dine and take our mid-day rest. On the verge of the dip we dismount, promising ourselves to walk so far, and leaving the men and mules to follow. It is a grand forest. The primeval pines up here are of gigantic size, rising from eighty to over a hundred feet, enormous in girth, and garlanded with hoary grey-green moss, the growth of centuries. Except only the pines close under the summit of the Wengern Alp on the Grindelwald side, I have never seen any so ancient and so majestic. As we descend they become smaller, and after the first five or six hundred feet, dwindle to the average size.

A fairly good path, cool and shady, carried down for a distance of more than 1500 feet in a series of bold zigzags, and commanding here and there grand sweeping views of forest slope and valley, brings us at the end of two hours' rapid walking to an open space of green pasture, in the midst of which are

clustered a wee church, a pretty white hostelry, and a group of picturesque farm-buildings. Steep hillsides of pine-woods enclose this little nest on every side. There is a pleasant sound of running water, and a tinkling of cow-bells, on the air. The hay-makers on the grassy slope behind the house are singing at their work—singing what sounds like an old German chorale, in four parts. It is a delicious place; so peaceful, so pastoral, so clean, that we are almost tempted to change our plans, and stay here altogether till to-morrow.

By and by, however, when the two hours have expired and the mules are brought round, we go on again, though regretfully. At this point, we enter the Val Travignolo; here only a deep torrent-gorge between steep woods, but broadening out by and by into corn-fields and pasture meadows rich in all kinds of wild lilies, orange, and silver-white, and pinky turksaps speckled with dull crimson. Thus, always descending, and overtaken every now and then by light showers followed by bursts of fleeting sunshine, we arrive, at the end of nearly three more hours, in sight of Predazzo, a widely scattered village in a green basin at the end of the valley. It looks like a prosperous place. The houses are large and substantial, with jutting Tyrolean eaves. Two church spires rise high above the clustered roofs. Farm-buildings and Swiss-looking brown chalets are scattered over the green slopes that circle round the town; and as we draw nearer, we find ourselves traversing an extensive suburb of saw-mills and timber yards, which here skirt both banks of the torrent.

And now, following at the tail of a long procession of grave, cream-coloured cows, all shod like

horses with iron shoes, and carrying enormous bells about their necks—we make our entry into the town. The children run out into the road and shout at our approach. The elder folks come to their house-doors and stare in silence. The Austrian gendarme at the door of the guard-house lifts two fingers to the side of his cap in military fashion, as we pass. Then, emerging upon an open space of scattered houses surrounding the two churches, we find ourselves at the door of a large, old-fashioned, many-windowed inn, the very counterpart of the ancient “Stern” at Innsbruck, over the arched entrance to which swings a gilded ship—the sign of the Nave d’Oro.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FASSA THAL AND THE FEDAJA PASS.

A Village in a Crater—Predazzo and its Commerce—Prosperity *versus* Picturesqueness—Footsteps of the Etruscans—The Val d’Avisio—Moena—The Porphyry of the Fassa Thal—Vigo and the Fat Maiden—Campidello—Monte Vernale—The Gorge of the Avisio—The Fedaja Alp and the Fedaja Lake—The Gorge of Sottoguda again—Home to Caprile.

THE most unscientific observer sees at a first glance that the lakes of Albano and Nemi occupy the craters of extinct volcanos. The craters are there, cup-like, distinct, and tell their own story. You must climb a mountain-side to get to the level of them. You stand on the rim of one; you look down into it; you may walk all round it; or descend to the water-level at the bottom. Nothing can be clearer, or more satisfactory. But it is startling to be told that Predazzo occupies