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Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys

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Chapter XIII. Forno di Zoldo and Zoppé

which are continually seen from other heights) is of the greatest interest. I doubt, indeed, if there be any other point from which all the giants of the district can be seen at once, and to so much advantage.

CHAPTER XIII.

FORNO DI ZOLDO AND ZOPPÉ.

On the Road again—Near View of the Civita—Adventure with a Snake—Monte Fernazza—Monte Coldai—The Marmolata from the Pass of Alleghe—Unexpected View of the Pelmo—The Mountains of Val di Zoldo—The Back of the Civita—The Valley of Zoldo—The Horrors of Cercena's Inn—The Sculptor of Bragarezza—Zoppé; its Parocco, and its Titian—Luncheon in a Tyrolean Country-house—Brusetolon and his Works—Specimen of a Native—Valley and Pass of Pallafavera—In the Shade of the Pelmo—Pescul—Selva and the Aborigines—Caprile again.

THERE remained yet another important excursion to be taken from Caprile, before we could finally break up our camp and depart. We must go over the Pass of Alleghe; visit the Val di Zoldo; make a pilgrimage to a certain village called Zoppé, where a Titian was to be seen, and come home by way of the Val Fiorentina. Now the main attractions of this expedition did not appear upon the surface. We had been over a good many passes already, and through a good many valleys, and had been plentifully pelted with Titians of all degrees of genuineness; but what we really wanted was to see the back of the Civita, and to get a near view of the Pelmo. As both of these ends would be answered by following the route thus laid down, and as the expedition was guaranteed not to exceed three days, we once more packed our black bags, stocked the luncheon-basket, rose at day-break one fine morning, and departed. This time,

young Cesare Pezzé, the ex-Garibaldian, having a married sister at Piève di Zoldo whom he wished to see, volunteered to walk with us—a soldierly, upright, picturesque fellow, with his coat flung loosely across one shoulder, a yellow silk handkerchief tied corner-wise round his throat, a bunch of carnations in his hat, and an alpenstock in his hand.

This time, as last time, our way lies at first beside the lake; but strikes away presently behind the village of Alleghe and up a delicious little valley, thick with walnuts and limes, and threaded by a bright torrent that fills many a moss-grown water-trough and turns many an old brown wheel. The path, rising and winding continually, passes farm-lands and farm-houses; barns, orchards, gardens; green slopes striped with rows of yellow flax laid down to bleach in the sun; and terraces after terraces of wheat, barley, flax, hemp, potatoes, and glossy-leaved, tassel-blossomed Indian corn.

And as the path rises, so also rises the Civita, its lower precipices detaching themselves in grand proportions from the main mass, while every riven pinnacle, spire, obelisk and needle-point, stands out sharply against the deep blue sky. Thus the mountain grows in grandeur with every upward foot of the way. White patches that looked like snow-drifts from the valley, now show as glaciers coated with snow, through which the blue ice glitters; and by-and-by, as we draw still nearer, another of those strange circular holes, or "occhi" as they are here called, stares down at us from near the top of a small peak, like a hole drilled in a dagger-blade. So, with exquisite glimpses over the bluish-green lake, we emerge at length from

the gorge, and climb a steep, stony lane with never a tree on either side to screen off the burning sun.

Suddenly a long steel-blue snake speckled with white, darts out from under the very feet of white Nessol! Clementi utters a wild war-whoop—L. a scream—the mule a snort of terror! Giuseppe and young Pezzé leap forward with their sticks, and in a second the poor reptile (which is as thick as one's wrist and about four feet in length, but I believe quite harmless) lies dead by the wayside.

The stony path now leads out upon a wild and desolate mule-track skirting the grim flanks of Monte Fernazza—a gruesome mountain whose low black precipices have crashed down before now in many a bergfall, covering the barren slopes with shattered débris and huge purple blocks all blistered over with poisonous-looking lichens. Winding now round the head of the glen by which we have come up from Alleghe, we arrive at last upon a grassy plateau at the foot of an overhanging cliff which, though locally called the Monte Coldai, is in truth the huge north-eastern shoulder of the Civita. Above here, in a hollow among the rocks, nestles a small tarn called the Lago Coldai, said to command a fine view; but which we had not time to climb to.

Beyond Monte Coldai, the way lies up a fine rock-strewn gorge, just like the gorge of the Avisio where it leads up to the Fedaja Alp. Gradually we lose sight of the long, fretted façade of the Civita, which retires behind the Coldai rocks, and, looking back, find that the lake has sunk quite out of sight. The Sasso Bianco, which till now had been standing out against the sky, has all at once dropped below the

horizon, and is immeasurably overtopped by the towering altitudes of the Marmolata. The Boé, the Cima di Pape, the Monte Vernale, the Sasso di Val Fredda, and many another now-familiar peak, have also risen into view. But it is the Marmolata that claims all one's attention, and seems to fill the scene. Presently, an obstinate cloud that has been clinging to the highest point of the summit clears off little by little, and leaves the whole noble mass distinctly relieved against the western sky.

"Guardate!" says young Pezzé, seeing a sketch in preparation. "La Marmolata has thrown her veil aside to have her portrait taken."

It is a grand view of the mountain, even though its snows and glaciers are all out of sight. From here, as from the Sasso Bianco, one sees its true form and its actual summit; while of the one no idea can be formed, and of the other no vestige is visible, from either the Tre Sassi or the Fedaja. Clementi can even identify the tiny topmost patch of snow on which F. F. T. placed his barometer when he reached the summit.

And now a grassy Col, about a quarter of an hour ahead, is pointed out as the summit of the pass. There we shall see the mountains of Val di Zoldo, and take our midday rest in whatever shady spot we can find. There too, as young Pezzé pleasantly prophesies, we shall be within reach of a *châlet* where milk, and even cream, may be purchased. So we press on eagerly, but, stopping suddenly a little below the top, are amazed to see the Pelmo—snow-ridged, battlemented, stupendous—shoot up all at once, as it seems, from behind the slopes and fir-woods to the

left of the pass, as near us as the Civita! Large masses of vapour are rising and falling round those mighty towers, never leaving them wholly uncovered for an instant; but they look all the mightier for that touch of mystery.

And now a few yards higher, and the Marmolata, the Sasso Bianco, the Boé, and all the rest, disappear together; and a lovely grassy plain dotted over with strewn rocks and clumps of firs, and bounded by a line of mountain peaks as wild and fantastic as anything we have yet seen, lies spread out in sunshine before us. This, according to the map, must be the grand chain of which Monte Pramper and Monte Piacedel (both as yet unascended) are the dominating summits.

Up here we encamp for an hour and a-half, Sub Jove; and the mules graze while we take luncheon. Clementi vanishes up the hill-side, and returns by and by with a bowl of cream in each hand, which, beaten up with wine and sugar, and eaten in the midst of such a scene, is at least as delicious as the "dulcet creams" prepared by Eve for the Angel's entertainment. Meanwhile the cow-herd comes down from the chalet to stare at the forestieri, and is so overpaid with half a lire that I begin to fear we must have given him a piece of gold by mistake.

A deep, narrow gorge now leads down from a little below the summit of the pass, to a point whence the Val di Zoldo—sunny, cultivated, sparkling with villages and spires—opens out far and wide beneath our feet.

And now, at last, we see the back of the Civita. Accustomed as one has become to the strangely dif-

ferent aspects under which a Dolomite is capable of presenting itself from opposite points of the compass, here is a metamorphosis which the most erratic imagination could never have foreseen. To say that the Civita is unrecognisable from the Zoldo side is to say nothing; for the mountain is so strangely unlike itself that, although one has, so to say, but just turned the corner of it, the discrepancy in form, in character, and apparently also in extent, is almost past acceptance. Calm, perpendicular, majestic on the side of Alleghe, here it is wild, tossed, tormented, and irregular. From Alleghe it appears as a vast, upright, symmetrical screen—here it consists of a long succession of huge, straggling buttresses divided by wild glens, the birth-places of mists and torrents. If from Caprile the mountain looks, as I have said more than once, like a mighty organ, from here it seems as if each vertical pipe in that organ-front were but the narrow end of rock in which each of these buttresses terminates. Looking at them thus in lateral perspective, I can compare them, wild and savage as they are, to nothing save that vista of exquisitely carved and decorated flying buttresses just below the roof of Milan Cathedral, which is known as the Giardino Botanico.

The Civita was first ascended by Mr. F. F. Tuckett, who gives the height at about 10,440 feet. The summit, snow-crowned and lonely, is plainly seen from this side, and looks as if it might be reached without serious difficulty.

The Valley of Zoldo is richly cultivated; the farm-houses are solidly built; and the whole district wears a face of smiling prosperity. The usual little dusty hamlets with the usual religious frescoes on the prin-

cipal house-fronts, the usual little white church, and the usual village fountain, follow one another rather more thickly than in most other valleys. At San Nicolo, where the valley narrows and the rocks close in upon the rushing Maé far below, we enter upon an excellent carriage-road which goes from this point, by an immense *détour*, to Longarone. At a certain village called Dont, some way below San Nicolo, we had proposed to pass the night; but being daunted by the dirt and general disorder of the inn, push on for Forno di Zoldo where Ball's Guide reports "comfortable quarters at Cercena's inn."

Here we arrive at the end of another three-quarters of an hour, and alight at the door of a very large, very old, and very dirty-looking house up a small steep street in the heart of the village. Passing through a gloomy stone kitchen where some fifteen or twenty harvesters are eating polenta out of wooden platters, we are shown up a dark staircase and into a large room, the floor of which is encrusted with the filth of centuries. The sofa, the chairs, the window-curtains look as if dropping to pieces with age and only held together by cobwebs. The windows open on a steep side-lane where all the children in the place presently congregate, for no other purpose than to flatten their noses against the panes and stare at us, till candles are brought, and curtains can be drawn to exclude them. As for the landing, which in most Tyrolean inns is the cleanest and smartest place in the house, it is the dreariest wilderness of old furniture, old presses, old saddles and harness, sacks, undressed skins, and dusty lumber of all kinds, that was ever seen or heard of outside the land of the Don.

Yet the Cercenas themselves are well-mannered superior people, and their forefathers have owned estates in Val di Zoldo for over five hundred years. The daughter-in-law of the house, a pretty, refined-looking young woman, waits upon us, and is made quite wretched by our few and modest requirements. We are not, I think, unreasonable travellers; but we have been riding and walking for nearly twelve hours, and wish, not unnaturally, for water, towels, food, and coffee. For all these things we have to wait interminably. That we should require a table-cloth is a serious affliction, and that we cannot sup, like the hay-makers, off polenta, is almost more than young Signora Cercena knows how to bear. A few small lumps of smoke-blackened meat, a dish of unwashed salad, and some greasy fritters are at length brought; and this young lady, while professing, I imagine, to wait at table, walks over quite coolly to a looking-glass at the farther end of the room, and there deliberately tries on L.'s hat and all my rings and bracelets.

It is a dreadful supper, and is followed by a dreadful night—hot, and close, and wakeful, and enlivened in a way that has associated Forno di Zoldo for ever in my mind with that Arab proverb which describes Malaga as a city “where the fleas are always dancing to the tunes played by the mosquitoes.”

The mules are brought round early next morning, for we have a long day before us. Zoppé, distant rather more than three hours from Forno di Zoldo, has to be visited in the morning; and at two P.M., on our way back, we have promised, in compliance with Signora Pezzé's particular request, to call upon her

married daughter who lives at Piève di Zoldo, about a quarter of an hour above Forno. While we are at breakfast, it being then a little after five A.M., the church-bells ring out a merry peal. Concluding that it is either a Saint's-Day or a wedding, I enquire what the joyful occasion may be, and learn, not without surprise, that an old and highly respected inhabitant has just given up the ghost.

The Val di Zoppé, sometimes called the Val di Rutorto, branches away from the Val di Zoldo at an acute angle from a point a little below Forno, and runs off northward towards the Pelmo. Our way thither lies at first through a chain of villages—Campo, Pieve, Dozza, Prà, and Bragarezza. Passing Pieve, we are met by Cesare Pezzé who is to take us to the studio of a certain self-taught wood-sculptor named Valentino Gamba. He lives at Bragarezza—a miserable, tumble-down hamlet on a steep hill-side a mile or two farther on, where we first catch sight of him sitting in a desponding attitude on the doorstep of a small cottage.

Being addressed by young Pezzé and invited to show his studio, he jumps up in red confusion, and leads the way into a little back room where stands an enormous oval frame of carved pine-wood destined for the Vienna Exhibition of the present year (1873). It is an unwieldy, overdone thing, loaded with Arabesques, fruits, flowers, musical instruments, Cupids, and the like; too big; too heavy; fit neither for a mirror nor a picture; but quite wonderful as an effort of untaught genius. An ideal bust of Italia, also in wood, is full of sweet and subtle expression, and pleases me better than the frame.

What possesses me, that I should enquire the price of that bust? It is life-size, and weighs—heaven only knows how much it weighs, but certainly as much as all our scanty baggage put together! I have no sooner asked the unlucky question than, seeing the flash of hope in the poor fellow's face, I reproach myself for having done so. He only asks two hundred lire for it—less than eight pounds—but I could no more be burthened with it on such a journey than with the church steeple. So I ask for his card, and, promising to bid my English friends look out for his frame next summer in Vienna, take my leave with the awkward consciousness of having said more than I intended.

From Bragarezza, the way lies between forest-clad hills up a constantly rising valley. The farther we go, the steeper and rougher the path becomes; the more desolate the valley; the more noisy the torrent. Then at last we have to dismount and let the mules scramble on alone. Now the Pelmo, as yesterday, comes suddenly into sight; its huge, tawny, snow-ridged* battlements rising close behind a near hill-side—so close that it seems towering above our heads. And presently—for we are only just in time to see it clearly for a few minutes—a great white cloud sails slowly up from somewhere behind, wrapping the mountain round as with a mantle, so that we only catch flitting fragmentary glimpses of it now and then, through openings in the mist.

Finally Zoppé, a tiny brown village and white church perched high on a green mountain side, looks

* These snow-ridges, which I have likened elsewhere to the steps of a gigantic throne, are chiefly remarkable on the sides facing Zoppé and the Val d'Ampezzo. From the Val Fiorentina they are much less observable.

down upon us from the top of a steep path full 400 feet above the valley.

That little white church contains the Titian which is the glory of all this country-side. A long pull up the hill in broiling sunshine brings us at last to the houses and the church. The door stands open, and, followed by all the men out of a neighbouring wood-yard, we pass into the cool shade within. There, over the high altar, hangs the Titian, uncurtained, dusty, dulled by the taper-smoke of centuries of masses. It is a small picture measuring about four feet by three, and represents the Virgin and Child enthroned, supported by San Marco and San Girolamo, with Santa Anna sitting on the steps of the throne. It is, on the whole, a perplexing picture. The Madonna and child, painted in the dry, hard style of the early German school, look as if they could not possibly have come from Titian's brush; the San Girolamo and Santa Anna scarcely rise above mediocrity; but the head and hands of San Marco are really fine, and go far to redeem the rest of the picture. The colour, too, is rich and solid throughout.

This altar piece, painted, it is said, by order of one of the Palatini in 1526, is classed by Mr. Gilbert among the "very few indubitable Titians" yet preserved among the painter's native mountains; but notwithstanding its reputation, I find it difficult to believe that the great master painted much more than the head and hands of San Marco.

The Paroco, hearing that there were strangers in the church, came presently to do the honours of his Titian. He was a fat, rosy, pleasant little priest, redolent of garlic, and attired in light-blue shorts, a

light-blue waistcoat, grey worsted stockings, and a long, black clerical coat, worn bottle-green with age. He chattered away quite volubly, telling how Titian had once upon a time come up to Zoppé for villeggiatura in time of plague; and how he had then and there painted the picture by order of the aforesaid noble, who desired to place it in the church as a thank-offering; also how it had hung there venerated and undisturbed for centuries, till the French came this way in the time of the First Napoleon, and threatened to rob the Commune of their treasure, whereupon the men of Zoppé made a wooden cylinder, and rolled the picture on it, and buried it in a box at the foot of a certain tree up in the forest.

"And look!" said the Paroco, "you may see the marks of the cylinder upon the canvas to this day. And we have the cylinder still, Signora—we have the cylinder still!"

I said something, I no longer remember what, to the effect that a genuine Titian was worth taking care of, and that the Commune could not value it too highly.

"Value it!" he repeated, bristling up rather unnecessarily. "Value it, Signora! Of course we value it. Many governments have offered to buy it. We could sell it for three thousand gold ducats to-morrow, if we chose. Ebbene! we are only six hundred souls up here in the Paese. Our men are poor—all poor—contadini in summer, legnatori in winter; but no price will purchase our Titian!"

We afterwards learned that this public-spirited little Paroco had been a mighty chamois-hunter in

his youth, and one of the first to scale the fastnesses of the Pelmo.

Now we leave Zoppé on its hill-side and come down again into the valley, catching by the way some wonderful glimpses of strange peaks peeping out through mist and cloud in the direction of Monte Sforioi and the Premaggiore range. And now, after a brief halt in the shade of a clump of trees beside a spring, we go on again, descending all the way, till we find ourselves back at Pieve di Zoldo and alighting at the gate of a large white house, where we are welcomed by young Pezzé's sister, Signora Pellegrini. Now Signora Pellegrini has married a man both wealthy and well descended, and lives in a large, plentiful, patriarchal way, much as our English gentry lived in the time of the Tudors. She carries her keys at her girdle, and herself superintends her dairy, her cows, her pigs, her poultry, and her kitchen. Being ushered up a spacious staircase, and across a landing hung with family portraits of Pellegrinis who were once upon a time Bishops, Priors, Captains, and powdered Seigneurs in ruffles and laced coats, we are shown into a reception room where a table is laid for luncheon.

The master of the house is unavoidably absent, being gone to a cattle-fair at Longarone; but Cesare Pezzé takes his place at table, where everything is fresh, abundant, home-made, and delicious.

After luncheon, we go to see the church—a large structure with a fine Gothic nave, containing two or three curious early Italian pictures, and an important carved altar-piece by Andrea Brusetolon, the Grinling Gibbons of South Tyrol, born in this valley of Zoldo

in the year 1662. It is a quaint, strange subject, admirably executed, but not pleasant to look upon. They call it the Altare degli Animi, or Altar of the Souls. Two figures intended to represent Human Suffering and Human Sorrow, each attended by a warning skeleton, support the entablature on each side. Two angels and a Pietà crown it on the top. The execution is excellent, but the impression produced by the work is infinitely painful.

That evening we wander about the fields and lanes beyond the village, and the writer sketches some wild peaks (called by some the Monte Serrata, and by others the Monte Rochetta) which are seen from every point of view about the place. There is, of course, the customary difficulty of keeping intruders at bay. One old woman in wooden clogs, having looked on for a long time from her cottage-door, comes hobbling out, and surveys the sketch with a ludicrous expression of bewilderment.

"Why do you do that?" she asks, pointing with one skinny finger, and peering up sidewise into my face, like a raven.

I answer that it is in order to remember the mountain when I shall be far away.

"And will *that* make you remember it?" says she, incredulously.

To this I reply that it will not only answer that purpose, but even serve to make it known to many of my friends who have never been here. This, however, is evidently more than she can believe.

"And where do you come from?" she asks next—after a long pause.

"From a country you have no doubt heard of many a time," I reply. "From England."

"From England! Jesu Maria! From England! And where is England? *Is it near Milan?*"

Being told that it is much more distant than Milan and in quite the opposite direction, she is so confounded that she can only shake her head in silence, and hobble back again. When she is half-way across the road, however, she stops short, pauses a moment to consider, and then comes back, armed with one last question.

"Ecco!" she says. "Tell me this—tell me the truth—why do you come here at all? Why do you travel?"

To this I reply, of course, that we travel to see the country.

"To see the country!" she repeats, clasping her withered hands. "Gran' Dio! Have you, then, no mountains and no trees in England?"

That evening when we are at supper, Giuseppe comes up to say that the young sculptor is below, having brought the bust over from Bragarezza, to know if I will make him an offer for it. Having brought the bust over! I picture him toiling with it along the dusty road—I see him as I saw him this morning, pale, anxious-looking, out-at-elbows; and for the moment I feel as if it were my fate to yield, and buy. Seeing me waver, L. pronounces me a dangerous lunatic, and even Giuseppe ventures respectfully to represent that if the Signora were really to purchase the "testa di legno" we should in future require an extra mule to carry it. So—not daring to see him,

lest I should commit the foolish deed—I send down a polite refusal, and hear of the poor fellow no more.

We are off again next morning by half-past five, thankful to see the last of Forno di Zoldo, with its filthy inn, its forges, and its noisy iron-trade. Far down by the torrent-side in the steep hollow below the village, there may be seen long rows of workshops whence the smoke of many fires is always rising. Here the men of Zoldo, who are for the most part blacksmiths, have made nails from time immemorial, sending their goods down on mule-back to Longarone, and getting up in the same way stores of old iron from Ceneda, Conegliano, and even Venice.

We are returning to-day to Caprile by a pass leading from the head of the Val di Zoldo into the head of the Val Fiorentina, winding round the foot of the Pelmo between that mountain and the Monte Crot. For the first four hours of the journey, we are simply retracing our route of the day before yesterday. A little beyond Dont (whence there is an easy and interesting way to Agordo by the Val Duram) the Pelmo rises up, pale, and shadowy, and most “majestical”; while at San Nicolo the Civita comes into sight again, half-hidden in rolling, silvery mists. Beyond Marezon, about half way between that village and Pecol, the roads divide, and we turn off from the Val di Zoldo up a long, grassy, undulating valley lying between the Pelmo, the Monte Crot, and the back of the Monte Fernazza. This valley, known as the valley of Pallafavera, is the common property of the Communes of Marezon and Pecol, who divide the pastures equally.

Between the Monte Crot—a small but finely-

shaped pyramidal mountain—and the Pelmo, which from here looks like a cloudy Tower of Babel, there rises a long green slope leading to the top of the pass. Here, in the shade of a big tree on a grassy knoll, we call our first halt. The saddles are taken off, and serve for chairs; a running spring close by among the bushes supplies us with clear water; and Clementi again fetches cream from a milk-farm a little farther on. So, sitting in the open air, under the bluest of blue skies, eating cream with wooden spoons out of a wooden bowl, we take our rest in as purely pastoral a fashion as the heart of even the fair Scudery could have desired.

The journey to-day is a long one, and it will be necessary to let the mules rest again by and by; so we presently go on again, and at about midday reach the top of the pass, which is called by some the Passo di Pallafavera, and by others the Forcella Staulanza. Hence the path winds down among scattered pines and larches to the very base of the Pelmo. At first the great Dolomite shows as only one stupendous tower; then the second tower, till now hidden behind the first, comes gradually into sight; lastly, they divide, showing a dip of blue sky between. Every turn of the path now brings us nearer, so that the huge mass, rising ledge above ledge, steep above steep, seems to hang above our heads and shut out half the sky.

And now, being within two hundred feet of the base of the mountain, we realise, as nearly as it is possible to do so without attempting any part of the ascent, its amazing size, steepness, and difficulty. We are so near that a chamois hunter could hardly creep unseen along one of those narrow ridges three or four

thousand feet above; and yet the extent of the whole is so enormous that a woman following a path leading across yonder slope of débris, looks a mere speck against the rock.

The Pelmo blocks the whole end of the Val Fiorentina. The path leading over the low ridge just opposite, is the Forcella Forada (6,896 feet) leading direct to San Vito at the foot of the Antelao in the Val d'Ampezzo. It corresponds in position to the Forcella Staulanza over which we have just come from the foot of the Civita in Val di Zoldo. The height of the Pelmo, so far as has yet been ascertained, appears to be 10,377 feet; that is to say, it is within a few feet the same as that of the Civita, and scarcely 200 feet below the summit of the Antelao. The mountain has been repeatedly ascended by the daring chamois hunters of Val di Zoldo, who have discovered four separate ways by which to reach the plateau on the top. It has also been ascended by Fuchs, and by the author of the "Guide to the Eastern Alps," who took it from the Borca side, above the Val Najarone. The two best routes, however, are supposed to be those from either Zoppé, or just above San Nicolo in the Val di Zoldo. Mr. Bell describes the Pelmo as "a gigantic fortress of the most massive architecture, defended by huge bastioned outworks whose walls in many places fall in sheer precipices for more than 2000 feet." He furthermore says, "the likeness to masonry is much increased by the fact that in great part the strata lie in nearly horizontal courses, whence it happens that many of the steepest parts of the mountain are traversed by ledges wide enough to give passage to chamois and their pursuers."

From the Forcella Staulanza, the Monte Rochetta of Val d'Ampezzo, and the jagged ridge of the Bec di Mezzodi, are visible above the slopes of the Forcella Forada. The topmost peak of the Civita also peers out above the fir-woods bordering the eastern face of Monte Crot; and far away, beyond the sunny vista of the Val Fiorentina, the faint blue peak of the Marmolata is seen against the horizon, its snow-slope outlined in frosted silver.

And now, following the course of the infant Fiorentino torrent, we begin to leave the Pelmo behind at every step. One by one, the villages of Pescul and Selva, the Col di Santa Lucia, the Monte Frisolet, the Sasso Bianco, come into view. Stopping for a few moments at Pescul, we go into the little church to see a carved tabernacle by Brusetolon—a tiny, toy-like thing, evidently a recollection of the Baldacchino at St. Peter's, supported upon flowery twisted columns, crowned by an elaborate canopy, and enclosing a crucifixion group with figures about three inches in height. Some of the little angels and cherubs clustered outside the canopy are so tenderly conceived and executed as to remind one of the designs of Luca della Robbia. The people of Pescul prize their little shrine, just as the people of Zoppé prize their Titian, and have refused large prices for it.

It is now one o'clock, and we have been upon the road since half-past five A.M. The mules are tired out, and stumble at every step. The Val Fiorentina stretches on interminably, and the village of Selva, where we are to rest for a good two hours, seems never to draw nearer. We get there at last, however, and put up at a small road-side albergo as rough as

any we have yet been into, but very clean and airy. Here the tired mules get each a hearty feed of Indian corn; the men, bread and wine; and we, being shown into a whitewashed upstairs room, proceed to light the Etna and brew a dish of Liebig.

The women of the house—and there are four of them—pursue us to this retreat as soon as they have served out the corn and wine below, and stand, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, in a fever of curiosity, watching all we do, as a party of children might watch the movements of a couple of wild beasts in a cage. They examine our hats, our umbrellas, our cloaks, and every individual article that we have laid aside. The Etna stupifies them with amazement. As for L.'s field-glass lying in the window, they eye it askance, taking it evidently for some kind of infernal machine that may be expected to go off suddenly and blow up the whole establishment. They are, in truth, mere savages—rosy, hearty, good-natured; but as ignorant and uncivilised as aboriginal Australians.

The biggest and rosiest of the four—apparently the mistress of the house—emerging presently from the first dumbness of her astonishment, pours forth a volley of questions, repeating my answers with a triumphant air, as if interpreting them to the rest, and cross-examining me as eagerly and unsparingly as an Old Bailey counsel. Where did we come from? From Forno di Zoldo! Sì, sì—she knew that—the men down stairs had told her so much. But *before* Forno di Zoldo. Where did we come from *before* Forno di Zoldo? From Caprile! Che! che! she knows that also. But *before* Caprile? Surely we came from far away—

from *Lontana*? Per esempio!—where were we born! In Inghilterra! Madonna! In Inghilterra!

Here she throws up her hands, and the other three do the same.

“But have you come like this all the way from Inghilterra?”

What she means by “like this,” it is impossible to say. She probably supposes we have ridden the two Nessols the whole distance by land and sea, with one small black bag each by way of luggage; but the easiest answer is a nod of the head.

“Santo Spirito! And alone?—all alone?”

Again, to save explanations, a nod.

“Eh! poverine! poverine! (poor little things! poor little things!) Are you sisters?”

A shake of the head this time, instead of a nod.

“Are you married?”

Another negative, whereat her surprise amounts almost to consternation.

“Come! Not married? Neither of you?”

“Neither of us,” I reply, laughing.

“Gran’ Dio! Alone, and not married! Poverine! poverine!”

Hereupon they all cry “poverine” in chorus, with an air of such genuine concern and compassion that we are almost ashamed of the irrepressible laughter with which we cannot help receiving their condolences.

Being really tired and in want of rest, I am obliged at last to dismiss both Coryphæus and Chorus, and when they are fairly gone, to lock them out. So at last we eat our Liebig in peace, and, being only two hours from home, with plenty of daylight still at our disposal, the writer succeeds in getting a sketch of the

Pelmo as it appears through the open window, down at the far end of the valley.

The rest of the journey lies chiefly along the rising verge of Monte Frisolet, passing over the Col di Santa Lucia. A little beyond Selva, we enter upon Austrian territory, leaving it again on the hill-side above Caprile, and reaching home by way of the old familiar zig-zag a little after six P.M.
