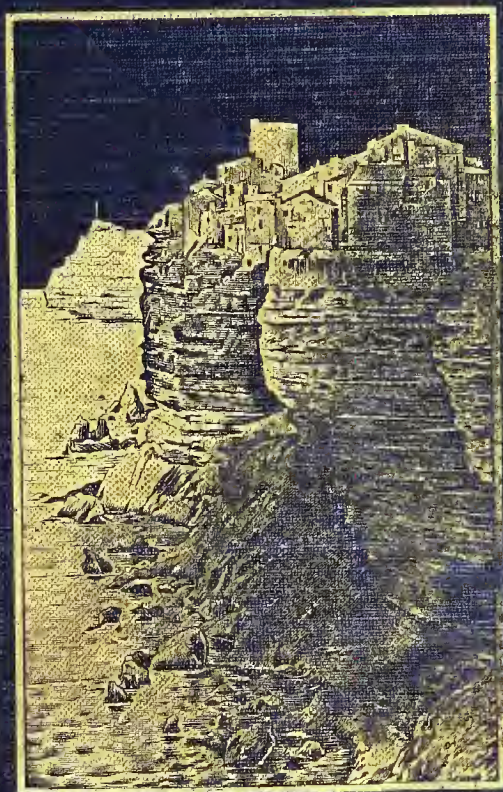


ROMANTIC CORSICA



GEORGE RENWICK

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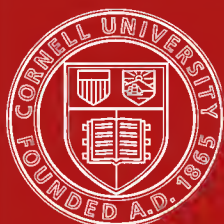
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ROMANTIC CORSICA

ROMANTIC CORSICA

WANDERINGS IN NAPOLEON'S ISLE

BY

GEORGE RENWICK

WITH A CHAPTER ON CLIMBING BY

T. G. OUSTON, F.R.C.S.,

MEMBER OF THE ALPINE CLUB

WITH 67 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

NEW YORK : CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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1910

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“ . . . Cynos . . . ,
A fruitful isle, of no ignoble name.”
CALLIMACHUS.

TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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INTRODUCTION

IT is strange that within little more than thirty hours of actual travel from London, at the end of a night sail from the thronged Côte d'Azur, there lies a beautiful and romantic little country as yet virgin to all but a few of the great host of travellers and tourists. This is all the more remarkable, I think, having regard to the fact that the island of Corsica offers within its bounds attractions for every sort and condition of visitor.

It is a land of green and gold, of far-rolling forests of glistening pine and fir and larch, with clusters of oak and eucalyptus trees, olive, orange and lemon groves, with its hillsides decked with the vine, dotted here and there with a gem-like lake and streaked with silvery rivers.

Far and wide the Mediterranean heath spreads itself like a gorgeous carpet; rich mosses weave their varicoloured, eternal tapestries; while lovely ferns, an endless profusion of wild berries, a fairyland riot of violets, pinks and crocuses, yellow and purple mesembryanthemum, lavender, myrtle, and rosemary, are woven by Nature's exquisite handiwork into scenes of inspiring beauty.

Ah! the charm of the Corsican road! It leads the traveller in a single forenoon from orange and almond groves up through every climate in Europe. It scatters thyme about his feet and wild roses by his side to take

him back in thought to English valleys; it carries him past a mountain side garbed in heather—fairest Scotia in a sunnier setting. It takes him to the tree line within grasp of the eternal snows. Downwards again it goes in sweeping, tantalising curves to the fertile vale. Now the traveller is shaded from the noonday sun by a long row of lean larches, then by a double line of mimosa trees with their strings of yellow balls—veritable sunbeams; now the *maquis*—that wonderful mixture of shrubs growing so plentifully all over Corsica—shades the road, and every four or five miles, heralded from afar by a towering cluster of eucalyptus-trees, is a well into which there pours, with a babbling greeting from the realm of snow, a stream of water, cold as ice and clear as crystal, to greet the thirsty traveller, who must not always drink.

Corsica is an excellent sporting country. The hunter will find in it a bag of infinite variety, ranging from the scarce, “mysterious moufflon” to the snipe, from the wild boar to the partridge. With the exception of a few scattered preserves, the sportsman is at perfect liberty to roam over the entire island, and in that freedom lies the great charm of sport in Corsica. As the east coast is the happy hunting-ground for the “guns,” my remarks on sporting matters are reserved for the chapter dealing with that part of the island.

Fishing, too, can be indulged in everywhere, and Corsican fish have long been famous for their size and quality. They were set before the epicureans of Rome, for Juvenal tells us that the Corsican mullet was greatly prized—

“A precious mullet from the Corsic seas,
Not less the master’s pampered taste can please.”

The mullets generally weigh four or five pounds. Trout

and eels simply swarm in many of the rivers and in the streams and on the coasts, the ardent angler may add to his stock of fishing stories fine tales of how he caught huge red gurnets, lobsters, sturgeon, mackerel, skate, perch, swordfish, tunny-fish, sardines, anchovies, and numerous other fish.

The motorist and cyclist may traverse the entire island on excellent *routes nationales*; for the climber there are half a dozen peaks well worthy of ascent; painter and photographer will find scenes ranging from the subtle charm of Sicily to the rugged splendour of Scandinavia.

The climate is, perhaps, the most wonderful thing about the island. There are three zones:—

- (1) Up to about 1,700 feet, the climate of Italy and Spain.
- (2) From 1,700 feet to 5,000 feet, the climate of the eastern Pyrenees or Provence.
- (3) Above 5,000 feet that of Scandinavia.

It is, of course, with the first zone that the visitor to the island is chiefly concerned. In it there are practically only two seasons—from June to September, when it is dry and hot, and from October to May, when the days are warm and temperate.

“I have just spent the winter in Corsica,” said Edmond About on one occasion. “That makes two summers in my year.”

In my opinion the best time for the hurried tourist to visit the island is during the three months April, May, and June. Then flowers and verdure are at their best and fever has not yet set in on the eastern coast.

My object in the pages which follow has been twofold. I have arranged my picture of Corsica as I saw it and as

it appealed to me, and my first wish is to be of service to those who would follow in my footsteps through all the "Scented Isle," or even a part of it. Secondly, I have tried to write for the home-stayer, whose heart, the poet says, is happiest ; I have endeavoured to draw a picture of an interesting people and a romantic land for those who must needs do their globe-trotting by proxy during leisure hours in the library.

For reasons which, I think, will be perfectly apparent, I have avoided loading my pages with information regarding hotels, inns, boats, trains, and diligences. Any tourist agency will, in five minutes, tell you how to go to Corsica ; particulars regarding travel, accommodation, and "sights" in the island can be obtained without the slightest difficulty on the spot from the numerous branches of the Syndicat d'Initiative de la Corse. My own custom was, on arriving at a town or village, to consult the first inhabitant I met, and the plan worked admirably. A Parisian friend, who knows the island department well, advised me to herald each day by telegraph my arrival in the evening at any town or village and to arrange for my mid-day meal by the same means. Personally, however, I am too erratic a wanderer, too fond of straying where fancy leads, only too ready to be diverted from the beaten path by odds and ends of interest, to be bound down by a morning time-table. Yet, though I reached wayside inns at hours ranging from dawn till starlight, I never found an instance in which a telegram would have greatly improved matters. In the case, however, of a party travelling in the outlying parts of the island, and when stages are accurately mapped out with the intention of being adhered to strictly, my friend's suggestion is an excellent one, and I strongly recommend it.

The visitor to Corsica has the choice of a number of

methods of travelling through the island. The railway may be used in order to get within reach of all that is worth seeing in the north. The *routes nationales* and a number of the *routes forestières* are admirable for the motor-car or motor-cycle, though, as also when travelling by carriage and pair, the tourist adopting these vehicles as the means of getting about is confined to the main roads. The mule is the animal pressed into service by the Corsican himself, and certainly on mule-back one can go everywhere. These animals, however, are scarcely ever to be had on hire, and any one deciding on this method of travel would have to buy one of those lively little creatures—and learn to ride it! I myself have no hesitation in recommending the bicycle. The excellent state of the roads on the whole may be judged from the fact that in covering nearly eight hundred miles of Corsican roads I had my tyre punctured only on three occasions. Only one puncture could be attributed to the state of the road, for of the others one was caused by picking up a nail from a peasant's boot and the other was the result of riding into a boulder in the dark.

A walking tour in Corsica would, I imagine, be quite enjoyable, but either the length of the journey is restricted, or it takes more time to carry out a fairly extensive tour than most people can afford. Given time, however, and a disposition which does not object to occasional discomfort and primitive conditions of life, there is nothing to urge against a walk through the "Scented Isle." But the cycle raises the rate of progression from three miles or so to an hourly average of eight or nine, which keeps the traveller always within easy reach of a comfortable inn. With a cycle, too, one can penetrate into all parts of the island.

In writing this book I have consulted, mainly for historical information, F. Gregorovius's work on Corsica

and I have also found of assistance Monsieur F. Girolami-Cartona's "Histoire de la Corse." The other work to which I have referred is James Boswell's "Account of Corsica," a quaint old volume only valuable now for the interesting matter it contains regarding Pasquale Paoli, the great Corsican patriot—a volume with its pages still white, its print still clear, and its binding still strong, in spite of the 150 years which have sped since it was issued "By Edward and Charles Dilly in the Poultry."

My thanks are due to Monsieur Laurent Cardinali, of Ajaccio, for permission to use several of his photographs in cases where my own were not quite so satisfactory as I had wished; to Herr Karl Baedeker, of Leipsic, for the admirable map from his "Southern France and Corsica"; to the Rector of St. Anne's Church, Soho, for kind permission to have photographed the tablet erected on the wall of that church to the memory of King Theodore of Corsica; to George H. Radcliffe, Esq., Chapter Clerk, Westminster Abbey, who supplied me with the photograph of the bust placed in the Abbey to the memory of Pasquale Paoli; and to my friend, Dr. C. J. W. Dixon, for kind help in the revision of the proof sheets.

G. R.

NOTTINGHAM,
Midsummer Day, 1909.



VIEW OF AJACCIO AND HARBOUR.

ROMANTIC CORSICA

CHAPTER I

AJACCIO AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

“Cette ville gâtée par la Nature.”

SOUTHERN Europe has few finer views to offer than that which greets the traveller when, after a night journey on one of those little boats which ply between Marseilles and Ajaccio, he comes on deck to find Corsica looming out of the morning twilight, a fairy vision of green, tinted with the first light of the westward-racing sun. Southward still flashes the warning beam from the Iles Sanguinaires in the floating, rose-hued mists of sunrise. Across the glassy sea comes the breath of Corsica, that wonderful perfume of the *maquis* which Napoleon remembered even at St. Helena, and which the great Emperor could never think of without a deep emotion.

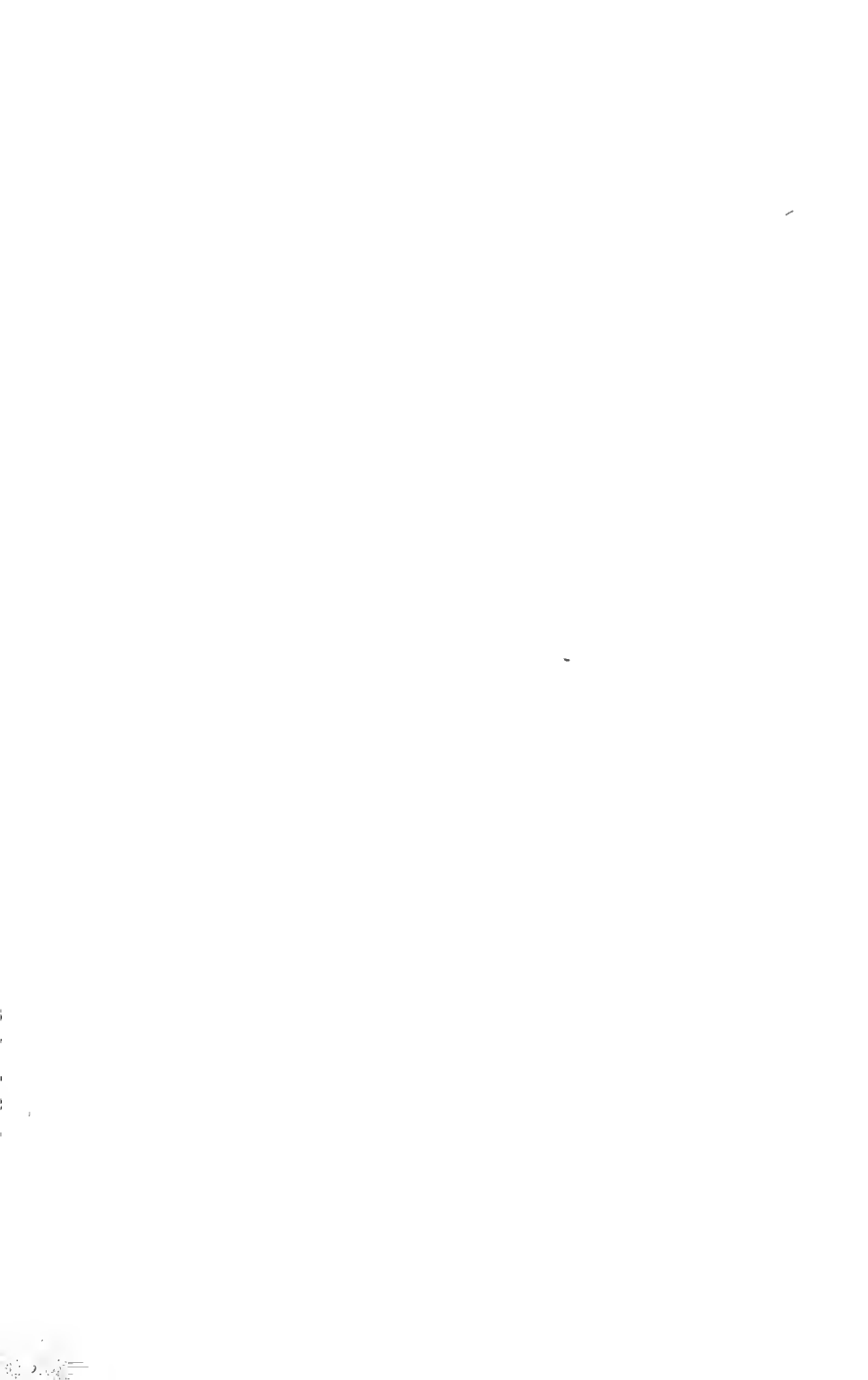
Little by little the island slips its garb of morning haze and stands out clear in the incandescence of day as though sculptured in the heavens; now a glass can descry tiny villages glued on the mountain sides; yonder the proud Monte d'Oro—7,800 feet high—raises its peak

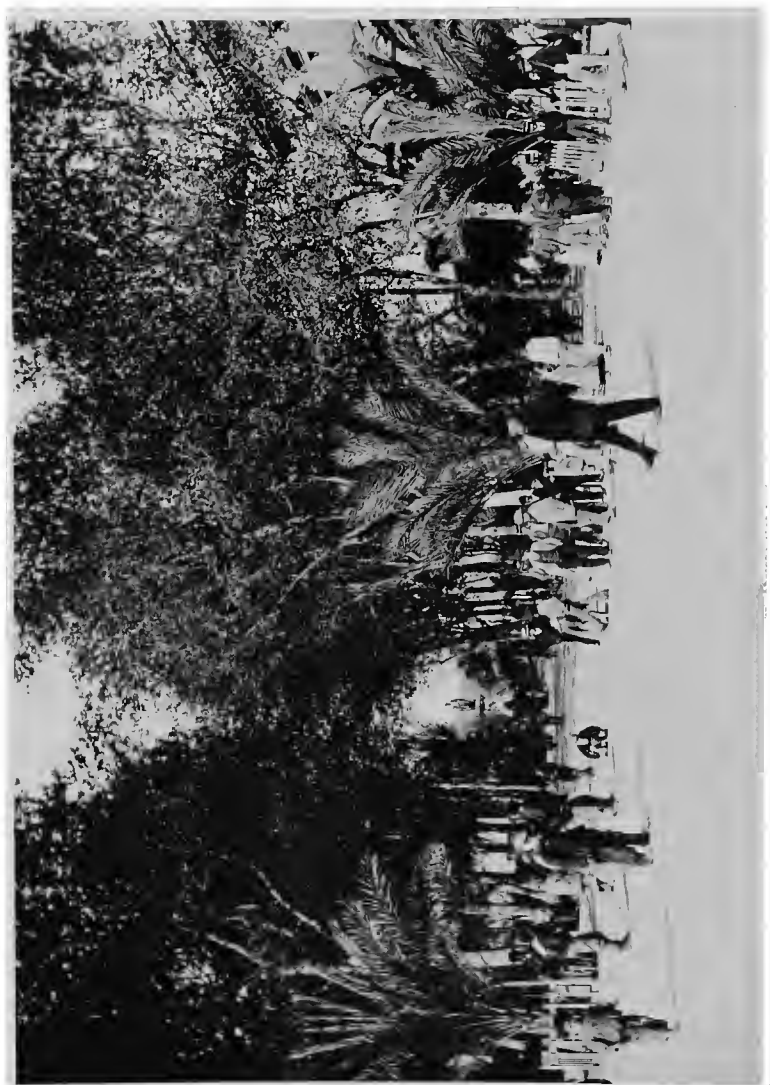
into the blue of the sky, clothed with a gigantic robe of velvety forests, and with the ermine of winter about its shoulders. Now the crimson sun is setting those glorious western gulfs on fire, and the liquid blaze of beauty is cutting its way into a chaos of fantastically hewn rocks which might be of garnet and ruby.

A wide sweep, and the little ship rounds the Iles Sanguinaires, their reddish rocks gleaming and flashing in the sunlight like a hundred heliographs. White and glistening, beautiful Ajaccio bursts, Naples-like, into view, the birthplace of one of the proudest empires of earth. It is laved by a gulf of Italian azure, and its rising background—now delicious in its subtle, tender charm, now inspiring in its rugged, fierce boldness—reaches far back into snow and sky.

Ajaccio is situated on the north side of one of the most beautiful gulfs of Europe. Certainly there is no Vesuvius to stand out proudly in the background, but Nature, I think, has been even kinder to Ajaccio than to Naples. Around the town is a lofty frame of snow-tipped mountains from which there slopes the vine-clad countryside. White villas and drab cottages are sprinkled over this wide expanse of restful green, out of which Ajaccio, a white, gleaming city, the jewel of Corsica, glistens like a diamond powdered round about with the gold of orange-blossoms. Ajaccio is Naples in miniature, Naples without Vesuvius, without its bazaars and beggars, its scent and sentiment. "An idyllic, quiet, harmless town," said Gregorovius of it sixty years ago, and so it is to-day.

The town is shaped like a huge V. At the angle stands the citadel, behind which clusters a maze of narrow streets and high, dilapidated houses, the old quarter. This part of Ajaccio also runs for a considerable distance to the left (looking seaward) parallel to the Quai Napoléon, but a newer order of things is gradually putting





PLACE DES PALMIERS, AJACCIO.
(Statue of Napoleon in the background.)

a more modern face on this section of the "old town." The ancient buildings which once stood on the quay have disappeared, to make room for shops and warehouses. A little beyond, the Cours Napoléon, a wide, handsome street at its "city end," and bright with gay *cafés* and attractive shops, has cut its way through this old part of Ajaccio, and the dwellings of centuries ago are on either side gradually disappearing before the builder's renovating hand. The other arm of the V is the new town, a trio of pleasant boulevards—the Cours Grandval, the Boulevard des Étrangers and the Boulevard Lantivy—running on the hillside on the northern shore of the gulf.

Ajaccio is fortunate in its streets. Short but proud is the Place des Palmiers, running at right angles to the Quai Napoléon. As its name suggests, it is delightfully shaded. On the little newspaper *kiosk* lie most of one's journalistic friends from Paris, with news nearly two days late, which for any other part of Corsica save pampered Ajaccio would be startlingly early. Quaint stone seats are set round the Place, and there the local politicians and gossip-mongers congregate. At the top of the Place, opposite the quay, is a fountain with an altogether outrageous statue of Napoleon as First Consul. The great man is dressed in a Roman toga with a laurel wreath on his head, and his right hand holds a rudder resting on the globe of the world. Surely a fantastic pose! Round the statue all day rises the chatter of the native intriguer; at night a chorus of frogs breaks all the canons of melody. The idea of making a fountain-god of Napoleon is a quaint one. Your Corsican is not such a great admirer of the Emperor as the stranger would think. As a great military genius, as a conqueror, he pays his memory a certain amount of honour, but the Corsican does not love Napoleon. Did he not leave Corsica?

No real Corsican does that—for ever. To-day, as I have mentioned in another chapter, all Corsica votes Republican save Ajaccio, which seems in honour bound to vote Bonapartist, a half-hearted, dubious tribute to the famous son of Corsica who carved his name so deeply on the granite of history. This half-respect has greatly troubled the ardent admirers of the *petit caporal*, and every effort has been made to glorify Napoleon in the town of his birth. Ajaccio, in fact, has been termed “the shade of Napoleon with houses built round it.” There is a Cours Napoléon, the Rue Napoléon, the Quai Napoléon, Napoleon’s grotto, Napoleon’s house, the Rue du Roi de Rome, the statue in the Place des Palmiers, another in the Place du Diamant (sometimes called the Place Bonaparte), the Place du Premier Consul, a Napoleonic museum, a Café Napoléon, but still the Ajaccien offers but a subdued hero-worship to the great man.

Placing his statue above a fountain was a desperate attempt to wring a fuller love from the unwilling Corsican. Water is somewhat scarce in the island—at least, good water is—and the deity who presides over wells and fountains is the greatest of all the figures in Corsican mythology. The attempt, however, to raise Napoleonic prestige by endeavouring to ascribe to the Emperor the character of a fountain-god can only be written down as a failure both from the point of political motive and of patriotic considerations. Napoleon Bonaparte remains a Corsican—who left Corsica.

On one side of the Place des Palmiers is the Hôtel de Ville, the finest modern building in Ajaccio with the exception of the Préfecture in the Cours Napoléon. The Boulevard du Roi Jérôme runs into the Place beside the Hôtel de Ville and near its termination is the Market Hall. There vegetables, meat, fruit and fish are exposed



AJACCIO AND ITS GULF.



“THE INKSTAND.”

The monument to Napoleon and his four brothers.

in mixed array for sale, and business goes on to the accompaniment of a strange medley of Corsican, French, and Italian. Along the boulevard are numerous little stalls selling a great variety of commodities. Bread, of all shades from a dirty white to a dark brown, cheese, the excellent *broccia* and the villainous-looking *caccio*, chestnuts and chestnut flour, poultry, dead or startlingly alive, tempt and repel the passers-by. All the forenoon the chatter of buying and selling goes on, and women's tongues wag in a manner which is alarming and, possibly, unique. Then the heat increases with the approach of mid-day ; Ajaccio grows quiet, lingers over *déjeuner* and retires for a long siesta.

Behind the fountain-statue is the short Avenue du Premier Consul, which runs into the Place du Diamant. This Place, bordered on two sides by tall, sombre, Venetian-shuttered houses, and on a third by the grim military hospital, atones for these grey bounds by presenting on its fourth side an unrivalled view of the bay, a vista which makes the tree-girt and otherwise unattractive square a charming place indeed. Here is to be found another grotesque statue of the great Emperor. This time he is on horseback on a large pedestal, and each corner is monopolised by one of his brothers. The five are garbed as Roman lictors. Why, I cannot divine. I should quite as soon have expected to see them in evening dress or Highland costume. The entire piece of work is inartistic in the extreme, and finds but little favour even in the eyes of the most enthusiastic Bonapartist, being known amongst Ajacciens as "the inkstand," a designation which, in my opinion, is well deserved. The Place du Diamant is the Bois de Boulogne of Ajaccio, and its promenade and lounging place from dawn till starlight. On Sundays it is a miniature Champs Elysées ; a military band plays in the

kiosk, and all Ajaccio and his wife, in fashionable and bright array, listen to the tuneful music and enjoy the exquisite day, the heat tempered by a pleasant breeze from the mirror-like gulf.

Undoubtedly the finest street is the Cours Napoléon, running from the Place du Diamant parallel to the quay. It contains the best shops—which is not meant to say a great deal—and the imposing Préfecture, with its tastefully laid out garden. The street is bordered with orange-trees, and terminates near the railway station at the Place Abbattucci, where there is a statue of that brilliant soldier, General Abbattucci, who fell at Huningue at the age of twenty-seven. The Cours Grandval, too, the continuation of the Avenue du Premier Consul, is a picturesque thoroughfare running upwards to the Place du Casone, where the Grotto of Napoleon is to be found.

This grotto is a curious cluster of huge rocks, a conspicuous landmark in a beautiful vista of olive-trees and pines, and derives its name from the tradition that Napoleon when a boy was in the habit of going there for the purpose of meditation and study. But Napoleon left Corsica when he was about ten years of age, so that I am afraid the “meditation and study” story must be rejected as legend pure and simple. I like a legend; it is often preferable to the hard, cold facts of history, and were Napoleon’s age the only obstacle in the way of this story assuming the garb of probability, I should say that Napoleon went there to play with his brothers and friends. But, alas! frigid fact gets the better of me here too. The grotto—the name, by the way, is highly imaginative and complimentary—stood during and long after the time that Napoleon lived in Ajaccio on land belonging to the Jesuits, and there was no public access to it as there is to-day. The famous Cardinal Fesch, Napoleon’s uncle on his mother’s side, subsequently



NAPOLEON'S GROTTO.

bought the land on which the grotto stands, but by that time Napoleon was a conqueror in Italy. The Cardinal's purchase later became common land. There is little doubt, however, that Napoleon did, on one occasion, visit the place. That was when he came to Corsica on his first return from Egypt, and he went to the grotto with the officers who accompanied him. The medley of rocks composing the grotto is to-day adorned—or spoiled—by a bewildering array of names and initials, mostly carved out laboriously, though some people have been enterprising enough to provide themselves with a brush and a pot of enamel wherewith to add their names to this scroll of fame.

But it is not only round the grotto that Napoleonic fairy tales gather thick. One has to push aside a good few of them to get at the truth about Napoleon's house, though the result in the latter case is a good deal more satisfactory. To find Napoleon's house the visitor must invade the old quarter of the town. He will be assailed by a dozen urchins with: "Vous cherchez la maison Napoléon, m'sieu?" They will offer to take him to it for a consideration, carefully concealing from him the fact that he is, in all probability, not more than a score of yards away from it. In a narrow *ruelle*, the Rue St. Charles, stands La Casa Bonaparte, a handsome building, four storeys high. On the wall above the massive door is the inscription:—

Napoléon I. est né dans cette maison
le xv août, 1769.

The residence was undoubtedly one of the finest in the town when the Bonaparte family lived there. The little talkative Madame who looks after the *casa* lives opposite,

and is an adept in the art of recognising strangers. She shows them over the house with an air of fitting awe and reverence. A stone stair leads up to the first and second *étages*, which were inhabited by the Bonapartes—Corsicans seldom make much use of the ground floor of a large house. The rooms are large, airy, but sombre, and the furniture, simple and severe, is not of great interest, as little of it dates back to Napoleon's boyhood, having been placed there on his return from Egypt in September, 1799, when the house was almost completely renovated.

There is a record in existence which states that in 1798 many prominent people of Ajaccio received State compensation for the damage done to their property during the revolt of the Paolists and the short occupation of the island by the English. Amongst these was Napoleon's mother, who was awarded 16,000 francs "on account of her house, situated in the Rue Bonaparte, of four storeys, including the *rez-de-chaussée*, being plundered." This fact, of course, somewhat detracts from the interest of the house, though there can be little doubt that the rooms are the same as when the famous family lived there. No one can question the genuineness of the few Napoleonic relics which remain, but it is a matter for regret that they are so few. Napoleon's mother in 1834 bequeathed the house to her grandson, the ill-fated Duke of Reichstadt. Joseph Bonaparte, however, disputed the gift, an action at law took place, and the building was handed over unfurnished to him. He in turn left it to his daughter, the Princess Zénaïde. In 1860 Napoleon III. was travelling in Corsica and the Princess offered the house to him. The Emperor accepted the offer and is stated to have furnished the *casa* anew. The Bonaparte relics were at that time in the possession of Napoleon's mother's family, and the Emperor persuaded the owners to part with them for 60,000 francs. They were placed in the



NAPOLEON'S HOUSE.



ROOM IN WHICH NAPOLEON WAS BORN.

casa on August 15, 1869, the centenary of the birth of the great conqueror. To-day the *casa* belongs to the Empress Eugénie, the top storey having been used by Princess Marianne Bonaparte—wife of Lucien Bonaparte—for some time before her death in 1891. There is also a story that the house was burned by the Paolists in 1793, but of this I could find no confirmation.

None of these stories is imparted to the visitor by Madame. She is an enthusiastic Bonapartist and nothing must be called in question. She points out the room in which Napoleon was born, with its small bed from which the great Emperor first saw the light of day. Then there is the sedan chair in which Madame Mère was brought home from church just before her great son came into the world. The other rooms are Napoleon's bedroom, in which is the trap-door by which he escaped from the emissaries of Paoli, who in 1793 tried to arrest him while in hiding in the house; the *salle des fêtes*; Napoleon's study, with the crown of gold bearing the date 1899, the centenary of his election as Premier Consul. All the windows have the usual Venetian shutters, and facing the house is a little flower-planted square, a space on which formerly stood the house of Napoleon's grandmother.

Even though there is but little to remind the visitor of the great family that once lived in the *casa*, there is certainly enough to stir his imagination and to bring up before him a picture of the past. He sees handsome Madame Mère and her husband, the pale-faced Ajaccien lawyer, a worried look upon his face, thinking probably of that legal fight in which he was engaged for years endeavouring, with a real French fear of the future, to secure an estate he claimed as a family possession. Year in, year out, the destiny of his family worried him, that family which was to break the record of human history

and to whom Fate was to give crowns and kingdoms. It is easy to summon up before the mind's eye that family of eight children—five sons and three daughters—a happy little band, the boys playing their first little games, fighting, perhaps, their first little battles, little recking how one of them was to go forth to battle for kingdoms, to play a desperate game of hazard with a world against him, to swell, as Lord Rosebery has said, "into a sovereign and then into a sovereign of sovereigns"; little dreaming of the glorious crowns that were to be theirs across the unborn years, of the blood-red pages they were to leave in the world's grim story.

It is strange to think that this quiet, narrow, rough *ruelle* heard "the clatter of his little feet," perhaps the childish laugh of him who was one day to rule seven kingdoms and thirty principalities. One's thoughts fly rapidly across the enthralling story of this overman, whose victorious troops bivouacked in every continental capital from sunny Madrid to snow-bound Moscow; who isolated England and played havoc with the commerce of the old and new worlds; who intrigued with the Shah of Persia; whose influence penetrated into the heart of Hindustan and aroused the Mahrattas of Holkar and Scinde to revolt; whose aims caused Monte Video and Buenos Ayres to be stormed; who ordered that the vaguely known Australia, then termed "New Holland," should be mapped and called "La Terre Napoléon." From Montenotte, from which he dated "his patents of nobility," to Waterloo and its desperate "Tout est perdu; sauve qui peut," the mind flashes, and then one seems to rest within that gorgeous mausoleum in Les Invalides in Paris, illuminated by the same sun which finds its way into the dusty corners of the room where the Emperor was born. I used to think that the great Emperor's tomb, gilded by the golden sunlight through western windows,

with the banners of his victories fading, like many a memory, with time, was the grandest sight I knew, but somehow his humble birthplace supplants it now. The starting-place of a great life is always inspiring. How often, even amidst all the glories which man can pile on memory, is its finish sad.

Ajaccio is a winter resort of unrivalled beauty and unparalleled charm of climate. It is protected by its rim of mountains from the winds of the east and north, and the temperature is, perhaps, the most remarkable thing about this quaint southern town. Within the last dozen years it has only been known to fall below zero (Fahr.) six or seven times, occasions on which Southern Europe was held in the grip of fiercest winter. The temperature, too, varies but little from day to day, the increase in the heat from January till August being gradual. From October to May is "the season," but, omitting the really hot months of June, July, and August, it is doubtful if any other place in Southern Europe has such a really enjoyable climate. Certainly no place suffers less from extremes or sudden changes of temperature. Between two and three o'clock on the sunny afternoons the heat dips pleasantly and about four o'clock it commences to rise a little again, so that the evenings and nights are entirely devoid of that treacherous cold which is so fraught with danger for many who are in the habit of frequenting *stations d'hiver*, and from which so many well-known resorts suffer.

Rain, too, is never at all troublesome. The wet days in the winter season range in number from ten to fourteen, and it is quite a common thing that eight months of the year should pass without a drop falling. When rain does fall it is generally fairly heavy, but never of lengthy duration, and a "wet day," such as we know it

in this country, is in Ajaccio a rare occurrence. The gentle winds of the South lose all their enervating qualities in passing over the wide stretch of ocean between the North African coast and Corsica. Built on a granite stratum, Ajaccio has the additional recommendation of being practically dustless, a state which everyone who is not a motorist will appreciate.

Ajaccio has, however, powerful competitors, and, in spite of all its charm, it is not yet greatly appreciated by English people, nor, strangely enough, by the French. Germans and Russians are the nationalities which visit Corsica in greatest numbers. Scandinavians, too, appreciate those beautiful Corsican bays, with their rugged cliffs, which look for all the world like little bits of Norway which must have stolen southwards when the world was made. The German is to be met everywhere in the island, and scores of times on my tour I was taken for a wanderer from the Happy Fatherland. On one occasion the charming old dame who keeps a cosy wee inn at Venaco took me for a Frenchman, a compliment which I must say I appreciated. Cherishing, as I do, a traditionally Scottish regard for France, I do not mind admitting that that was at least one occasion when I did not insist on the recognition of my exact nationality. Americans hustle through the island in fairly large numbers, and guess and calculate that it beats Switzerland.

What is called *la ville d'hiver* runs along the Cours Grandval. There are the finest villas with beautiful gardens. Between the Cours and the sea are to be found the pretty winter *châteaux*, and all along the coast nearly to the Iles Sanguinaires, on the slopes of the mountains and facing the south, stand many charming residences, unsurpassed in beauty of situation by anything on the Côte d'Azur. Ajaccio's hotels

are excellent in every way, and *châteaux*, villas, and apartments are to be had in profusion. But the town suffers in one respect. The Ajaccien is not a social person. There is a lack of swing and go about him. Amusements are few. There is certainly a theatre, where opera, operetta, drama, comedy, and vaudeville hold the boards in turn, but the attraction there is not great. The question of a *casino* is after many years only being discussed. There are *cercles des étrangers*, but these suffer from that spirit of exclusiveness which prevails in the Ajaccien home. Afternoon concerts at the Hôtel de Ville are one of the few forms of enjoyment which the Ajaccien, or rather more particularly the Ajaccienne, indulges in. People are chatty and pleasant in the restaurant, but in the home quite as exclusive as Tibetan Lamas.

Ajaccio makes a braver show of what the tourist calls "sights" than any other Corsican town. To those who like museums—I candidly confess I do not possess that weakness—Ajaccio has got something to offer. In the Hôtel de Ville is the Napoleonic Museum, with interesting pictures and sculpture. The Museum of Ajaccio (Rue Napoléon) will provide several days' work for the enthusiast. In it there are a large number of rather interesting pictures, many being genuine old masters. The sculpture, also, is noteworthy. In the Chapelle Impériale (or the Chapelle Fesch) a number of the members of the Bonaparte family are buried, including Napoleon's mother, "Mater Regum." Then there is the cathedral in the Rue du Collège, where Napoleon would have been buried if Paris had refused to receive his ashes. On April 29, 1821, Napoleon at St. Helena expressed his desire that, if his last resting-place were not to be "by the banks of the Seine, amongst the

people he had so much loved," it might be in this noble building. In it there is a marble plaque with the words :—

"Si on proscrit (de Paris) mon cadavre comme on a proscrit ma personne, je souhaite qu'on m'inhume auprès de mes ancêtres dans la Cathédrale d'Ajaccio en Corse."

Ajaccio is not a town of trade to any great extent. A few ships each week bring the few necessaries and some of the luxuries of life for the place and the neighbourhood and take away what Ajaccio has to offer to the world. The sale of wares, which Gregorovius found small, and the native industries, which he characterised as paltry, still remain so. Business is everywhere on a small scale, and the town being the capital of the island, the petty officials, who simply swarm all over the place, leave but little room for the business man. Ajaccio's exports are wood, charcoal, chestnut-wood for dyeing purposes, goat and sheep skins, chestnuts and chestnut flour, fish (crayfish in large quantities), game (including the famous Corsican blackbird), fresh and dried fruits, olive oil, briar pipes, cork, and horses. But your Ajaccien refuses to do things on a large scale, with one exception : he must have a lot of leisure. He is content with a little money, a little work, a little house, but, at all costs, he must have a great deal of time to himself. Most of this leisure he spends in the open. Watching the arrival and departure of the steamers is his principal recreation, and the time in between such events is passed by reading his paper as he sits on the stone seats of the Place des Palmiers or by talking politics whilst promenading the shaded portion of the Place du Diamant.

Apart from Ajaccio's own charm, it has superb



THE QUAY, AJACCIO.

surroundings. To any one who is fond of walking—for only the pedestrian can see fully the beauty of the neighbourhood—alluring Nature gives almost a surfeit of herself. One of the most pleasant excursions is that along the northern shore of the gulf to the Cap de la Parata, ten miles from the town. We were a jovial company who took this charming trip—an Ajaccien and a Frenchman on horseback, three Germans and a Swede in landaus, and myself awheel. We left the town at six in the morning to spend the day in the open, and the excursion is one of the most pleasant that Corsica has to offer.

The road, save for a short distance from the Cap, is a splendid one, bordered by almond and other fruit trees and vines, and the views, which every turn of the road seemed to make more beautiful, were admitted by every one—we were globe-trotters all—to be unique. On the right the country rises to a culmination in the Pointe de Lisa, 2,600 feet high. The *maquis* was in all the glory of its finest summer garb; the blue of the gulf matched the peerless azure of the sky. Here and there *pêcheurs de langoustes* waved their morning greetings from their boats. We halted four miles out at the Orangerie de Barbicaja to lay in a supply of the delicious fruit to be obtained there. No one knows what a good orange is like until he has tasted those of Barbicaja. All along the road just before reaching the *orangerie* is a line of those buildings so common in Corsica, and so like the *koubas* of Algeria—little burial chapels—in the midst of which stands the Chapelle des Grecs, used for religious purposes by those Grecians who established themselves in and about Ajaccio after having been expelled from their domains at Paomia, on the west coast, and prior to the time they made Cargèse

what it is to-day.¹ This part of the route is termed the Appian Way.

At the Cap de la Parata we pitched our camp. Already on the spot were the fishermen with whom we had bargained in Ajaccio the previous evening for a couple of boats to take us to the Grande Sanguinaire. For a time we wandered about, and indulged in a light fruitarian lunch before embarking. We sailed past three rocky islets to the largest of the group, a sail of about two miles. In the full glare of the noonday sun the Iles Sanguinaires certainly fulfilled in their aspect the description given of them by Alphonse Daudet—"reddish and of fierce aspect." On the largest island, that on which we landed, is the lighthouse which flashes Corsica's welcome through the dark to those who take the night boats from the Continent. The old Genoese watch-tower on the summit of the Cap de la Parata stands out grandly against the distant mountains. The ruggedness of this part of Corsica appealed to Prince Jérôme Napoleon, who died in 1891. He left behind him a wish that he should be buried on one of the islets, and that above his grave should be placed a granite tombstone. "This monument," he said, "assailed by wind and wave, will serve as an emblem of a troubled, agitated life." For some reason, however, his wish was not carried out. Back on the mainland again we spent an hour or two at our camp, disposed of Barbicaja oranges, took photographs, and chatted with the *pêcheurs de langoustes*, who permitted us to taste their fish soup called *bouillabaisse*,² which, with black, hard bread, formed what they politely termed *déjeuner*. The soup was excellent, though bones were rather numerous. Next day I came across *bouillabaisse* in an Ajaccian

¹ See Chapter XII.

² This differs a good deal in Corsica from that served in France.

restaurant, and I heartily wished that the *chef* had had the recipe of the Parata *pêcheurs*. *Bouillabaisse* is either very good or alarmingly repulsive.

I have always entertained a great dislike of going back by the way I came, and my suggestion to take a round-about route to Ajaccio was carried without a division. We sent the two landaus back to town, one of them taking my bicycle, and a fisherman undertook to see the two horses safely home. We cut across the *maquis* to the Col de Canareccia and joined the road from Vignola, running at right angles to the Parata route. It is not a road I can recommend, but we were a light-hearted, jovial party, and the humour of Corsica, Sweden, Germany, France, and—let me whisper it gently and in all humbleness—actually of Scotland, kept us going at a swinging pace, while down from the *maquis*-clad rocks came the echo of our laughter and our shouts. At Pisinale the panorama is particularly fine, and approaching Villanova a charming view of the Gulf de Lava bursts into view. At the tiny hamlet a peasant marvelled at our thirst, which, great as it was, could not nearly match his kindly hospitality.

After Villanova the route wriggles in and out in a most extraordinary manner, and on four occasions we scrambled over the *maquis* to avoid the twists. Soon, however, we joined one of the main roads from Ajaccio northwards and left it again half a mile or so farther on to visit the Château de la Punta. Corsica is a country of twisting roads, but I think the path up to the *château* creates a distinct record in tortuous twists. As the proverbial self-respecting crow would fly, the distance from the main road is, I judged, just a little over a mile. As one is compelled to walk it is about four and a half. In the flickering shade of the eucalyptus-trees or under the more refreshing shelter of the olive, past bold rocks and

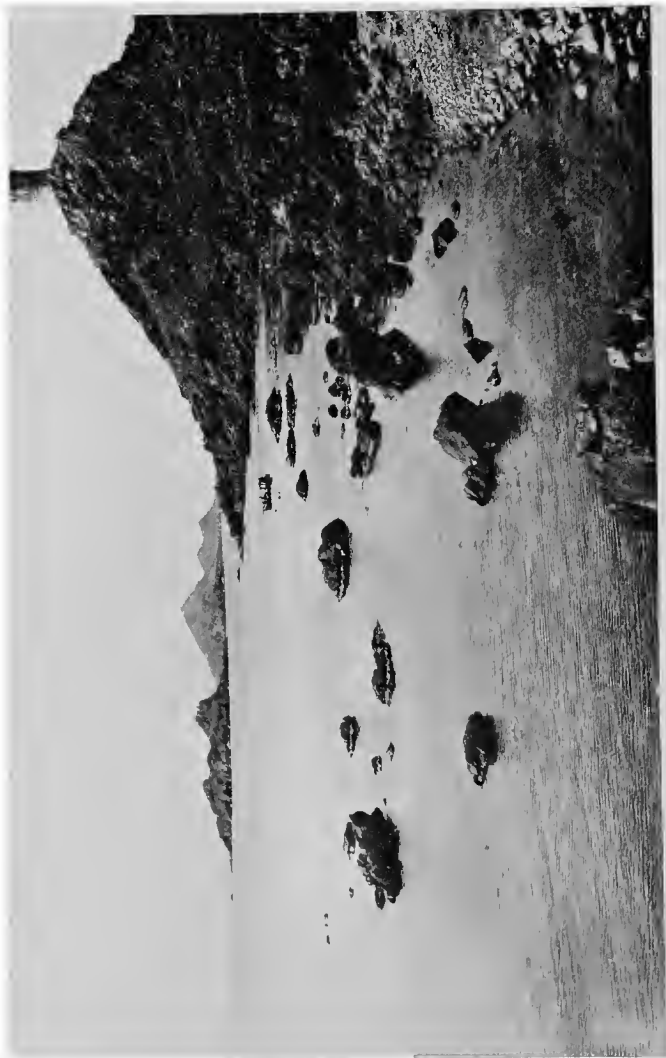
clumps of fine oaks we pushed our way slowly upwards. On the route is to be seen the mausoleum of the famous Pozzo di Borgo family[†] and the three ruined towers of Monticchi, a fortified place in days long gone by.

The *château* itself stands at a height of 2,000 feet above sea-level. It was built between 1886 and 1894 by the Duke Jérôme Pozzo di Borgo and his son Charles, the material used being what was saved from the burning of the Tuileries at Paris in 1871, and the plan followed in construction was to reproduce one of the pavilions of that ill-fated palace, "pour conserver," as an inscription says, "à la Patrie Corse un précieux souvenir de la Patrie Française." There is a great deal inside the *château* to attract the visitor's attention. The tapestry and the pictures are equally fine and the marvellous Renaissance chimney-pieces and the decorative art throughout the entire building are undeniably superb.

The Frenchman was subdued in manner. What was this "précieux souvenir de la patrie française" doing on an outlandish hilltop in Corsica? The Ajaccien was proud. Was it not a matter for congratulation that, when "la patrie française" temporarily lost her head, "la patrie corse" preserved for her this "précieux souvenir" of a glorious past? The Germans, in a thunderstorm of Teutonic gutturals, were all admiration and openly sided with the Ajaccien. The Scotsman, thinking of King Edward I. and the Coronation Stone, sympathised with Monsieur, and unequal war was on the point of being declared, when the Swede intervened. International *entente cordiale* was restored over refreshments.

From the hilltop three or four hundred feet higher up

[†] The history of this famous family is briefly outlined in Chapter XII. in the description of Alata, the native place of the family.



CAP DE LA PARATA AND THE ILES SANGUINAIRES.

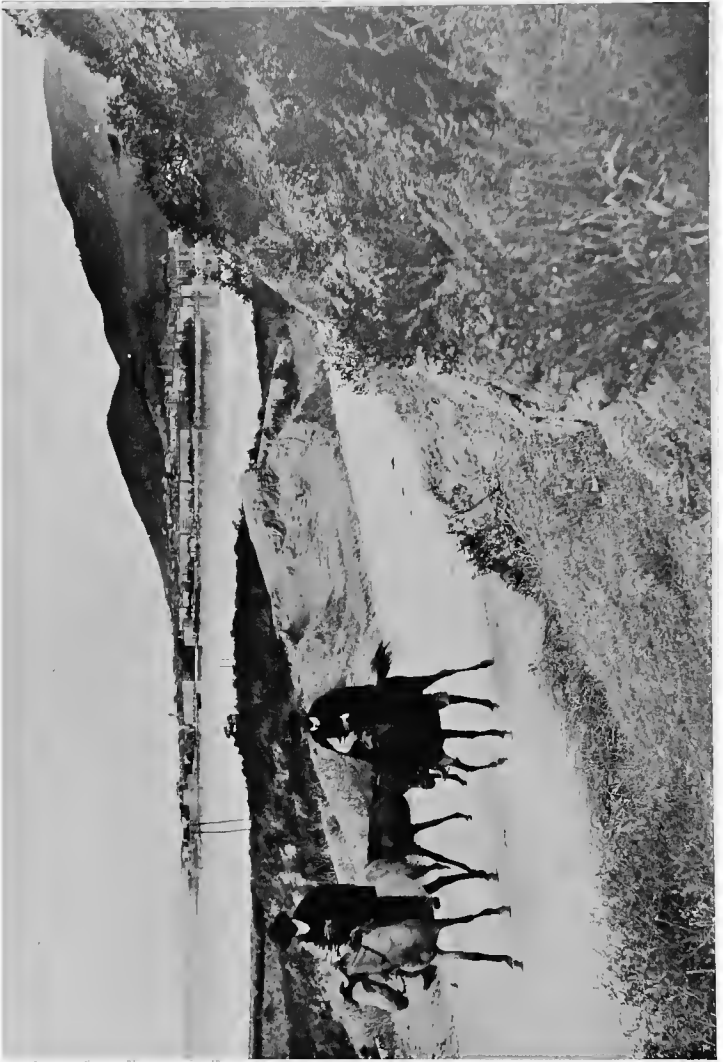
trickles a glittering little stream, watering the beautiful *jardin anglais* with its alleys, its perfect sward, its ornamental plants, and its magnificent trees, while shooting off into the *maquis* are many "lovers' lanes." We took that leading to the summit, half an hour's climb, where the view was delightful—the finest, I think, in that part of the island. Stretching away to the north-east, mountains lay piled on one another, a gorgeous vista of purple peaks dipped in the rose and violet radiance of declining day. That, indeed, were allurements enough, but in the far north the Gulf de Lava and the Gulf de Sagone gleam in the gold of evening—a bit of Corsica's robe of blue set with sequins of the sun. Southward are Ajaccio and its gulf, and at the end of the faintly-traced road we had come the ruddy Iles Sanguinaires. In the glory of sunset how appropriate their name!

Retracing our steps past the *château*, we broke off from the route and took a path through woods and *maquis* towards Ajaccio. About halfway to the town is the Jardin des Milelli, which at one time belonged to the Bonaparte family, but which is now a part of the town lands. The small house, now inhabited by shepherds, is to be seen surrounded with a plantation of olive-trees. A peasant pointed out to us an oak-tree under which Napoleon used to study. But we all thought of the grotto and were sceptical. It is, however, true that on one occasion Madame Mère brought her children here when Ajaccio was in a state of siege and the Paolists were up in arms. It was also from this country-seat that Napoleon fled to the Tour de Capitello.* A little farther on we reached the Penitentiary of Castelluccio, filled, we were told, by prisoners from France's North African colonies. There is a similar establishment a mile nearer the town. A tramp of about four kilometres along the

* See Chapter II.

beautiful valley of Saint Antoine brought us in the day back to Ajaccio—and to dinner.

This beautiful round by no means exhausts the charm of Ajaccio's surroundings. The "route de Salario," with its fountains of delicious water at the top, is a lovely afternoon stroll. The name is, I believe, a corruption of "salamander," a legend stating that the source of the water was discovered in the midst of a nest of salamander. On the same hillside is the Promenade des Pins, a twisting pathway through a wood of pines and olive-trees, interspersed with flowering broom, with a glorious view of the gulf at the top. Here also is the Promenade des Crête which may be taken as the first part of a charming route to reach Scudo, on the Parata road, a walk of about three hours. The waters of Caldaniccia are about six miles from Ajaccio. They lie off the main road to Corté on the right bank of the River Gravone. The region is a desolate one. The waters are much used by sufferers from rheumatism and several other complaints, and are said to have a surprising effect.



CHAPTER II

SOUTHWARD TO SARTÈNE

“When I came to the little port of Propriano, that feeling of being out of the world came over me, which one cherishes so dearly on the lonely island.”

“Sartène . . . a large paese¹ in melancholy isolation among melancholy mountains.”

F. GREGOROVIVS.

I T is almost superfluous for me to say that I left Ajaccio on my tour through Corsica on a beautiful morning; it is practically impossible to leave the town on a morning which could not be so described. Weather is a thing we distrust, and with reason, in this country; in Corsica it may be trusted implicitly. Amongst my baggage which I left behind in Ajaccio to await my return was my rain-proof cape, so great was my faith in the Corsican Clerk of the Weather. And I must admit that he treated me handsomely. Not until I had left Porto on the west coast, that is, not until I was almost within sight of the end of my long tour awheel, was there a drop of rain, the estimable Clerk doubtless thinking that it would scarcely be right to let me leave Corsica without knowing how it rained in Vendettaland.

The road southward to Sartène, an excellent one, circles the gulf for several miles, and then one steers

¹ Commune.

straight for the mountains. On reaching the opposite side of the gulf from Ajaccio, the route cuts off a little neck of land where stands the Fort of Aspreto on an eminence three or four hundred yards from the road. The immediately surrounding country was the scene of a desperate encounter in the year 1731 between 1,100 Genoese troops and twenty-one shepherds from Bastelica. It was during the winter, and the men had brought their animals from the colder uplands round Bastelica to the Campo dell' Oro—a fertile stretch of country, a fine view of which is obtained from the fort. The Genoese governor determined to expel the shepherds by force, and eight hundred soldiers were sent against them. A battle was fought near the fort, and the Genoese were defeated with heavy loss, being driven back for a mile towards Ajaccio. Meanwhile a second force, three hundred strong, had disembarked in the rear of the band of shepherds, who soon found themselves surrounded in the marsh made by one of the mouths of the Gravone. A fight *à l'outrance* took place, and, after an heroic struggle, the band of *bergers* was exterminated with the exception of one man, who was taken prisoner to Ajaccio. He was forced to walk through the town surrounded by men carrying on spikes the heads of six of his relatives. His captors then executed him, and his body was exposed for days on the walls of the citadel. As the traveller goes through Corsica he will hear scores of such tales relating the hideous cruelty with which the Genoese endeavoured to fasten their authority on the island.

At this spot, as I have said, the traveller will see spread before him the Campo dell' Oro—"the Field of Gold." It is bounded by the two arms of the River Gravone, one of which pours itself into the gulf near the Fort of Aspreto while the other, after receiving the waters of

the Prunelli, finds the sea a couple of miles or so farther along the coast. The Campo is one of the most fertile spots in Corsica, and though to some extent fever-stricken in summer, it is splendidly cultivated. So fruitful is it, in fact, that the Corsican has a saying that if cocoanut-trees are planted there, in two months they will yield not only cocoanuts but monkeys !

The Campo behind me, I left my cycle at a wayside cottage and set out on a two-mile tramp by the side of the river to its mouth, where there stands the Capitello Tower. The tower is connected with an interesting story of the first military exploit of Napoleon Bonaparte. In April, 1793, consequent on the failure of a Corsican expedition to take possession of Sardinia, the French Convention, which had restored to the Corsicans their independence, called before the bar on a charge of treason Pasquale Paoli, the great Corsican patriot, who was then President of the Administration of the island, and Pozzo di Borgo, Procureur Général. An insurrection of the peasants followed this *volte-face* of the Convention. The young Napoleon was himself arrested by Paolists at the little town of Bocognano, but was rescued by his friends. The Bonaparte family, as has been related in the previous chapter, fled to Milelli, and their house in Ajaccio was plundered.

Early in May Napoleon, whose sympathies had turned to the Convention, though previously he had been an ardent supporter and a firm friend of Paoli, went to Bastia, and there he managed to convince the Convention Commissioners that a show of force would be sufficient to quell the revolt. A few small ships of war were at St. Florent, and these were ordered to Ajaccio, whilst Napoleon, with about fifty men, established himself at the Capitello Tower. He then managed to procure a cannon and to raise his force to three hundred men.

The idea was that he should attack Ajaccio by land and the fleet by sea. Storms, however, scattered the ship and the tower was besieged by a thousand armed peasants. After existing for three days on horseback Napoleon escaped on board one of the ships, on which he went to Calvi. The tower is one of those Genoese buildings so frequently met with along the coast, an even to-day it shows signs of the damage which Napoleon did when he tried to blow it up before quitting it. It is strange to think that the mock-siege of the tower marked the parting of the ways in Napoleon's career. It drove him from Corsica; it turned his attention from his island home to France; it changed the current of his thought from the affairs of a little *patrie* to things imperial; forced him to take his first step on the way to a throne.

The aspect of the country changes rapidly after crossing the Prunelli. The hillsides are uncultivated, peasant cottages become few and far between. The landscape however, is particularly striking. On the Pont de Pisciatello, across the Prunelli, one catches a glimpse of the snow-clad Monte Rotondo, which is at least thirty miles distant. Then comes the lovely valley of the Mutoleggia, a little stream bordered by vines and *maquis* and looked down upon by frowning hills.

Here it was that I first appreciated the glorious charm of the *maquis*, its hesitant, elusive perfume, which makes the air of Corsica something unique in the world. It is spread all over the island like a carpet, making the country another Green Isle, another Ireland. The *maquis*, although to be found in one or two of the nearest parts of the Continent, grows nowhere else to such an enormous extent. It is a mixture of eight plants—cistus, lentiscus, arbutus, myrtle, heath, rosemary, juniper, and wild olive—combining to give Corsica an enchanted atmosphere, to make it the Scented Isle.

where he fell; he learned war with the Medici of Rome; with Francis I. he fought, and the Europe of his day rang with his name; he was one of Bayard's friends; Charles Bourbon said he was worth ten thousand men.

In 1547 Sampiero felt that his country needed him. He returned to the island and a renowned Corsican, Francesco d'Ornano, gave his only daughter, a young lady of great beauty, to the valiant warrior. As soon, however, as the Genoese governor heard he was in the island, he had Sampiero seized and thrown into prison. The French ambassador at Genoa claimed Sampiero as a French subject and he was released. Then commenced the great fighter's lifelong struggle against the Genoese oppressors.

War had broken out between France and Charles V., and the French carried the war into Corsica, as the Genoese were closely allied with Charles. The French landed in the island under Marshal Thermes, and the Corsicans sprang to arms. With Thermes came Sampiero, who, after his release, had been on the Continent. A fierce war was at once entered upon, a war in which the Rupert of Corsica swept victoriously through the country. So great was the terror of his name that Bastia and Corté quickly surrendered. Not all Sampiero's deeds of valour could, however, conquer Calvi—"semper fidelis." The siege had to be raised and the warrior turned his attention to Ajaccio, which he soon took. The houses of the Genoese were plundered and thousands of persons were slain. In this instance, history tells how deeply the Corsican characteristic of hospitality is implanted. In the midst of frightful slaughter, the Genoese appealed to the generosity and hospitality of their foes, and at once the avenging sword rested from its bloody work. Lamba Doria, the Genoese governor

of Ajaccio, was himself received in the house of Francesco d'Ornano, the father-in-law of Sampiero !

Meanwhile, France's Turkish allies were besieging Bonifacio and sweeping, with fire and sword, the surrounding country. Here, again, Sampiero's valour failed, but trickery in the end succeeded. A Genoese messenger, carrying news to the hard-pressed town that help was near, was captured and forced to convey the intelligence to the besieged that relief was impossible. Believing this, the untaken town surrendered.

From Calvi, however, the famous Genoese general, Andrea Doria, set out to reconquer the island, and it would take chapters to tell of all the brilliant deeds of Sampiero in the terrible war that followed. For six long years he wore down the Genoese, helped by Spaniards and Germans, and succeeded in making Corsica independent, though under the nominal sovereignty of France. Then, like a thunderbolt, came the news of the peace of 1559. France, by treaty of peace with Philip of Spain and his allies, gave up Corsica to Genoa !

Sampiero was forced then to become an outlaw, for it was necessary to give the island time to recover in order to sustain war again. It had been devastated and the upkeep of armies was, for the time, an impossibility. For four years he wandered over the world asking for help and receiving promises. Genoa's spies were ever at his heel. Poison, the sword, the dagger, all were tried to rid the Republic of its formidable enemy, but in vain. Meanwhile Sampiero's outlawry had reduced his wife and family to poverty. His wife was living at Marseilles, and the Genoese, seeking to strike at their inveterate foe through his wife, endeavoured to entice her to Genoa, with the idea that she would be the means of reconciling her husband and the Republic. Sampiero heard of this

and despatched a friend to prevent her going. He himself was at that time in Algiers, treating with Barbarossa. His wife was brought back to Aix, having been intercepted just in time to prevent her from reaching Genoa, and Sampiero returned to her *viâ* Constantinople.

In Marseilles he carried out the great crime which stains the story of his life. A friend met him there and told him that he had long suspected that Vannina would flee to Genoa.

“And you hid your suspicions from me!” yelled Sampiero in wildest anger, as he stabbed his friend to the heart.

Sampiero brought his wife back to Marseilles, and in their deserted, desolate house, overcome by the awful thought that his beloved Vannina had surrendered herself and her son to the hated Genoa, he killed her.

After more wandering, the famous warrior, with something more than the hate of stifled liberty in his heart, went back to Corsica. He landed at Propriano and caused his ship to be sunk. “My safety is now my sword,” he said. With a tiny force of about a hundred men he advanced on Corté, and the Genoese fled in terror. A brilliant victory at Vescovato, between Bastia and Corté, and another not far away in Caccia, brought the whole of the island in arms to the conqueror’s side. Genoa fought stubbornly, employing all the arts of war and conspiracy to defeat the islanders. Victory rested now with one side, now with the other. Stephen Doria, the Genoese commander, succeeded at last in laying waste half the island, yet Sampiero and his braves were untamed.

Deserted by their former friends on the Continent, the Corsicans fell back on guerilla warfare, for the prosecution of which their country and their temper so greatly suited them. Little daring bands of fighters bled Genoa

of strength. Sampiero drove Doria, wounded almost to death, from the island. Governor after governor failed to corner the Corsican hero. Genoa, the victor over Pisa and Venice, the master of Europe's most formidable legions, the possessor of the greatest generals of the day—Genoa recoiled stricken before Sampiero and his bands of fearless outlaws.

But where military force and wealth failed, treachery at last succeeded. Forged letters and false news brought this Corsican Wallace through the little valley where the memorial stone is erected. He was accompanied by but a small band of men, and as I sat there chattering with a patriotic young Corsican, it was not difficult to re-enact the whole bitter tragedy. The Corsican came along slowly with his little band. Suddenly the hillside bristled with armed men. Sampiero saw at a glance that this time he was cornered. He turned to his son. "Sauve-toi!" he said, and the young man escaped, to live to become a marshal of France. The aged warrior—for Sampiero was sixty-nine at the time—had almost cut his way through the attacking band when he found himself face to face with three relatives of his dead wife, won over to the enemy by Genoese gold and a desire for personal vengeance. One of the Ornani fell wounded by a shot from Sampiero's pistol, but his gun missed fire, for his own armourer, who had turned traitor, had tampered with it. He then rushed at his enemies with his sword, but fell shot in the back by his armourer. The day was the 17th of January, 1567.

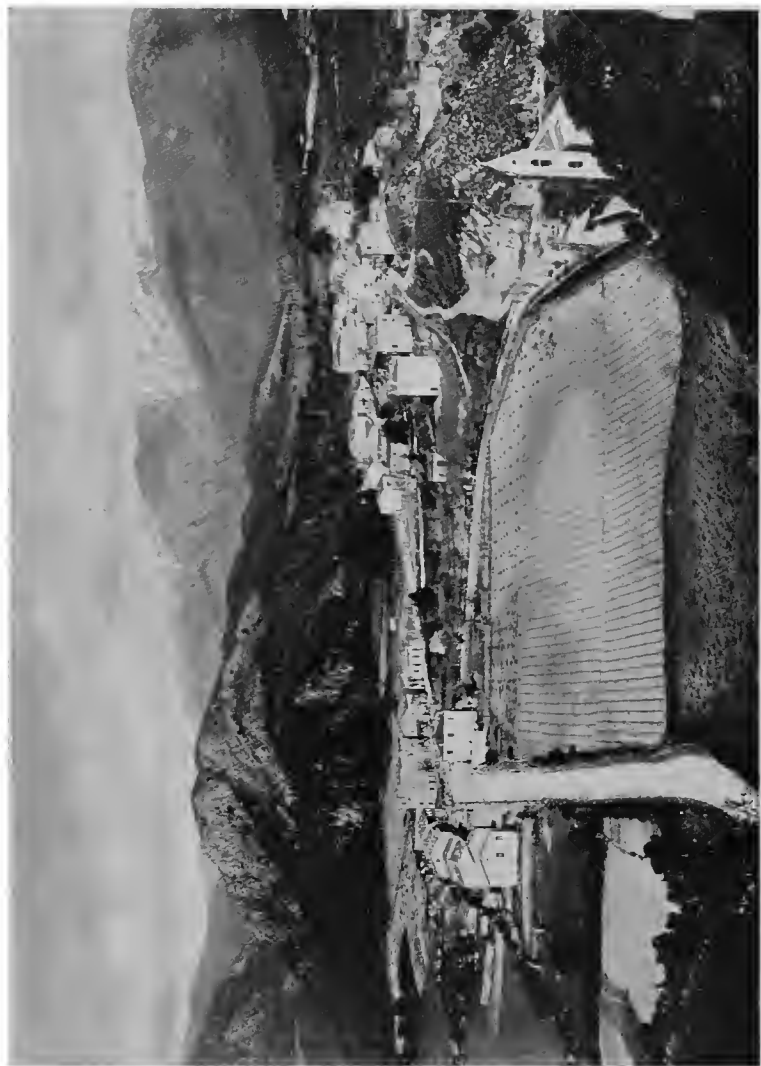
I know but one more inspiring spot in Corsica—the birthplace and tomb of Pasquale Paoli at Morosaglia. But the spot where Sampiero fell, the little porphyry ravine, inspires one in a different way. Paoli lives in the hearts of his countrymen as a great man of peace; Sampiero as a terrible man of war. History has scarcely

a name to parallel with his. He left to Corsica an example of passion for freedom and fearlessness in fight which carried her through eras of devastating war, eras in which she must often have sighed for a Sampiero. It was his spirit which the foreigner tried to crush during two solid centuries and which only succumbed, worn out and broken, on the stricken field of Ponte Nuovo in 1769. He also bequeathed a darker page to Corsica's rough story—the terrible page, blood-red, which tells of vendetta, which, while war has slain its thousands, has claimed its tens of thousands. The slaying of his friend and his wife and the subsequent plot against him by his relatives are in reality the fountain-heads from which the stream of personal vengeance flowed on through Time for more than three centuries.

From the end of this little by-path the road mounts to the pleasant little village of Cauro, "a straggling village with one large, square house and a little church—Cauro, the stepping-stone between civilisation and those wild districts about Sartène."¹ There are, perhaps, eight hundred inhabitants in the place, dwelling in rough little houses scattered in groups round the church and shaded by delightful plantains. The surroundings are particularly beautiful; the atmosphere like wine. There is a quaint little inn—the Hôtel de France. The "dining-room," typical of its kind, is furnished with a large table, shaky chairs, a still shakier half-burst sofa, and a Singer sewing machine, whilst in the corner is a heap of bedding ready to hand for any unexpected influx of visitors.

The diligence crawled and creaked up behind me and landed two passengers for dinner, one a peasant and the other "something in Zicavo," homeward bound from Ajaccio. The peasant at dinner displayed extraordinary

¹ H. Seton Merriman.



CAURO.

capacity for undiluted wine, and he led a long discussion on the inadvisability of adding water. I managed to turn it on to the more interesting topic—to me—of Sampiero, and the peasant promised to take me to see Cauro's church and to tell me the legend of Sampiero's head. We talked of many things—of bandits, of Corsican scenery, and of England—while we worked our way through a *menu* which I reproduce as constituting a typical Corsican *déjeuner* of the wayside inn :—

Sardines.

Smoked Sausage.

Haricot Beans.

Roast Mutton.

Fried Potatoes.

Bread and Cheese.

Oranges.

The church lies off the main road at the entrance to the village from Ajaccio. The peasant and I hunted up the old man who kept the keys, and we had a look into the quaint little building. According to my companion's story, Sampiero's head was buried in the church just a month after his death, the body having been exposed for that time on the walls of the citadel of Ajaccio. Long ago there existed a curious custom in the villages in this part of the island. When drought was being severely felt, it was customary for the villagers to march in procession to the nearest stream of water. At the head was a youth, who carried on a salver a human skull which had been exhumed from some ancient tomb either in the church or the churchyard. On arrival at the brook the head was thrown into the water. About seventy years ago this custom was still observed, and on one occasion a human head was discovered in the church and used for this strange ceremony. At night it was found that the blue parchment which had covered the head bore the inscription "San Piero," and there could be no doubt

that the head which had been thrown into the brook was that of Corsica's hero.

It was decided to recover it next day, but before morning a very heavy rain fell, the brook became swollen, and the head was carried away.

Being thoroughly saturated with Sampiero lore, I decided to alter my plan for the day—my plans were never made for more than a day ahead—and, instead of pushing straight on to Petreto-Bicchisano, I turned aside and took the road to Bastelica, Sampiero's birthplace, nineteen kilometres distant. Cycling in Corsica demands that one should rest in the middle of the day. I always made it a rule to be on the road between five and six o'clock in the morning and to halt about eleven o'clock. The heat for the next four hours makes riding more painful than pleasurable. Shortly after three o'clock, then, I left for Bastelica. A stiff cycling road it is, and, though the surface is mostly good, the route winds in annoying zigzags, and I must have walked a fairly large proportion of the distance.

But there is the lure of Corsican scenery, and, no matter how difficult the road, as each corner ahead seems to beckon one forward with the promise of still fairer beauty, the kilometres slip under one's feet often almost unnoticed. The fascination of speed, of ticking off the milestones, ten or twelve every hour, is a fever which does not thrive in Corsican air. Steep roads and subtle charm combine to play havoc with what one expected one's rate of progress to be and to reduce one's average speed to some undiscovered decimal in the neighbourhood of seven miles an hour. That is the general speed in the island. The creaking diligences with their bony horses just touch it; the railway train exceeds it by but little; the fiery little Corsican mule seems to pride itself on falling in with fashion.

The country through which the road to Bastelica passes would be difficult to surpass in that part of Corsica. It winds through the gorgeous *maquis*, the subtle perfume of which dwells with me to-day—the *maquis* in all the splendour of early summer garb, hiding in its depths its herds of goats with their tinkling bells. Oak and pine vie in offering shade; Monte Renoso, between 7,000 and 8,000 feet high, towers beyond Bastelica; far as the eye can reach over hill and dale and up to the mountained horizon is shimmer and shade, shade and shimmer.

Bastelica itself lies in a sort of amphitheatre on the Prunelli. The town is composed of several *hameaux*, as is usually the case with Corsican villages. In Bastelica there are six, and—a rather unusual thing—not one of them is called Bastelica, for a group of *hameaux* mostly takes a collective name from the principal one. The *hameaux* are Les Dominicaccia, Les Vassalaccia, La Costa, Le Santo, Les Trucolacci, and Stazzona. It was in the first named that Sampiero was born. The actual house was burned down by the Genoese during the great warrior's lifetime, but another house has, within comparatively recent times, been built upon the site. On this building there is an inscription in the Corsican dialect, a translation of which is as follows:—

To the Greatest of Corsicans,
SAMPIERO,
Famous Hero amongst the numberless Heroes
whom
The Love of the Fatherland has nourished
Among its mountains and torrents,
William Wyse,
Irish Catholic,
Nephew of Napoleon the Great,^{*}
Dedicates this Marble,
8th December, Conception Day,
1855.

^{*} Lucien Bonaparte's daughter married Wyse.

Above this inscription is the *tête de Maure* which is seen on the arms of Corsica. How a Moorish head came to be there is a matter of controversy. It is, however, most likely that this curious head, with a bandage of silver, owes its presence on the Corsican arms to the fact that legend says it was a part of the arms of the Moorish King Lanza Ansica when that monarch, in fable-shaded eras, conquered the island.

On the open space in front of the church—La Place de l'Église—is a fine statue of Sampiero by Vital Dubray, erected in September, 1890. It is really a splendid piece of work and shows Sampiero in fighting attitude with his sword on high.

Bastelica, said Mr. H. Seton Merriman, is "a place with an evil name," but the well-known novelist adds nothing to justify the statement, and anything I can say about Bastelica will be in refutation of that remark. It is a favourite holiday resort for the people of Ajaccio and it caters to a fair extent for visitors. The town is proud of its *eau de la montagne*, which is delicious; it lies about 3,000 feet above sea-level and its climate is mild and equable. With its magnificent circle of chestnut forests, its well-kept houses of granite with their red roofs, Bastelica is an ideal Corsican town, and the charm is heightened by the kindly disposition of the people. True Corsicans they are, tall, finely built, with clear blue Corsican eyes. And it is strange that, dwelling in the birthplace of Sampiero, under the shadow of his fine statue and with his memory ever present among them, the Bastelicans have always had the reputation that amongst them enmity and vendetta are unknown. Yet they preserve most of the real Corsican characteristics. The men look extremely picturesque in their dress of shaggy cloth, a peculiar material, practically waterproof, and made in the town itself. The women, too, are just a little fonder



STATUE OF SAMPIERO AT BASTELICA.

of bright colours than is usually the rule in the district.

Early next morning I sped quickly back to Cauro, and, almost before the people there were awake, I was negotiating the steep rise which leads to the Col de St. Georges, the ridge of the mountain range which separates the valley of the Prunelli from that of the Taravo. The view to the rear as the traveller climbs is one of a series of undulating ridges, vine-clad, wooded country stretching away till it melts in the distant haze, and the prospect of another such vista spurs him on for six or seven miles of stiff going. And he is not disappointed. As I stood on the *col* there lay spread at my feet two vales of striking grandeur. Dark precipices frowned here and there; the rivers ran like molten silver through vales of gold; chestnut groves, cut by roaring mountain torrents, and clusters of olive-trees stood out proudly, while little villages dotted the wide landscape. The sea glittered faintly in the distance.

It was difficult to make up one's mind to go on again, but soon, astride my cycle, I ran quickly down to the cool Taravo. The staid flow of its clear waters was inviting. It was just nine o'clock, so, leaving my cycle in charge of a talkative laddie watching his goats, by the wayside, I went down the bank of the river, and in a huge, deep, rock-bound pool, fed by a picturesque little row of waterfalls, I enjoyed a lovely cooling bathe. In this and other pools I noticed that trout were very numerous and I regretted not having a fishing rod. In one pool the fish were particularly abundant, and one fine fellow, on my approach, committed an error in tactics in hiding under a bit of rock by the bank. A couple of seconds later he was wriggling his life away on the grass. I had successfully recalled that riverside strategy practised

long ago by little Border streams, which went by the name of "gumping."

The little herd laddie looked on my capture with delight and enthusiasm, and, diving into a clump of Mediterranean heath, brought out just what I had sighed for—a fishing rod. A crude article it was, too. He had utilised a willow rod; to the end of it he had tied his line—it was the genuine article—and a fierce-looking double hook was fastened clumsily to a small piece of gut. He fished every day, he said. Otherwise, there would not be a great deal for dinner.

We were soon back at the pool, and my little friend, hunting among the stones on the bank, collected a number of particularly repulsive-looking slugs, which served as bait. It was my honour, so I led off, and what little and long-disused skill I possessed soon played havoc with the happy family in the pool. In about twenty minutes four sturdy trout had joined their "gumped" brother on the bank, and in about the same time my little friend brought the other members of the family to land—three fine trout they were. Then we divided the spoil. The little Corsican pleaded hard for what he termed "an equal division with one extra" for me. I must leave the solution of that problem to some nimbler brain than mine. My arithmetic reeled and staggered before it! In the end I took two and the laddie carried home six, after having expressed his thanks in the most profuse manner. As I pushed up the steady slope from the river I could hear him singing as he made his way homewards down the valley.

Petreto-Bicchisano is a somewhat aggravating place to reach, especially when one has lingered by the wayside and has to do the last stage under the broiling noon-day sun. The place is approached by a long incline; it would be a severe blow to one's self-respect as a cyclist

to dismount and walk, for the rise seems very little, but with a laden cycle it is just as much as one can do to keep going. I reached Bicchisano (the first of the two hamlets which appear on the map as Petreto-Bicchisano) long after mid-day, but without having damaged my self-respect! I expected to have some difficulty at the inn about *déjeuner*, as I was so late, but I was beyond the tyranny of time. Corsica is not regulated by clockwork. My watch said it was a quarter to one, but the genial landlady, taking the trout to the kitchen, said that lunch would be ready about half-past eleven! So I strolled out into the village to think out another arithmetical problem and incidentally to find some one who could provide me with the necessary articles wherewith to furnish a fishing-rod, for my success in the gentle art that forenoon had roused once more an ancient fever.

“When in doubt, consult the blacksmith” is an excellent thing to remember in Corsica. If there is anything he cannot give you, he can always tell you where to get it. As a rule he will offer in the latter case to get it for you. He knows everything and everybody, he is a mine of information upon everything. The gendarmes come and go; *monsieur le forgeron* goes on for ever. I consulted the blacksmith in this case, and during lunch he brought to the inn an excellent little willow rod, with line and hooks complete.

“Monsieur,” he said, nodding to the gendarme, who was lunching with me, “will tell you the law about fishing.”

“It is the close time just now for everything in the rivers but trout,” replied the gendarme, just as Madame placed on the table a second course of fish—which were not trout. The gendarme looked hard at them and Madame smiled.

“But, of course,” added the gendarme, “you don’t

need to worry about observing the law *au pied de la lettre* in Corsica."

And I didn't!

From Petreto-Bicchisano, ringed with shady trees, with the Ben-Nevis-like Mount St. Petro towering above it, I intended to run to Propriano. The route rises *en lacets* for about nine miles, but, as on the way to Bastelica, the scenery is charming, the road good, and the miles soon slip by. On the Col de Celaccia a lovely vista of another glorious valley, ending in the shining Gulf de Valinco, is to be seen. A steep descent brought me quickly to a picturesque little village literally hung on the mountain side. Dismounting half-way down the "street," I asked the blacksmith what the name of the place was.

"Olmel'," he replied, dropping the final vowel as usual. We chatted for a little while.

"Have you read 'Colomba'?" he asked.

I replied that I had nearly learned it by heart.

"Well," he added, "it was in Olmel' that Colomba died."

So that day I went no farther. In homage to the memory of my favourite heroine I felt compelled to stay there until next day at least. There is no getting away from Colomba in Olmeto—"grande, blanche, les yeux bleu foncé, la bouche rose, les dents comme de l'émail . . . l'orgueil, l'inquiétude et la tristesse"—you meet her by Olmeto's well to-day. The blacksmith came with me to the inn, where a tiny maid sat on the doorstep nursing a ferocious-looking *poupée*. She told me her name was Colomba. In the dining-room of the inn there is a bookcase where I found one book—"Colomba."

Prosper Mérimée's heroine was in real life a lady named Colomba Carabelli. The vendetta in which she took such an active part, as described, almost exactly, by the French writer, actually took place at Fozzano, about



VIEWS OF OLMETO.

ten miles inland from Olmeto, in 1833. Colomba died thirty years later.

I had just settled matters at the hotel when the blacksmith returned. Would I join in the remnant of the celebrations in connection with the return of the Republican candidates to the local council? Of course I would. A score of village worthies were assembled in a little *buvette* opposite the smithy. The tricolour had been run up outside and we drank to "La République Française." Then the old mayor proposed the new mayor and *vice versa*. A jovial old character gave the toast of "Nos amis en Angleterre." He was careful to explain that that meant everybody in that wonderful country, to which he could pay no higher compliment than to call it "the other Corsica." Success to my journey and a score of other toasts were drunk—in a sweet syrup recalling the tasty raspberry vinegar of long ago.

We talked Corsican politics and I asked what the difference was between the Republican and the Bonapartist parties. The answer, to anyone who has delved deeply into the intricacies of foreign politics, was simplicity itself. It was that the Republicans were simply more socialistic than the Bonapartists! The doings of the advocates of women's suffrage in England had even penetrated to Olmeto, and the extension of the franchise in this direction was heatedly discussed. I was converted to a belief in women's suffrage while in Finland—the first country to give women parliamentary votes and to send women as members to Parliament—long before the question seriously vexed England. But in little Olmeto, where they talk of Socialism, I was the only "champion of the dames." The general belief was that women would never get votes in Corsica.

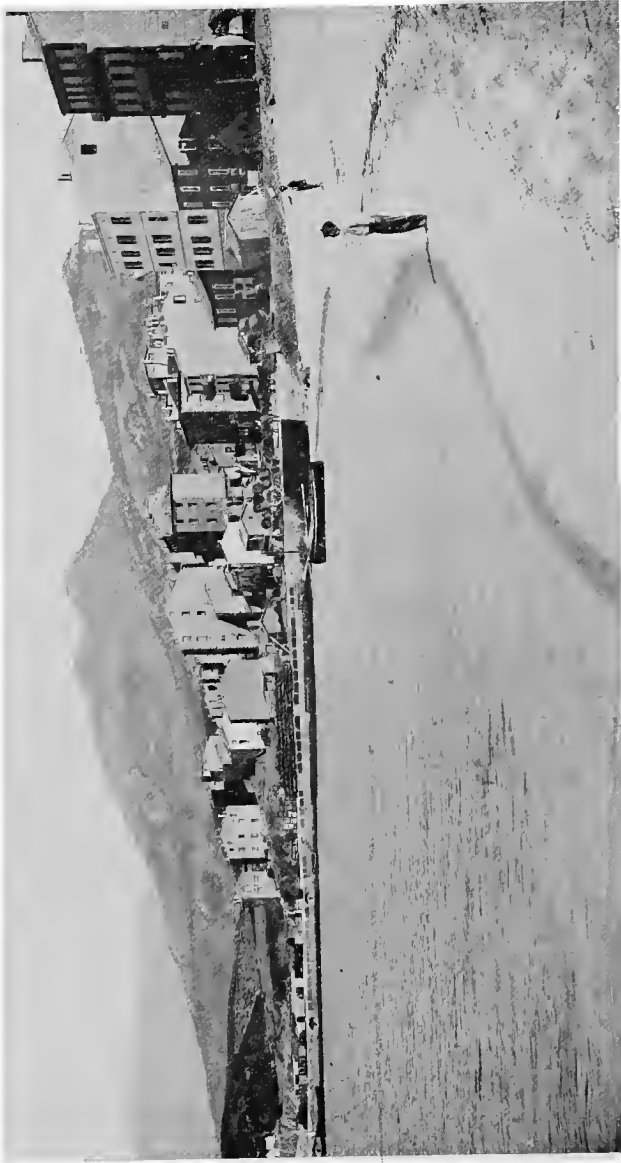
And Madame de la Buvette smiled!

It is in such little gatherings that one meets the real

Corsican—vastly interested in politics, fiercely patriotic, eloquent, eager for news from beyond his little island, ready to discuss the most intricate problems, musical, friendly.

Reposing amid fruit-trees and vines, Olmeto clings to the hillside facing the silvery Gulf de Valinco with Propriano sparkling in the distance. The village has a proud history. Near at hand is the ruin of the castle of Arrigo della Rocca, an impregnable-looking place now invaded by the wildest vegetation. Arrigo was one of the many fierce fighters against the Genoese whom Corsica has bred. He drove them from the island on one occasion, save from Calvi and Bonifacio, and caused himself to be proclaimed Count of Corsica. For four years he governed well, but his methods changed subsequently to cruelty, so that the Genoese had no great difficulty in establishing themselves in the island once more owing to the division in the ranks of the Corsicans. Arrigo then sought aid from the King of Aragon, and landing with a strong force, conquered the island again and took the Genoese governor prisoner. Stern rule once more made him unpopular, and he is said to have died as the result of a Corsican-Genoese conspiracy, being poisoned at Vizzavona, in the centre of the island, in 1401.

On leaving this charming little place the road is precipitous till the sea shore is reached. The way then skirts the delightful gulf, rimmed with brown sand mixed with rough grass, shrubs, and huge stones. A silent place it is, only the faintest murmur of the waves stealing through the air and little indication on the beach that the waves are ever furious. But this spot has had its share of noise and war, though those long ago have retired beyond the mountain barrier. Here Sampiero landed with his valiant little band: somewhere in the bay must rest the little ship he sank. In the distance on the



PROPRIANO.

southern shore is the Campo Moro, where round an old watch-tower in one's imagination one seems to see landing troops of brightly-clad Saracens.

Then comes Propriano, dumped down on a little promontory of the gulf. It is a prosperous little port—the busiest between Ajaccio and Bastia. It has an excellent harbour, the entrance for trade to a big slice of Southern Corsica. A couple of ships were unloading at the quay when I reached it. A strangely-assorted mass was being piled up, most of which was to find its way on huge wagons up the steep way to Sartène, of which Propriano is the port. It is a more open, cleaner town than those I had till then come across. With a railway Propriano would rival Ajaccio and Bastia. As it is, the port is the stumbling-block in the way of Bonifacio's greater prosperity. Why the Corsicans are content to wait patiently till some red-tape-bound *grippe-sou* in Paris says she may have her railway system extended was one thing I never quite got to the bottom of in Corsica.

Near the port is Baracci, with its waters famed for the cure of rheumatism.

From Propriano the road turns inland and sweeps along like a switchback till the bridge across the Rizzanèse is reached.

This spot has its legend. Near the road are two peculiar stones, and they certainly give one the impression that two persons have been petrified to form them. The story goes that a monk and a nun, fleeing from Sartène, halted by the riverside to rest. Fate overtook them there and turned them into pillars of stone. The stones are called the Menhirs du Rizzanèse.

From the river to Sartène is an extremely stiff pull. When I got within sight of the town—perched tantalisingly high up in the mountains and capped with cloud—I could see the road twisting for six or seven miles in

front of me. Before starting on this heavy piece of work I sat down under a roadside tree with my map to see if there was a way round. But there was not. There seemed to be nothing for it but to put into practice that fine little motto on which I was reared, "Put a stout heart to a steady brae." He must have been a traveller in Corsica who first said that.

Just as I rose, from round the corner came the rumble of wheels, and a minute later a huge wagon, laden with sacks of flour, and in charge of a jovial, singing wagoner, appeared.

"Going to Sartène?" he shouted as he approached.

"I should like to dine there to-night, if possible," I replied.

"It's a stiff pull for a cyclist, but look here!" And he took a piece of rope, and, drawing his horses to a standstill, tied it to the rear of the wagon.

"Hold on to that and you'll go up in style," he said.

It was, indeed, something to be grateful for, and, though the chain over the top of the wagon beat on the sacks and sent clouds of flour over me, I was Corsican enough by that time not to worry much about my appearance. With the driver to chat to, the steep miles soon passed; slowly but surely we climbed up into Sartène and the clouds, below us stretching a wide, sombre piece of wild country, thick with pine forests and dark with boulders. Cork-trees and evergreen-oaks girt the roadside, and from far beneath the route the harmonious murmur of gentle streams ascended.

At last I was in Sartène, where the wildest and most passionate Corsicans are said to live. I dismounted, thanked the jolly wagoner, and shook half a sack of flour out of my coat. As I did so a loud alarm-bell rang out through the twilight.

"Fire?" I queried.

“Oh no !” replied a passer-by, with a smile. “Not a fire ! Only the dinner nearly ready at the hotel.”

I climbed up the narrow *ruelle* and round into a fairly large main street, at the bottom of which stood the Hôtel de César et de l'Univers—a spacious enough name, surely. Madame was all attention ; the remainder of the flour was brushed out of my clothes, my boots cleaned for the first time since leaving Ajaccio ; soap and water appeared in un-Corsican abundance ; the dinner was excellent, and the wine—I endorse Madame's own description—“*si tellement bon.*” I have very pleasant memories of this charming Corsican hotel, even though it be up a long flight of stairs and the clouds float past outside the windows.

Gregorovius put the population of Sartène at 3,890, but I should think that it is well over 5,000 now, as there can be no doubt that the town has grown considerably within recent years. Its situation is peculiar. Perched on an amphitheatre high up on the side of the mountains, the clouds often rest on the lofty roofs. An irregular street, with high and low houses alternately, and many open, rubbish-strewn spaces, leads to the main street, which boasts of a number of shops with an infinite variety of things for sale. At the top of the street is the Place Porta—a square where stands the church, the *mairie*, the *sous-préfecture*, as well as a picturesque fountain with many taps, from which Sartène obtains its water.

Behind the church is the old town—the Borgo quarter. It is at once amusing and sad to visit it. It consists of a mass of extremely narrow passages, often communicating with each other by still narrower staircases, the high houses either shutting out the sun entirely or allowing its rays to enter to turn the alley into an oven. To enter this squalid quarter is like going back into the

Middle Ages or visiting the poorer quarters of the cities of the East. Passers-by have to scrape against the wall to allow one another to pass. If the Sartènese would only learn leap-frog people in a hurry might get along a great deal faster ! Quaint old men doze all day by the doorstep ; children, dogs, rubbish, bits of furniture, or a little shopkeeper's stock-in-trade are all mixed up in the absurd little thoroughfares. Yet the children look healthy and happy, are well clad, and, I found, have had the opportunity to develop an enormous appetite for chocolate. The men are sturdy and handsome, and the women—true Corsican types—have pleasant looks, are finely built, and are fond of colours to a greater degree than most of their *compatriotes*.

The other quarter of the town is that of Sainte Anne, the rich quarter. The dwellings there have a pleasant touch of Italian architecture about them, though the effect is somewhat spoiled by the blackish stone with which the majority of the houses are built.

In the spacious market-place one comes back to the real, idyllic life of the Corsican—the eternal political discussions, the saunter on the terrace of the church, from which a really marvellous view of the surrounding country can be obtained, the all-pervading *dolce far niente* in which the Corsican is such an adept. But picturesque Sartène has not always been so peaceful. Its history is tragic. In and around the town vendetta has raged as nowhere else in the island ; hundreds of Sartènese were, in the sixteenth century, carried off as slaves to Algeria. Mediterranean pirates have ravaged the fertile district with fire and sword. But the most tragic page of its story is that telling of the civil war which, for more than four years, raged within its gates. The Bourbonists of the Sainte Anne quarter and the Liberals, as they termed themselves, of the Borgo quarter



SARTÈNE.



LION DE ROCCAPINA.

quarrelled about the year 1815 over political questions, and intercourse between them became as restricted as it was possible to make it. After the July Revolution of 1830 the quarrel assumed a much more serious character, and unfriendliness changed into open enmity. Each party barricaded its quarter, and for four years the fight went on intermittently, the roll of dead gradually rising and adding fuel to the passion of both sides. Matters culminated in a bloody battle fought in the streets, when the Liberals endeavoured to carry the Sainte Anne quarter by assault. How many lives those terrible years of warfare cost it is impossible to say, and though a treaty of peace was drawn up on December 7, 1834, it was not for many years that anything like friendship was restored.

But though in Sartène the fiercest passions of the Corsican race slumber, to-day the hospitality of the people and their pleasant manners are outstanding features even in a country where those two characteristics are so conspicuous. At every turn one knocks up against their kindness. At dinner on the first night I spent at the hotel I sat down with eight strangers; I rose with eight friends.

Suddenly, just as we were finishing, shots were heard from the market-place.

"They are celebrating the result of the elections," said one. "Let us join them."

We trooped up to the Place Porta. The military band was playing in the middle of the square. A jing-a-ring of children whirled round the players; outside the youngsters the older folks joined hands. Every one must join in, and a minute later tawny hands seized mine and round I went with the others. Revolvers were whipped out and fired skywards; heavy double-barrelled guns joined in the noise, and the rejoicings culminated in the most spirited rendering of the "Marseillaise" that

I have ever heard. In it Corsican passion leapt to life again. Once that passion sent human blood flowing down the streets ; now it heals old sores, wipes out old enmities, and ranges a valiant people in unity under the tricolour of France.

CHAPTER III

MAINLY ABOUT BONIFACIO

“ This Corsican Gibraltar.”

F. GREGOROVIVS.

NATURE, as a sculptor of grotesques, with the wind as her hammer and the rain her chisel, has left many striking examples of her lordly work on the western coast of Corsica. On the side of Cap Corse which faces the setting sun she has hewn many weird effects; south of the Gulf of Porto, in the region of Les Calanches, she has let her art run wild with pomp of fantastic arch and high-flung, sculptured rock, mocking the puny ideas of man with its colossal magnitude. Her tempests found the coast between the Gulf of Valinco and Bonifacio a long rough line of shapeless masses, and to-day it is a startling succession of carven glories. Between the Sartène road before it touches the shore again and the sea a dozen rivulets rush to the ocean, through valleys which they have cut for themselves, guarded by rocky sentinels which the fierce mistral has marshalled in imposing array. And carried by the wind there comes to the wanderer in that fantastic region “that most ancient and most mystic hymn-chant of the waves which none can hear without awe and which no musician can learn”¹—the same wild music which throws its spell

¹ Lafcadio Hearn.

over Scotland's outer isles, the eternal hymn that floats round Brittany's rugged sea-line, the chant to which worlds are made.

As I sat under the huge *Homme de Cagne*, the towering lord of this unspoiled earth-corner, proud of its sovereignty and its 4,000 feet of greatness, through the tremulously pierced silence there seemed to come on murmuring air the words of that most picturesque of wanderers, Lafcadio Hearn, speaking of "the thunder of that mighty ode of hexameters which the sea has always sung and will sing for ever . . . the mighty measure of that mighty song . . . the divine saltness of that unfettered wind . . . white breakers and vast stretches of wrinkled sand and the far-fluttering breeze which seems to whisper, 'Come.'" A desolate, free, beautiful region it is, with the wind's song to which the white-robed waves dance with their shouts of joy.

The *Homme de Cagne*, a fantastic puppet, with a scraggy mantle of forest thrown loosely round him, stands about half-way between Sartène and Bonifacio. Cunning sea-breezes and cutting sheets of rain have given him almost human shape. He is the bold outrider of the armies of Nature which stand behind him in rough ranks—the battalions round Bastelica and Bocognano, the cohorts camped by Corté, the legions which guard the distant Luri—the mountains which have bred a stern-spirited mountain-race. The *Ortolo* skirts the lordly *Homme*, racing down a half-barren valley, strewn with stunted cork-trees and dwarfish berry bushes. On the southern side of the bridge which spans the stream is a little pathway by which the ascent of the mountain can be made.

It was just eight o'clock in the morning when I hid my bicycle among the rocks and bushes some little distance from the roadway. About a quarter past ten, from the

summit I saw fair southern Corsica spread out before me like a gigantic relief map. Far to the north Mount Incudine peeped out of the purple mist of morning still lying heavily; eastward and westward was the white-rimmed sea; southward lay the twisting coast road leading to the white city of Bonifacio, and across the narrow strip of water a shimmer of sunlit silver which was Sardinia. In a north-easterly direction the sharp edge of the mountains of Cagne lost itself in mingled haze and forest-land.

Gregorovius, taking this road during his tour half a century ago, complained that "there is not a place on the whole road, and I should have half perished of hunger and thirst if my travelling companion had not taken bread and wine with him." But to-day no such complaint can be uttered. At Roccapina, where the old Teuton wanderer found a solitary post-house, a tiny village stands, and Monsieur and Madame Marchi received me with the utmost kindness. While *déjeuner* was being prepared I went for a bathe, and incidentally inspected the famous Lion de Roccapina. This rock stands pre-eminent on the coast and has the shape of a huge crowned lion couchant, so wonderfully exact in appearance that one is almost driven to the conclusion that man has aided Nature in the work. This I was assured, however, is not the case. Here it was that the Genoese first landed to commence their long, fruitless struggle for the possession of the island. The *leone coronato* watches over a treacherous coast, and many a good ship has come to its end at this rough spot. The proudest possession of Monsieur Marchi is a medal presented to him by the British Government for the valuable assistance he rendered to the crew of a British ship which was wrecked some years ago in the tiny Gulf of Roccapina. Many a sailor snatched from an ocean grave off Rocca-

pina has received kindly succour in Monsieur's little *buvette*.

The *menu* for *déjeuner* was a curious one. Here it is:—

Sardines.
Smoked Ham Sausage.
Boiled Fish.
Green Peas (cooked).
Mutton and Potatoes.
Broccia.
Dessert : Peas (uncooked).

This fare was much more appetising than its outline on paper would suggest. The idea of raw peas for dessert was certainly a new one to me, and would, I am afraid, only appeal to a wanderer's appetite greatly stimulated by climbing a mountain and having had an invigorating sea bath. *Broccia* I had tasted before, and I asked for it at every meal I had in Corsica, seldom being disappointed. It is a white, soft cheese made of the cream of goat's milk ; it is eaten fresh with sugar and a spoon. The flavour is delicious and *broccia* (or *broche*, as it is more commonly called, for the Corsican invariably drops troublesome final Italian vowels) is well worth going to Corsica to taste, for only there can it be found at its best. But of all other native cheeses, and especially *caccio*, let the stranger beware.

The *déjeuner* was served in the best bedroom ! This was a typical Corsican cottage room, decked with a few ancient photographs ; a gun hung on the wall with a water gourd ; opposite were gaudy oleographs of the Presidents of France and the monarchs of Europe ; a Singer's sewing machine looked strangely out of place ; a huge chest of drawers and an equally large bed completed the furniture, whilst in front of me on the table was placed a highly coloured stone basket of dusty "everlasting" flowers. It is strange that the wealth of

floral beauty which is scattered never far from the doorstep is scarcely ever used to decorate a Corsican room.

These wayside inns are curiously interesting little places. They are the *buvettes* for the few people who live in the neighbouring houses, the clubs where the local politicians and gossipers gather. Providing meals and rooms for strangers is still a part of their business not much to be depended on. The "drinking room" is generally the kitchen as well, and on the shelves round it stand bottles of all shapes and sizes, with half a dozen different kinds of *rhum fantaisie*, cognac, and red and white wine. Sometimes there is a separate room in which to serve the stranger's meals, but mostly he takes his food *en famille*, which is, I think, cheerier for the companionless wanderer. Seldom does one come across an inn with more than three bedrooms, but Madame would never dream of turning a stranger away were they all occupied. In such a case she soon makes him at home with a neighbouring family.

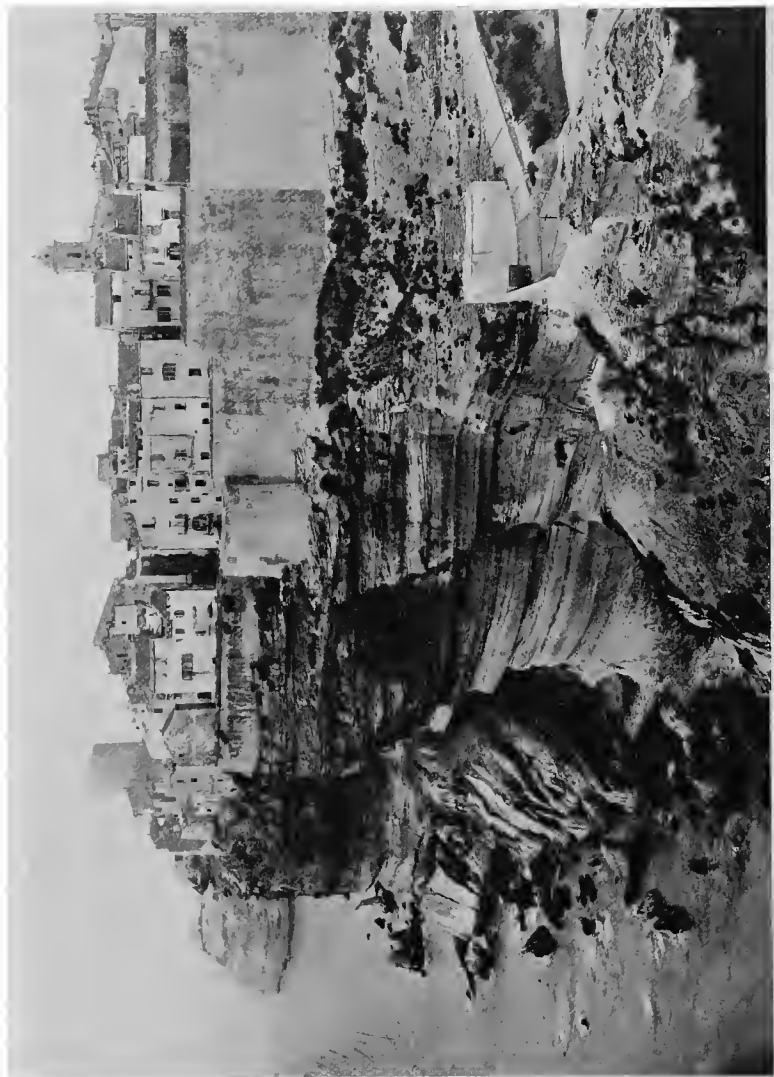
The road switchbacks onward to Bonifacio, and on the Col d'Arbia, over 400 feet above sea-level, the last climb, this most striking of all Corsica's towns stood out fascinating and white in the brilliant sunshine. Scarcely five miles distant, one can see from this eminence its towers and fort with their background of blue sea. The entire southern part of Corsica is of chalk, and once over the Col d'Arbia the road becomes white as snow. Its glare in the sunlight is extremely trying to the eyes, and it is well that the route is bordered by the restful green of olive and fig trees and radiant *maquis*. It is as smooth as ice, and in spinning down towards the town a strong southwestern breeze, refreshing under a cloudless sky, kept my pace fairly moderate.

Here, I was told, it is always blowing, and generally

hard, and I could see from the stoop of the olive-trees that a south-west wind is prevalent. Huge chalk rocks stand out by the roadside like pillars of white flame amongst the green ; the vegetation is marvellously rich when the nature of the soil is taken into consideration. A road, which hugs the east coast right to Rogliano in the north of Cap Corse, cuts off at a sharp angle, and almost a precipice, between towering rocks, takes one down to the narrow neck of land which connects the peninsula on which Bonifacio stands with the mainland. To the left of this road across the isthmus the sea is not many yards distant. On the right the water has cut its way round in behind the town and has formed a magnificent harbour, scarcely rippled by the sternest winds. Since Bonifacio ceased to be merely a fort, space has been hewn out of the gigantic rock on the landward side along the harbour and a lower town, with a fine quay and flights of steps at right angles to it for streets, has been dumped down without consulting architects or medical officers of health.

Towering on high, reached by a steep, curling street, is the Bonifacio out of the distant past, proud of its might, dreaming peacefully of sieges, of war, of slaughter. A stiff climb brings one to the ancient drawbridge and the towered gate, with its inspiring carved message from an era of heroic deeds—*Libertas*. And when one looks down on the lowland where Alphonso of Aragon once arrayed his soldiery against the fortress and on the seas where his galleons rode, one is not altogether surprised when one reads that that proud motto was never violated.

The old town lies entirely within the walls on the lofty plateau. There is a bewildering array of streets, narrow and twisted, and—a most remarkable fact—no market place or square. I asked an idler in one of the streets one afternoon if Bonifacio had no *piazza*.



BONIFACIO.

“Oh yes,” was the reply, and with a smile he led me along a few *ruelles* into what he called the Piazza Doria. It was, however, not a *piazza* proper, but what I took to be the principal street. Cramped within narrow bounds, Bonifacio evidently had to have recourse to this subterfuge to satisfy its vanity, for every Corsican town must have a *piazza*—otherwise, what would the native politicians do?

The town in many respects recalls Sartène, with its narrow streets, in which an open shutter, a refractory donkey or a stubborn mule can effectively stop all the traffic. The houses are high and if anything just a trifle dirtier than in Sartène. There is, of course, no room for streets of any width, and the network of alleys makes Bonifacio the quaintest town in Corsica, perhaps in Europe. History still peeps out from many an ancient building; a date, centuries old, makes one halt and ponder. I noticed 1641 carved on an old house in the Place Doria; another dwelling is pointed out where Charles Quint remained for a few days on his return from his second expedition to Algeria in 1541. And strangely enough, just opposite is the ruin of a house where, in 1792, Napoleon Bonaparte stayed for eight months, he who was destined to seize the crown which Charles V. once wore and hurl it in the dust.

The town, it is stated, was founded in 828 by Boniface, Duke of Tuscany, and a part of this warrior's work, the Terrione Tower, was in 1900 demolished—a somewhat needless act of official vandalism I think—by the French military authorities. On the arms of the town are four towers, and there is no doubt that it did once possess four, the one remaining being, I understand, the last of the original quartette. Not, however, till the end of the twelfth century did Bonifacio achieve any great prominence. About that period it passed into the hands of the

Genoese and became under them the most remarkable town of the time. It was practically a tiny republic, with its own senate and its civil and criminal codes ; it issued its own money ; it enjoyed free trade with Genoa, and thus its stubborn, rock-bred liberty was born.

Under such conditions it drew within its walls a large number of prosperous merchants ; it became as great an honour to say, "Io Bonifazino proprio" as in the days of Rome, "Civis Romanus sum." To-day that pride remains. The Bonifacians at the present time speak a dialect fairly distinct from that of the rest of Corsica ; they are proud and hospitable ; of irreproachable manners ; enmity and vendetta have never flourished amongst them ; they are hard workers. They earn their livelihood largely by the cultivation of olives, which are said to be the best in Corsica, and cereals. One has only to wander about the neighbourhood of the town to recognise that they must be hard and skilful workers. The soil, chalky and dry, would drive most peasants to despair, but the Bonifacian has struggled bravely with stubborn Nature and has won. The crops gathered round the town are surprising, both in quality and quantity, and it is not too great a compliment to pay to say that had any other Corsicans had the neighbourhood of Bonifacio to cultivate, the result would have been a dismal difference—a half-cultivated, half-desert countryside.

Another thing which struck me very forcibly was the fact that work in the fields is not left so largely to women as in other parts of the island. Save at harvest time, when a great deal has to be done in a short space of time, it is the man who looks after the land, leaving the woman to attend to her domestic duties. It is a very curious sight to see the men departing soon after sunrise for the fields stretching away up to the Col d'Arbia. They

generally go on their donkeys or mules, taking their mid-day meal with them, and in the evening they trudge back homewards by the side of their animals, which are laden with firewood.

As I have said, there is always a good deal of wind in and about Bonifacio. The first night I spent in the town it howled round my room with an almost terrifying noise which made sleep out of the question. In the morning, however, I could find no one to sympathise with me. It was nothing, I was told; there was "always a little breeze in Bonifacio;" no one had heard anything during the night. The wind, too, makes walking about the narrow streets somewhat unpleasant. It blows alternately up and down each street, and is laden with a fine chalk dust. Everything is of chalk in and around Bonifacio—houses, roads, streets and wind.

To the traveller who has a weakness for ancient churches, Bonifacio should be satisfying. The Church of St. Dominique, near the entrance to the citadel, is extremely interesting. Though I make no claim to being an authority on ecclesiastical architecture, I think this building is the finest I saw in the island. It dates from the thirteenth century, having been erected by the Templars, whose armorial bearings are sculptured on the walls. The striking feature is the white tower at the south side of the building. At the base it is square, but above the roof octagonal and crowned with battlements indented in Moorish style. The effect is exceedingly picturesque. The exterior—and here I fall back upon my friend Mérimée—is not Gothic, but resembles in style *La Canonica*.^{*} In the interior, however, the work is of the purest Gothic, if one excepts some fairly modern alterations about the windows. The high altar is an inspiring piece of art; it is of white marble inlaid with porphyry

* See Chapter IX.

and coloured stones, the carving being particularly rich. In the choir and the sacristy are several beautiful examples of wainscoting. Above the altar of Notre Dame de Bon Secours is a magnificent image of the Virgin Mary.

Not far from the Church of St. Dominique is that of St. François. It is a good deal smaller than the first, and is in fourteenth-century style. The building contains an interesting tomb, that of Philippe Cattacciolo, who was the host of Charles Quint when he stayed in Bonifacio. The Emperor, on leaving, asked Cattacciolo what he wished as reward for his hospitality. Three favours for Bonifacio were granted by Charles, who then required that his host should ask a personal reward. Cattacciolo said he wished to be buried in the Cathedral—an honour never yet conferred on any citizen of Bonifacio—and the Emperor commanded that this should be done.

The third church is that of St. Marie Majeure, the chief religious edifice of the town, and of Pisan construction. The tower is elegant, but sadly in need of repair. Here, in the large vestibule, one finds people sauntering and chatting, where long ago the senate met to discuss public affairs. In the sacristy a grilled *armoire* in the wall contains what is said to be a piece of the real cross.

Bonifacio is a garrison town and a naval port. A number of spic-and-span French torpedo-boats were lying in the harbour, and by the courtesy of a French lieutenant I was shown over one of them. What a cramped little thing a torpedo-boat is! Engines in an egg-shell might be fittingly used to describe it. "A single shell well planted, and—dormez bien!" was the lieutenant's remark as I expressed my surprise at its frailty. Everything is sacrificed to speed, and I fancy that being in command of one of these hornets of war

either makes or breaks a man. How proud of his little sea-viper was this boy, with his muscles of whipcord and his keen, intelligent face. Just the sort of dare-devil youngster to run his ship into a warm corner without the ghost of a chance of ever coming out again. We talked—or at least he did—of men and things naval. He had enthusiasm enough for a squadron, ideas galore, and in his microscopic cabin—how he managed to dress in it I cannot imagine—his motto hung, the immortal words of Nelson, carefully printed on a tinted card:—

“Captains shall be doing their Duty
By sticking to an enemy’s ship.”

“The finest strategy of our finest foe, the ideal for a torpedo-boat, though a century old,” said the lieutenant. And I should not care to be the commander of a hostile battleship who, in “the blindfold game of war,” knocks up against my keen little friend in the dark.

Bonifacio, from a military standpoint, is termed a second-class fortress. The garrison consists of three or four hundred men, for whom life must be dreary and unexciting.

“At Ajaccio, Bastia and Corté,” said a sad-visaged *piou-piou* to me, “there is something to do. In Bonifacio—no theatre, dismal little *cafés* with their endless French billiards, old newspapers, and not a bit of music in the place, but only wind and sea and sky, of which one can have enough in a week.”

The people of Bonifacio are not at all warlike, and few of them carry guns, although fewer towns in Corsica have a history in which war plays so great a part. One of the finest chapters in its story is the siege of the town by Alphonso of Aragon, who in the fifteenth century endeavoured to take the place by storm. The Pope had conferred upon the father of Alphonso the title of King

of Corsica, and the son had taken it into his head to regard the honour as real and serious, which his parent had not done. Bonifacio was, through long years, always Genoese at heart. With Calvi, the ever faithful, it stands out, in the welter of warfare against Genoa, as the ally of that famous, and infamous, Republic.

The siege ranks with that of Carthage of old, and with that of Gibraltar in more modern times. An old Corsican historian, Petrus Cyrneus, commonly called Pierre de Corse, has left behind the stirring story of Bonifacio's heroic struggle, and, from a French translation published at Bastia, I venture to take an outline of the episodes of the gallant defence of the town and the fierce attacks upon it.

It was on August 14, 1420, that Alphonso commenced his attack on the rocky citadel, believing—and no doubt rightly believing—that if he carried the town all Corsica would soon be his. His ships, eighty in number, swarmed in the narrow sea and bombarded the town, while Alphonso himself occupied the hills to the north and threw clouds of missiles of all sorts against the brave defenders. He planned a furious assault, offering his soldiers and sailors large rewards if they were successful. The attack by land was fiercely sustained, hideously costly, and quite unsuccessful. By sea, however, it came near to being successful. A vigorous bombardment caused one of the towers to fall, and a number of ships sped shorewards towards the gap in the wall. Many of them stranded, and the crews jumped into the waves and poured into the breach. The defenders, however, had just repelled a land attack, and were able to rally at the threatened point. A fierce hand-to-hand fight took place, and not one of the enemy who entered the breach escaped alive. Firebrands were poured among the stranded ships, and every one was

soon burned to the water's edge. The granary of the defenders, however, was set on fire during the fight, so that at the outset the Bonifacians were reduced to sore straits.

Specious promises caused a few of the defenders to desert to the King's side, and they told the monarch of the desperate condition of affairs inside the town. As a result, another attack was planned, resisted with equal heroism, and repulsed with heavy slaughter. Men, women, and even children joined in the fray. Showers of missiles were hurled against the ships, and storming parties could get no foothold on the walls—stones, arrows, scythes, lances, heavy beams, burning torches and liquid resin being used to repel them. The next attack was still more difficult to repel. Stones, bullets, arrows, and harpoons were rained on the devoted fortress, and the enemy even got near enough, at one part, to engage in hand-to-hand encounters on the outworks. A breach was made near one of the towers where the Spaniards had thrown large quantities of sulphur followed by burning torches, the idea being to enter under cover of the smoke caused. The defenders replied with burning tow and slaked lime, which blew in the faces of the enemy, and once more the attack failed.

Day after day the unequal fight continued ; night after night fell without a sign on the horizon of help from Genoa ; morning after morning saw the position become more desperate. Huge earthworks and high towers overlooking the city were erected by the Spaniards, and the onslaughts waxed fiercer and fiercer. Day or night, rest was impossible for the Bonifacians. The fight against famine, too, was as fierce as that against man. Herbs, roots, bark, dogs, and rats were the food of the garrison, till at last further resistance appeared to be impossible. Hostages were delivered to the enemy and an agreement

concluded to surrender in forty days if succour did not come from Genoa. A small vessel had been built by the Bonifacians. By dead of night it was manned and despatched to Genoa with a last request for aid. Fifteen days later it returned with the news that the Genoese fleet was waiting for a favourable wind. Day after day came and went, and the fleet did not appear; the forty days were fast speeding, and at last the time of truce was over. The Spaniards appeared before the gate and demanded the surrender of the town according to the agreement.

“But,” cried the Bonifacians, “we have received Genoese succour during the night!” And lo! far up on the walls appeared the banner of the Republic, and following it came troops of soldiers in bright Genoese uniforms and armour. But it was a trick, and the King of Aragon doubtless saw through it. The fact was that the women of Bonifacio had arrayed themselves as Genoese soldiery and had paraded in view of the enemy to give the impression that the number of the defenders had been largely increased. Alphonso in anger renewed the attack, but without success, and four days after the stipulated time for surrender the Genoese fleet appeared over against Sardinia. Messengers swam over to tell the ghastly story of the siege.

The Genoese, seeing the strength of the Spanish fleet, hesitated to attack; but, influenced in the end by the terrible tale of Bonifacio's suffering, they decided to join battle. The Spaniards, however, took the initiative, and one can well judge of the feelings of the besieged as they watched that fierce naval conflict in the straits. For them the issue meant surrender or victory—that all their heroism should be as nothing, or that the end should be imperishable glory. Nearly all day the conflict raged, and Alphonso, too, must have watched it eagerly. The

Bonifacians hurled the last of their firebrands on the Spanish ships, and the Genoese, seeing the enemy's fighting strength largely reduced by burning vessels, steered straight for the entrance to the harbour and drove back their opponents with fierce fusillades.

Before night fell, Alphonso, from the hills, watched the joyful defenders carrying up corn and wine into the stricken, unconquered town. Next day, on January 5, 1421, he withdrew his forces from their positions, embarked, and set sail.

The quaint old historian, in his story, leaves a curious description of hand-guns, which, for the first time in Corsica, were used at this siege. He termed them hand-bombards, hollow like a reed and made of cast-iron. The bullets he calls leaden acorns, which were "propelled by fire" at such a velocity that they would "pierce an armoured man."

A pretty legend is told in connection with what is called the King of Aragon's staircase, which may still be used at the present day. It commences near where the Torrione Tower stood, and is cut out of the *falaise* facing the sea. Consisting of one hundred and forty-two steps, it goes right down to the water's edge. The fable goes that the King of Aragon, during the siege, ordered a number of Spaniards to land from one of the ships and make the stair by which entrance to the fortress could be obtained. This work was done, it is said, in a single night, but just when the workers were finishing the last step they were seen by a woman, and the alarm was raised. This tale on the face of it is, I am sorry, more fancy than fact, like so many interesting stories in Corsica. I should like to believe it, because I always think that it is much more agreeable to believe something truly interesting than something uninterestingly true. In addition, if this fable were a fact it would give another indication of how the

wind blows round Bonifacio, for it must have howled delightfully to have carried away and shouted down the noise of the cutting of the stair.

To be coldly truthful, I should think that the task was a long and wearisome one, carried out at a much later date than that of the great siege. Such an event would no doubt teach the inhabitants that it was advisable to have a means of victualling the town from the sea, and such an entrance could be very easily defended.

I spent the greater part of a day visiting the famous caves of Bonifacio. They are only to be reached from the sea, and it was after an early lunch that the boatman whom I had bargained with on the previous day came to my hotel. He was a tall, handsome young tunny fisherman. We embarked near the foot of the King of Aragon's staircase, where his boat lay, and before visiting the caves he pulled out well into the straits to give me a view from the sea of Bonifacio, which looked like a castle of the winds. A few ships were gliding up and down the narrow sea. The mountains of Sardinia in the purple distance looked like spectral Alps between the two mirrors of sea and sky.

The caverns are three in number. Under the *falaise*, on the top of which the citadel stands, is the St. Antoine grotto, a huge place with a vast entrance to it, and a maze of stalactites hanging from the roof. The water is fairly deep and clear as crystal, while the spirit of colour plays about mysteriously in its calm depths.

A little to the eastward is the Monte Pertusato (the Pierced Mountain). Here the dashing waves have cut through the most southern promontory of the island and one can sail through a passage with sides hung as it were with tapestry of stalactites. But more interesting still are Le Camere (the Chambers). The boat passes a creek in

which the never-tiring waves have cut out several narrow caves. Into the largest of them we went. The floor of it is occupied by a large and limpid pool, called the Bath of Venus, which communicates with the sea by means of a canal two or three yards long. The roof and the walls have been mysteriously carved, and the unruffled water lying in its hollow, scooped out of violet and grey rock, gives a charming colour effect.

But my guide had kept the best to the last. This was the magnificent grotto variously called the Sdragonato, the Dragonetta or the Dragonale. It is, in fact, the only one really worth visiting, for its charm is unique. Here Nature has indeed excelled herself. About forty or fifty yards westward from Le Camere this marvellous sea-cave is to be found, a mighty wave-carved glory. Suddenly the boatman caused the boat to sweep in towards the land, and steering with care under a fantastic *falaise*, we entered a grotto by a concave portal. The walls of grey rock at the entrance seemed now to reflect the sea behind us, then to assume a veil of shimmering gold and blue—an effect borrowed from fairyland. This part of the grotto narrows down to a smaller portal, by which we reached a vast cave, lighted by a large long opening in the roof. Here, in this gorgeous cathedral of the sea, with the gentle music of wave and wind hymning ceaselessly the praises of Nature, one is afraid almost to let slip even a startled word of infinite surprise. Reposing on a bed of vari-coloured rock, garbed with sea-weeds, lies a large mirror of water, placid and glittering like burnished silver. Twilight of exquisite softness reigns; from the gap in the roof the light enters and plays wonders in a riot of colour and iridescence, now gleaming mysteriously on the walls, now playing curiously, bafflingly, amongst the violet moss spread over the rocks, then tinting the water with colours from Paradise and

fitting, a mass of sunbeams, in this corner and in that. At the eastern extremity a great sombre opening yawns, into which the waters only penetrate when driven by fiercest western winds.

Whilst I stood, as I would have been content to stand for hours, "in wonder and amaze," my boatman friend whipped out his revolver and, before I could prevent the sacrilege, had fired at one of the numerous pigeons which make this haven their home. The shot rang out with an ear-splitting crack; the noise reverberated again and again till it seemed to linger and die in the darkest corner. He missed his mark, I am glad to say, but he explained that the purpose of the shot was chiefly that I might hear the peculiar effect of noise in the grotto. Seats and steps of stone have been cut out by Nature round the sides, and we lingered long there, disposing of our provisions, sharing lunch with the fishes sporting in the clear depths, but the pigeons, though some of them were fairly tame, did not come near enough to be fed. We left them a plentiful supply of crumbs to enjoy when we had gone.

What centuries of unceasing work are represented in this sea-church! I know no prouder dome than that which Nature has cut out of the rocks of Bonifacio, no more restful cathedral than this spacious Sdragonato, where the senses are lulled with infinite peace, and where are softly sung the century-old melodies beside which the music of the master-minds of men is so feeble and so fleeting.

The rest of the day we spent fishing in company with several other boats. For a time we watched the *pêcheurs de langoustes* at work, then, pulling out to sea a little, we devoted ourselves to the pastime *à la ligne*, and I pulled out a dozen mixed denizens of the deep, whilst my guide wrought double the havoc amongst finny families. Line

fishing provides many a Bonifacian with a livelihood, and, in addition, cray-fish of excellent quality are particularly abundant. A good deal of employment is provided, too, at a large cork factory near the harbour. It is one of the largest factories of its kind in France, and I believe that over 20,000,000 corks are turned out yearly, whilst in addition a large quantity of cork in slabs is prepared and exported.

About three miles from Bonifacio, and reached by a fairly good mule road in a little under an hour, is Cap Pertusato with its lighthouse and semaphore. I went there towards evening one day, and was very hospitably received by the keeper. The road is a peculiar one on a rocky ledge high above the sea, which has cut into the chalk rocks in the strangest manner. Higher still stands Bonifacio, bright "in Sonne und Luft," on the top of its grotesque *falaises* with the sea still at its task of cutting and carving the strangest rocky fastness of Europe. From the platform of the lighthouse I enjoyed for a few minutes the distinction of being the most southerly person in Corsica. The view is splendid. In the distance, over a gently swaying sea, is the island of Sardinia. Dotted here and there are numerous islets, and the keeper pointed out the Isle of Lavezzi, where, on February 15, 1855, a French frigate, *La Sémillante*, carrying 770 soldiers to reinforce the armies in the Crimea, was wrecked, striking on an outlying rock of the island and sinking immediately, before a soul could be saved.

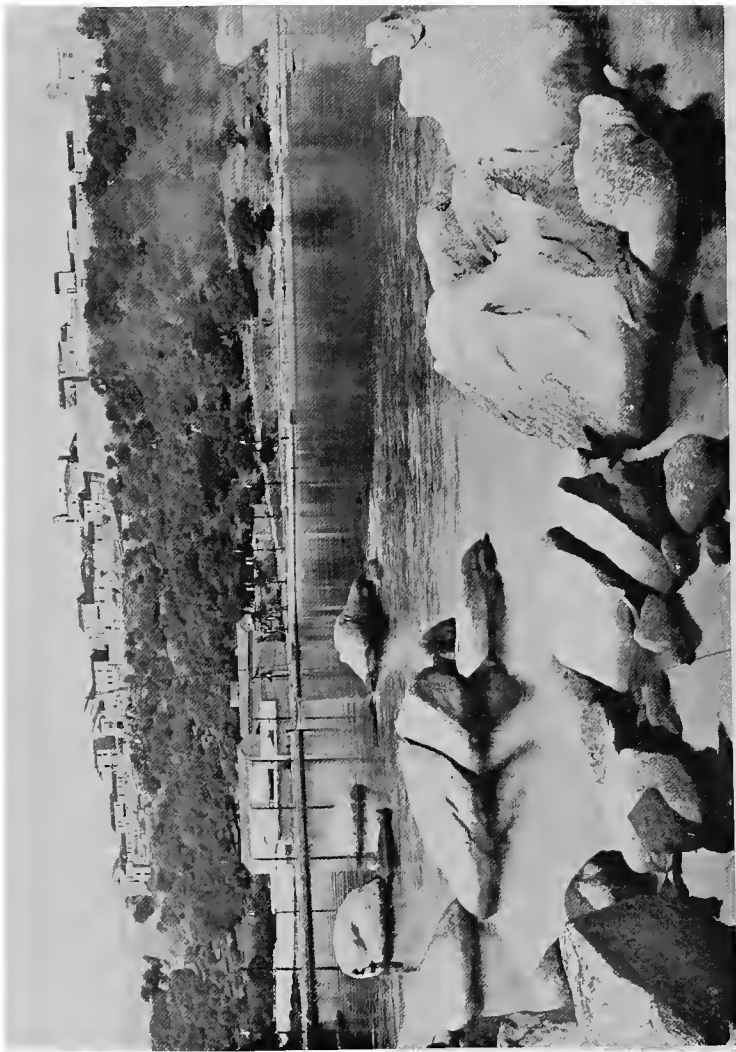
The darkness had fallen when I left the Cap, so talkative had the jovial keeper been. The moon shone dimly through a light veil of cloud so that I could see the road for a few yards in front of me—a white streak never fading completely into the darkness. The sea lay like a

wide stretch of crumpled tinsel, and Bonifacio stood dark and awe-inspiring against the faintly-illuminated sky. It was a picture of infinite beauty, and it brought forcibly to my mind the fact that it was whilst becalmed on that very sea, whilst looking on these very scenes, that Cardinal Newman wrote that magnificent hymn, "Lead, kindly Light."

There is but little of interest lying between Bonifacio and Porto Vecchio. The road is a *route nationale*, but at times cycling is only possible on the smooth-bottomed ruts left by the heavy diligences. The countryside is, as usual, *maquis*-covered, and the population is extremely sparse. The distance is about eighteen miles, and it can be easily covered awheel in two hours. At a little cluster of houses outside Porto Vecchio I came upon the closing scenes of a wedding, and as I was about to pass I was hailed by one of the guests, in whom I recognised a Bonifacian acquaintance. I was, of course, made welcome by the whole company, for the arrival of a stranger, and especially one from so far away as England, was greeted as a happy omen. A very pretty Corsican girl had just been married to a young farmer of the Bois d'Ospedale, the wooded highland round the town, and I joined the company in a last hearty wish of long life, health and happiness to the young pair, being called upon to make what turned out to be a very halting little speech, greeted with greater applause and thanks than it deserved.

"Come to the road and see us off," cried the bridegroom to the company, and it was pleasingly pathetic to see and hear the good-byes and to note how everyone drew back and left to the bride's mother that last sad mother's duty—"seeing her daughter off."

Porto Vecchio itself is another indication of how the



PORTO VECCHIO.

Genoese picked out the finest spots on the coast for their settlements, and Porto Vecchio is perhaps the best of all. It is a typical Corsican town, but suffers from being in the realm of fever, being situated on a low-lying part of the coast. During the greater part of the summer months it is deserted by the majority of its 3,000 inhabitants, who depart for the healthier uplands. In May the exodus had not yet begun, but fever has put its stamp indelibly on the place. The inhabitants of the port are lacking in the fine Corsican physique to which one becomes accustomed in rambling through the island. One feels sorry for the little children playing round the poor, tiny fountain in the market-place, with its slight flow of water, which in summer one would scarcely dare to drink. The youngsters look as though they had fever in their blood already. The houses in the few tortuous streets have a deserted appearance; many are quite in ruins and it is often difficult to tell from the outside whether a dwelling is occupied or vacant.

Out of the way of trade and travellers, Porto Vecchio lives a quiet life. The people in this most sparsely populated district in the island are engaged in viniculture and in the preparation of cork for exportation, a good deal of which is sent to Bonifacio. There are also large salt works near the harbour. The gulf gives Porto Vecchio the finest harbour in Corsica, probably with the one exception of that of Ajaccio, but it is deserted. And one wonders, as one does at several places in Corsica, what deep legislative slumber prevents salutary works being carried out which would soon make Porto Vecchio the Marseilles of Corsica. But there it remains in a fever-stricken district. It should be surrounded by a garden of prosperity did France not shamefully neglect everything in connection with her island department.

The town is built on a stratum of red porphyry, a material with which the town was at one time walled. Of the fortifications the bastion, now a chapel, remains. The roads and paths round the town are delightfully shaded, and from the neighbouring heights a fine view of the extensive harbour can be obtained. The harbour is splendidly sheltered, being open only to the rare winds from the north-east. Beautiful mother-of-pearl is found in the gulf. Altogether Porto Vec' (as the French call it) is an uninteresting and mournful place. The people spend most of the day gossiping in the market-place and lounging in the couple of tiny, bare *cafés*, and the only place in which business seems to be carried on is a shop in which one may obtain everything from chocolate to socks, from pans to coloured picture post-cards. The kindness and hospitality of the people is, however, a pleasing feature. My Bonifacian friend from the wedding saw me safely housed with some friends of his, and during my stay at the port they treated me as though I were a distinguished personage instead of merely a humble wanderer. I should think I made friends with everyone in the place, and when the rural postman heard one night that I intended to go to Levie next day—for my movements past and prospective were "the talk of the town"—he came to the house where I was staying and said that as part of his round and a section of my route lay together he would be glad to act as companion and guide as far as the parting of our ways. He suggested that it was highly advisable to be *en route* by five o'clock in the morning, so as to reach the heights of the Bois d'Ospedale before the heat of noon-day came on. I learned next day, from an expression of surprise on the part of an old woman at a house on our route where he left a letter, that for my benefit he was making an extra journey—a six hours' stiff climb in a hot sun! Yet to

have offered him some small recompense for his kindness would have been to have insulted him deeply, and all I could do, I thought at the time, would be to act as host at lunch-time, which I thought I was doing, until the kindly old woman at whose house we put up for an hour or two positively refused to take a single sou from "an Englishman who had come so far to see Corsica, and who in consequence deserved Corsica's hospitality."

CHAPTER IV

AMONG THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

“Va sur les hauteurs !”

LAMARTINE.

THE traveller who has even a little of the dilettante about him, who prefers to tour along the lines of least resistance, would be well advised to leave southern Corsica and its mountains severely alone. And I think that is what the majority of travellers in the “Scented Isle” have done. The stiff road leading from Porto Vecchio to Zonza and Levie and back to the coast again at charming little Solenzara is but little frequented. Gregorovius, determined old globe-trotter though he was, took the easier—and, by the way, almost wholly uninteresting—coast road up to Aleria, and by omitting to drive this hard wedge into one of the loveliest parts of Corsica, he missed a characteristic bit of the island which, I am sure, would have stirred his ponderous descriptive powers to their highest.

Particularly is the first part of the journey, which falls to be described in this chapter, neglected—that is, from Porto Vecchio to Levie. There is little to take anyone, save the most strenuous wanderer, to Porto Vecchio in the first place ; in fact, he is not likely to be persuaded by guide-books to visit south and south-eastern Corsica at all. At most a dash on Bonifacio from Sartène is the

limit, for Sartène, to most visitors, is the southern border of Corsica, and they generally make their way to the east coast by way of the Fiumicicoli River, Sainte Lucie de Tallano, Levie, and Zonza, and so perform the last section of the journey I am about to describe. But lack of energy would probably persuade the majority of people to turn back at Sainte Lucie, for the map will show that Aleria and Solenzara may be much more easily reached by the aid of the east-coast railway.

The fact of the matter is that southern Corsica, an extremely interesting country and exquisitely beautiful, has never been done justice to. My long ramble in that region was the happiest part of my journey. I infinitely prefer the rough, hard-won height clad by the gigantic forest of Ospedale to the guide-book traveller's pride—Evisa; the awe-inspiring Col de Bavella, gained by foot from Zonza, to the more sedate, and perhaps prettier, railway-fed Col de Vizzavona. The Col de Bavella is Corsica, pure Corsica; Vizzavona has a dozen kith and kin in Europe. With one solitary exception, the Gorge of Santa Regina, between Corté and Ponte Leccia, the Col de Bavella stands in the midst of the most beautiful region in the island; were it not for the Gorge I should term it Nature's masterpiece. Not even the proud Homme de Cagne has a more picturesque panorama to display, a lovelier vista of Nature's bold outlines.

Southern Corsica is Nature's paradise for the strenuous, for I found that there was but little cycling to be done in it, and this chapter is very largely the description of the finest sort of wandering—wandering afoot.

I divided this part of my journey into three sections :—

- 1st. Porto Vecchio to Levie.
- 2nd. Round Levie and Ste. Lucie de Tallano.
- 3rd. Levie to Solenzara.

This gave me two strenuous days with a comparatively easy one sandwiched in between.

Monsieur le facteur, whom I introduced to the reader in the previous chapter, was waiting for me in the Place promptly at five o'clock in the morning. The air, sporting amongst the trees in playful zephyrs, was exquisite; the distant purple heights looked beautiful and seductive, and soon we were going at a swinging pace along the *route nationale*, parallel to the inmost shore of the gulf. Nearly a couple of miles on our way we turned to the left by a *route forestière*, an excellent road leading right into the mountains. What a delicious "coast" the next fifteen or sixteen miles would have been had I been travelling in the opposite direction! But as it was, it was delightful, for the route is nicely shaded from the unwinking light of day by lime and cork trees.

Monsieur looked with particular envy at my cycle. How he had longed for one himself, he said, but an unappreciative Government department in Paris had refused to listen to his petition. Time was when his demands were a trifle more ambitious. In the glowing enthusiasm of youth nothing but a horse and trap was commensurate with his official dignity, but some great brain in the Parisian Post Office did not think alike. Then he asked for a horse, and again his prayer went unanswered. Lastly he begged for a cycle, but some petty official retorted that his ideas were too far in advance of the age in which he lived to be considered.

Yet to-day, after trudging that eighteen-mile road up and down several times a week for nearly thirty years, my old friend is still sturdy enough to put three miles an hour behind him—no mean pace on such a route. But these unanswered prayers of his have left their impression on him, and Monsieur is a Corsican Repub-

lican, a somewhat rare political bird. As we trudged along he treated me to a *recitavo* of the advantages to be gained if Corsica could only paddle its own canoe, if it were only loose from "cette galère de la France." Strikingly prominent in this list were the facts that the people of the Ospedale district would receive their letters a little earlier and that Monsieur, *facteur rural*, would get back to Porto Vecchio a few hours sooner. But when I advanced a few of the arguments set forth by a little deputy on the boat from Marseilles, Monsieur was compelled to admit that it was, after all, rather a good thing that Corsica was a part of "cette galère de la France," though postal maladministration in this particular region required quite a lot to balance it.

I might be able to chronicle in a few lines the subjects we did not talk about as we zigzagged round the hillsides, steadily ticking three miles an hour off the map. A most entertaining fellow he was, with his stories of moufflon hunts, adventures by the way, vendetta; every turn by the road was like turning over a page of an interesting book. And it was well, for every turn brought into view another stiff kilometre to be climbed.

Soon we stopped at a little path, rocky and badly cut, leading almost sheer up the hillside. This was a short cut, said the postman, which took a few kilometres off the length of the journey. Now, I have always had my suspicions about short cuts, but Monsieur persuaded me that this was really a short cut and not a long one, so up we went, and I could soon see that, though distance justified the postman in using the word "short," he should have added to the qualification the word "hard." The path gradually became worse; I had to lift my bicycle over stony patches; at length it became necessary for us to shoulder it between us. Halfway a letter had to be delivered and the gossip of Porto Vecchio retailed

to the ladies of the little wayside hut. From that spot the short cut went on for quite another kilometre, and the *facteur*, unknown to me, for he spoke in the Corsican dialect, out of which I could pick but little, arranged with a sturdy young girl to carry my bicycle to the main road for twopence-halfpenny! She agreed, and, rolling a large cloth adroitly into a sort of cushion for the head, she swung the cycle on to it, the frame bag resting on the cushion, as though its fifty pounds were so many ounces, and marched along, balancing the weight with remarkable ease and going at such a pace that the two unladen masculines had considerable difficulty in keeping up with her.

At the main road we quarrelled over the ridiculously small remuneration which had been agreed upon. But Mademoiselle thought that twopence-halfpenny was quite the standard rate of wages for the work, and my most forcible French, made no doubt a good deal milder by the *facteur* as he translated it into Corsican *patois*, was all required to persuade her to accept half a franc. I held out for a franc, but that to her seemed to savour of highway robbery. She added that there were no robbers in Corsica, that she was pleased to be of service to a stranger, in the end took the half franc, and sent us on our way with a shower of good wishes and adieux.

On and onward twisted the road, bordered on both sides by mingled *maquis* and trees. A mile or so farther on we were greeted by a trio of Corsican boys, who put before us a strictly business proposition. They would relieve us of our loads for two sous each. One took the cycle, one my fairly ponderous camera, the third the postman's unwieldy leather bag. How fine it was to saunter along without a load, and I was just beginning to appreciate it when the boys announced that they were tired. They returned their loads and received the

stipulated reward, though they had only acted as carriers for about half a kilometre. They sat down, rested for about three minutes, ran up to us again, and wished to re-enter our service for three sous! These laddies will be hotel proprietors in Switzerland one of these fine days! Such commercial acumen is quite lost in Corsica.

The view of the surrounding country was growing more beautiful every minute. Far below us the road twisted and turned, floating along the mountain-sides like a loose scarf in the wind. In the distance Porto Vecchio gleamed by its glistening bay; the sea of restful blue was dotted here and there with islets; distant Sardinia trembled in the heat-haze on the horizon, and far as the eye could reach the countryside was clad with a robe of *maquis*. Here and there stood noble oaks, stunted firs, lofty pines, growing in the shallow earth-covering which in this part of the country clothes the rocks. Hill and valley, valley and hill were spread in undulating sequence to the distant, bare mountain-tops of the west.

In this region one misses evidences of cultivation, almost of civilisation. Houses—or rather huts—are few and far between; villages are non-existent. The people are poor almost to the verge of destitution; I do not think it is possible to obtain a glass of the poorest wine between Porto Vecchio and the little cluster of houses at the top of the road in the Ospedale Forest. A few lean goats and sheep nibble the scanty herbage, pigs snort in odd corners, brightly-coloured lizards swarm over the rocks, and now and then a snake darts quickly over the path. Nature offers beauty without stint, but, autocrat that she is, withholds all save the barest necessities of life for man and beast.

Under the blazing forenoon sun, with damp handkerchiefs hanging from the backs of our caps, we struggled on to the *col*. The last stage of our march was indeed a

struggle. The pines had driven the oaks downwards and their tall forms provided but little shade. A tiny brook laboured along by the side of the road, and we stopped to fill our handkerchiefs with lovely watercress, amongst which the water hides itself.

Near the *col*, on the farthest limit of the *facteur's* round, we were welcomed at a pleasant little cottage by Monsieur and Madame Golanti. While Madame prepared our *déjeuner* we had a delightful wash, and I often smile as I think of the meal we two hungry tramps did justice to. A large tin of sardines vanished as if by magic, a huge, old, hard, appetising sausage followed suit, a yard-long loaf grew small by degrees and beautifully less, half-a-dozen eggs, a tasty salad of the watercress, a curious *mélange* of meat and vegetables, all went towards renewing our jaded strength.

The house was one of a cluster looking out from the forest towards the sea and Porto Vecchio. The forest can be seen spreading away to the south-west along a mountain ridge, at the end of which our old friend, the Homme de Cagne, peeps out of the brooding, haze-enshrouded distance. The soil at this height is not very fertile, and the trees are lanky and their foliage scrubby on this account. One wonders how they weather the winter tempests which must howl around this highland. Most of the houses are only used as summer residences by the richer inhabitants of Porto Vecchio and the other little towns beyond the northern boundary of the Ospedale Forest. The odour of the pine and the upward-wafted perfume of the *maquis*, with the cool air carried gently from the south-eastern sea or along the fin-like mountain range from stormier south-western shores, make the atmosphere elysian.

A travelling Britisher in the Forest of Ospedale is not an everyday comer, so that when he does appear his

presence must be celebrated with no little *éclat*. After lunch my health was drunk by Monsieur and Madame, their stalwart son and the postman, and a "musical afternoon" followed. Madame has one possession of which she is immensely proud—a gramophone. As we sat on the shaded little balcony behind the house it droned and stuttered much ancient patter and many a catchy ditty from Parisian music-halls, interspersed with sonorous melodies of Corsica's own. Madame's son, too, was a musical genius in his way. His skill on the banjo—a favourite instrument with the Corsicans—was quite remarkable, and the enthusiasm with which he played and sang the fiery songs of the island was highly infectious.

He had inherited a love of music from his mother, who not only sang well but played several instruments in a quite exceptional manner. It is, indeed, very seldom that one comes across musicians amongst the women of Corsica, for, though girls are intensely fond of music, they soon lose their interest in it, for most of them after marriage are treated as little better than servants; they seldom join any company which may be in their homes and never sit down with the others at table.

The best of friends must part; the happiest party must break up. Monsieur le facteur had to trudge back to Porto Vecchio before nightfall; the peasant's son, too, had work to do in the woods; the afternoon was waning; Levie was still a good distance away. So farewells were said and, with a letter of introduction to open the hospitality of Levie to me, I quitted the hospitable forest home with still another pleasant memory of Corsican kindness.

A short trudge brings the traveller to the height of land, a huge watershed from one side of which a score of streams rush to the sea round the Gulf of Porto Vecchio, and from the other countless rivulets flow to

reach, by twisting, tangled ways, the Gulf of Valinco and the neighbouring ocean, to be seen shining mistily in the west. On the right the straight line of the eastern coast can be traced for mile on clear-cut mile. Through the forest of lanky pines the road twists downwards, a wealth of giant ferns bordering and at some places invading it. Mount Incudine, due north, seems to be stepping nearer ; on the left are those two mighty clefts cut by Nature's bill-hook—the valleys of the Ortolò and the Rizzanèse, in the latter of which Levie lies. The road to the little town can be seen here and there describing a vast semicircle round the southern wall of the valley, and then, as one descends, through a break in the hilly barrier one catches a glimpse of San Gavino di Carbini, Levie's little neighbour, with its tiny, picturesque church.

Pines yield place to chestnut-trees as the traveller approaches the village with the musical name of Zonza. It lies in a fine protecting mantle of these trees. An ideal little spot—it should be happy, for it has no history—it receives summer guests from Sartène, Bonifacio, and Porto Vecchio. Its modern Gothic church is an extremely pretty one.

Just about six o'clock I reached Levie, a straggling little town of nearly three thousand inhabitants, prettily situated, amphitheatre-wise, on the hillside. Like San Gavino, it boasts a fine new church, beside which rises a tall clock-tower, giving out to the valley somewhat indifferent time, but from which a magnificent view of the surrounding country can be obtained.

I was unable to deliver my letter of introduction, as the family to whom it was addressed had gone to Zicavo for some time, but the people in the neighbouring house recommended the little inn over the way, and there, on mentioning the name of my mid-day hosts, I was made at home at once. It was a curious place. A *buvette* sitting-

room opened out on the street. Behind this apartment was a bedroom, and beyond that again was the dining-room. To reach the upper rooms it was necessary to climb up a rickety ladder from the first bedroom.

One of the small upper rooms was allotted to me, and there, when I was about to indulge in that most refreshing of toilet manœuvres—a shave—I was faced with a most serious difficulty. Corsican mirrors are more for ornament than use. If they do not distort one's features to such an extent as to make the use of the razor highly dangerous, they are placed in such a position that only a contortionist can make use of them. On the present occasion one was so high up on the wall that it would have been necessary for me to stand on a chair whilst shaving, and seeing that the only chair in the room had but three shaky legs, the proceeding would have been fraught with serious danger. The other glass was firmly fixed low down on the side of the bow-window, into the sill of which a tiny basin was fixed. It was only possible to see one side of one's face when one's head was half into the basin and incidentally half out of the window, a position which made shaving foolhardy. Preferring to shave or be shaved by sight rather than by faith, I stumbled—the only way one can get down—into the lower room, almost falling into the arms of Monsieur le Juge de la Paix. I told him of my difficulty, and inquired if there was a really accessible mirror in the inn or a barber within five miles. "No need to worry," he said, and, mounting again, he placed his own room at my disposal till dinner-time. Here the mirror was of use. I fancy feminine hands had placed it in position.

At these little inns there is generally an interesting company at dinner. That evening Monsieur le Maire, fat, French and forty, came to the table; there was a commercial traveller from Marseilles (they swarm all

over the island during April, May, and June, that is to say, one comes across one in every inn); Monsieur le Juge de la Paix appeared in blue coat and white linen trousers, high double collar, and fantastic tie; he had a Kaiser moustache, hair that stood up like corn, teeth that gleamed like those of a picture post-card beauty, and a ring with a large ruby that scintillated in the lamplight. Then there was Monsieur le maître d'hôtel, who vainly strove to get a word, edgewise or otherwise, into the long harangue of the *maire*, who was laying down the law politically. By the time the *broccia* appeared, he had brought everyone round to his way of thinking, that is to say, everyone had abandoned the idea of trying to stop the flow of mayoral rhetoric so as to ventilate other points of view—and the *maire* regarded the silence as an indication of general acquiescence in his expressed policy.

Corsican politics having been put in excellent order, the *maire* turned his attention to me, took it for granted I was a German, and asked me what I thought of Corsica. I exhausted my stock of French superlatives in describing what I had seen, while he exhausted a bottle of wine at his side. He was intensely proud of Levie and its neighbourhood, and he promised to devote next day to showing me the surroundings of the town.

Levie, according to its *maire*, is an extremely important place. The people trace their common origin back to a family which gave to Roman Catholicism one of its Popes—Sixtus V. His name was Felix Peretti, and as the name is still extremely common in the *piève*, there may be something in the story. The *maire*, too, pointed out in the church a beautiful figure of the Christ in ivory which this Pope sent to Levie. Of the family of Peretti was a fine soldier, named Napoléon delle Vie, from a contraction of the latter part of whose name the group

of hamlets, which at the time he lived was just springing up, took its name. This Napoleon was no relative of the great conqueror, but was a fighter with a great reputation for bravery. In 1558 he took part in the battle which Henry II. fought at Renté against Charles V., and for his outstanding heroism was raised to noble rank. He was a friend of Sampiero, and was killed in one of the numerous battles against the Genoese.

From Levie, leading southward, a road runs to Carbini, from which the *piève* in which Levie stands takes its name. The *maire* drove me to the place, which is about six miles distant. It is famous as being the place where, about the middle of the fourteenth century, a remarkable Communist sect arose, that of the Giovannali, which derived its name from its leader, Giovanni, a monk of the order of Saint François. The sect attained considerable power, its ceremonies being marked by many strange superstitions and extraordinary excesses. Women, children, and goods were common property. Pope Urban V. excommunicated the members of the sect and finally sent to Corsica a commissioner and troops. Many fights took place between the soldiery, aided by the people, and the Giovannali, and in the end the sect was wiped out. This Carbini is not to be confounded with San Gavino di Carbini, between Zonza and Levie. Gregorovius evidently was misinformed with regard to the two little towns, for he mentions San Gavino as the chief seat of the Giovannali. The Church of Saint Jean at Carbini is interesting. It is in much the same style as the more famous relic, La Canonica,¹ near Bastia. Near it is a still more interesting relic out of by-gone ages—the ruins of the Church of San Quilico. Beside this is a tall, square tower, which, with the ruins, is said to mark the spot where the Giovannali had their splendid

¹ Chapter IX.

church. The building was destroyed by the enemies of the sect, and when the anti-Giovannali endeavoured to raise an edifice on the same spot, popular tradition says that during the night angels destroyed what the workmen had done in the daytime. At last the task was abandoned as hopeless. The tower, however, seems to have withstood sect-hatred and angel-anger. When Prosper Mérimée, during his study of Corsican historical monuments, visited Carbini, he found that the tower had been partially destroyed by lightning, but it has since been restored.

Another delightfully pretty place near Levie is Sainte Lucie di Tallano, which, I think, thoroughly deserves its reputation as the most beautiful of Corsican villages. It is just about half the size of Levie and stands on an *étage* of the hills overlooking the Fiumicicoli. Sainte Lucie is famous for three products. Round about grows the vine which produces the famous "Vin de Tallano," perhaps the best of the island. By the banks of the river is the Caldane mineral spring. This water is said to possess marvellous properties for the cure of rheumatism. Near the little town, too, is found a very beautiful stone, called *diorite orbiculaire*. It has the appearance of greyish granite with white and black spots. It is extremely durable and is found nowhere else in the world. It has been used in a number of famous Italian buildings. Several huge pieces I saw looked for all the world like a panther's skin, the grain being exquisite. The church dates back to the fourteenth century and has a particularly fine interior, together with a number of interesting *œuvres d'art*.

From Levie to Solenzara on the east coast is 49 kilometres as the *route forestière* goes, that is to say, 33 or 34 miles. To the Col de Bavella, the top of the great mountain wall, which stands majestically between the

two places, is just 19 kilometres, of which it is possible to ride nine to Zonza. Therefore, when I left Zonza I thought that a ten-kilometre climb would bring me to the crest of the far, shining height, golden against the glow of dawn, and that my tramp would be followed by a delightful downhill run of something like 30 kilometres from the *col* to the coast.

This, at least, was the hope which the map raised ; all my inquiries in Levie as to the condition of the route tended to support the belief. But I had reckoned without the Corsican road-mender, and, in addition, it had evidently not occurred to any one to tell me that in May it is as yet too early for the havoc of the winter on the road across the heights to be repaired. The result was fairly staggering. I rode nine kilometres to Zonza, climbed afoot the ten which take the traveller to the *col*, but instead of being able to "coast" the remaining 30 kilometres, the state of the road was such that, downhill though it was, I walked 23, and was only able to ride the seven immediately preceding arrival in the little town, making a grand total of 16 kilometres awheel and 33 afoot. And when I look back on it, I think of that fourteen hours' journey as the grandest, longest, and hungriest of all my Corsican days, leaving a memory which I hope will be the last to fade of all my recollections of the "Scented Isle."

At 5 a.m. I had wished the early birds of Zonza good morning ; between six and seven o'clock in the evening I reached the coast, with Solenzara lying drowsily among its eucalyptus-trees in the painted shades of twilight.

I know no road in the whole island so charged and surcharged with the glories of Nature. Mountains crowd in upon the road, and the lofty Incudine, with its rich vesture of green and grey, of purple and crimson, with a

fairly gossamer mantilla of cloud thrown over its brows of white, seems to march from the north as though to bar the way. Nature has been wildly extravagant in tossing torrent and tree, rock and stream, mountain and valley in vast spendthrift profusion. It is as though she had gilded and gladdened into a garden a corner of cosmic chaos. Twisting through age-old forests of chestnut-trees, which furnished food for the hardy warriors of Sampiero, through clumps of lofty, meagre pines and giant fern plots, now cutting its way through a huge Jove-thrown boulder, then narrowing to cling desperately to a steep, *maquis*-covered mountain-side, flower-brightened, the road takes its way. Far above are the bare hill-tops, where Winter has but lately loosened her grasp, and from which she has hurled spring torrents down to the peaceful vale below, torrents which have cut deep paths for themselves in the road. Down, deep down, stream and waterfall play, and through a maze of shrubs and trees come their musical murmurs; the stroke of the woodman and his song echo through the glades; the birds are busy with their music; scattered like stars are wild flowers and berries; and everywhere, thrown between forest leaves and through boulder-clefts, flashes living gold from the sun's eastern mints.

The forest army has invaded each valley—those of the Criviscia, the Zona, and the Asinao—and they lie fresh and green save here and there where the woodman, discovering the impotence of his axe and strength, has brought an all-devouring tree-felling machine to slaughter the giants of the vale. Here the lightning has left its trace on some gnarled chestnut-tree counting its age by generations; there the meaner fire of man has been used to level the lords of the mountain-side. Heralded by a rumble of wheels and the crunching of the gritty road surface, the proud monarchs that so long breasted the

tempests come on creaking, awkward carts. Drawn by fiery mules, prancing and capering, they are bound for Solenzara or Porto Vecchio for shipment.

At times the road became narrow and tiresome to travel on. Sharp granite chips have been thrown down to hide winter's havoc. At several spots I found that the road had been entirely washed away and rough planks placed over the abyss. A fierce mountain torrent had swept one bridge entirely away, and there was nothing for it but to wade across, carrying my heavily laden bicycle. Houses on the route are few and far between, and most of them I found deserted. Save for the carts carrying tree-trunks to the coast, the postman—he has a horse and a rough cart—a rare *voiture* with a tourist or two, the road is unused.

I reached the height—just about 4,000 feet above sea-level I think it is—shortly before mid-day, for I had lingered long by the way, exploring to right and left. *Je suis chasseur de points de vue*. On the left side of the road, just where the blue T.C.F. plate announces that the *col* is conquered, is a large expanse of grass, interspersed with shaggy trees. There I had my frugal lunch—chocolat Menier and biscuits. A few goats came and looked at the suspicious stranger; a little herd of donkeys gazed stupidly for a quarter of an hour, came nearer, and shyly partook of fragments of biscuit; birds twittered gently, tired by the heat; blackbeetles were busy rolling large bits of refuse to some unknown bourne; huge bees and wasps hummed past on gauzy wing.

I remained for a couple of hours in this seductive solitude, and it was after two o'clock when I got ready to resume my journey. There was no need to hurry, I thought, as I saw the tremor of the sea in the distance; the road was downhill. The road was downhill, of course, but what a road it became! I mounted, but

before I had gone a hundred yards, off I had to come. The surface consisted of eight or ten inches of loose earth, mixed thickly with sharp bits of granite as large as my fist. It was impossible even to walk comfortably ; it was merely a case of floundering along, ominous thuds causing me alarm as my cycle bumped in and out of ruts where the dust hid big stones. Round the corner, I thought, it might possibly be better ; round the corner it was a whole series of degrees worse. It looked as though a huge dry-stone dike had at one time stood at the edge of the road, but had fallen and spread right across the way, while to cover this the winds have brought down loads of dust from the cracked, calcined rock out of which the route is cut. So dry is the rock wall that even every lizard that rushes up from the road to the shelter of the nearest shrub sends down a little shower of dust from beneath its scampering feet.

The descent grew steeper and still steeper, and I admit it was no very pleasant task to struggle down the precipitous path holding in a heavy cycle. A solitary woodman came up the road.

Greeting him, "How long does the route go on in this condition ?" I asked.

"Oh, in two kilometres you will be able to ride again," was his reply.

I looked over the side of the road. A hundred yards below me I saw my route, which had doubled back on itself, and a hundred yards still farther down I caught a glimpse of it again. Across the valley, to the side of which the road clings before it goes with a wide sweep down the riverside, a huge rock towers over a thousand feet high, the scanty trees on the top looking like berry bushes. The two kilometres passed and the road got worse. It was then zigzagging and descending, however, in such a manner that riding would have been highly

dangerous had the condition of the surface permitted it. On and on again. The river was soon reached, and I tramped along to the accompaniment of its fantastic music. Its call was irresistible, and, hiding my machine in the *maquis*, I chose a clear deep pool and enjoyed its refreshing mountain coldness.

For miles the road continued to be wretched, but the scenery was magnificent, and I was quite reconciled to the idea of walking to Solenzara. Now and again, at the risk of a torn tyre, I rode for a hundred yards or so. Then I came across a few road-menders, and I was able to ventilate some strong views on their science.

"I never saw any one come over the col on a vélo before," said one.

"You are English of course," said another decidedly, for evidently only an Englishman would be *drôle* enough to come that way *à bicyclette*.

"Road-mending in Corsica," remarked a third, "is like making bricks without straw. We have to find metal as we go along, and then there is nothing to make it hold. We can only throw it down and leave it to be trampled hard by the traffic of the district."

"The traffic of the district" as the means of trampling down the road into a decent one was decidedly good. What "traffic" I saw only "trampled" it up into something to give a cyclist nightmare.

Soon, far in the distance, I saw plainly a twisting line of white—the sea-shore—and I settled down into a steady four-miles-an-hour tramp, comforting myself by the reflection that I could walk all the way to Solenzara before the inn locked its doors for the night. Soon houses became a little more numerous; a long train of mules laden with sacks of charcoal stampeded into the *maquis* when I came upon them at a turn in the road.

“Cachez la machine ! Cachez la machine !” the drivers shouted, but that was rather a difficult task, for there was nothing that would hide it. So I stood between it and the animals ; they soon discovered that there was nothing to be very frightened of, and like a squad of soldiers they fell into line once more and the train went tinkling, tinkling up the hill again.

Round turn after turn I went. Lo ! Suddenly the road became smooth and firm as asphalt ! I mounted, expecting to be able to ride for a hundred yards or so. The road sloped gently by the riverside and continued to improve if anything. Kilometre succeeded kilometre, and I sped along, driving in front of me a herd of silly goats which I was sure should have been going in the opposite direction. Towards evening, in the more remote parts of the island, the traveller will always meet with herds of goats walking sedately homewards, sometimes accompanied by a keeper and sometimes not. They are great nuisances to the cyclist, as they are afraid to pass him or to allow him to pass them. Many a time I have driven herds of these animals along for miles in front of me. The only way to get rid of them is to rush along and endeavour to pass one or two. Immediately you pass one it rushes off behind you, and the rest, evidently not wishing to leave a comrade alone or noticing that it is easily possible to evade the pursuer, suddenly turn and in a cloud of dust rush to join their friend that was last and has become first.

Soon the silver heights and purple depths were vanishing behind me in the twilight ; the grim mountain-barrier lay in the rear, a darkish mass inspiringly grand ; the heavy mace of evening silence descended on the flat coast-land ; the tinted shadows lengthened. The Solenzara river, its turbulent mountain spirit soothed at last, flowed, almost without a murmur, into the sleepy sea.

Not far off were the few winking lights of the village, Solenzara itself beneath its eucalyptus-trees.

Down by the river were a number of young girls filling their pitchers ; along the quarter of a mile which separates river and village I passed a number of them, with their water-vessels on their heads, and they invariably greeted the traveller with a bright "Buon' ser', signor'."

Solenzara is a village lying a little up from the sea-shore, and consists of a long, straggling street from which another, curiously irregular, runs down to the beach. At the end of the second stand the school and barracks of the gendarmes, looking out on the waves. All round the village the health-giving eucalyptus-tree is to be seen, and it is this little forest that makes Solenzara the tiny jewel of the eastern coast of Corsica. The village lies on that low-lying coast-line spreading almost from Bonifacio to Bastia, and along which fever holds its sway in summer-time, giving to every hamlet in this region, even in the cooler season, a half-deserted appearance. At Solenzara, too, commences what is called the Spiaggia, or Plain of Aleria, stretching away to where the Golo reaches the sea, over fifty miles distant. This expanse of lowland is the most unhealthy part of the island, though extremely fertile, but round Solenzara the towering eucalyptus-trees, shedding their curious little pyramids all round, keep the village healthy even at the height of summer. From June till October the terrible *marécage* blows and forces the inhabitants all along the coast to flee well up into the mountains, but its spell breaks in the little region at the mouth of the Solenzara.

A cheery little Madame was preparing dinner at the quaint Hôtel de la Poste when I reached it. She looked at my bicycle, thick with dust, and asked me where I came from. I told her.

“But monsieur has surely never come over the col on a vélo!” she said, in astonishment.

“Not exactly on it, but by the side of it,” Monsieur replied.

She murmured something about *les anglais* being *drôles*, and promptly placed before me a bottle of wine and a decanter of water, to refresh myself till dinner was ready. Having done so, I expressed the desire to have a wash, and Madame, taking the half-empty decanter, led the way upstairs, showed me my bedroom, and placed the decanter in the tiny basin by the window-sill! And there, with about two cupfuls of water, I got rid of the dust of the *col*, which had hardened face and hands. I did not, however, make any comments about the disadvantages of primitive civilisation, for I knew that every drop of water required had to be carried a quarter of a mile from the river. No wonder there is a natural disposition to count the drops.

The hotel was a curious little one. On the ground floor was the *buvette*, and behind it a combined sitting-room and kitchen for the more distinguished visitors. In the upper part of the building, reached by a rickety little ladder, is the strangers' dining-room, through which the bedrooms are reached, my own by going out at the window, along the balcony, and in at the window! A few gaudy pictures, a chest of drawers, the usual impossible mirror, a chair and a bed were the contents of the room placed at my disposal. An excellent dinner was soon on the table, and after enjoying it I went off to bed and—nearly—slept the clock round.

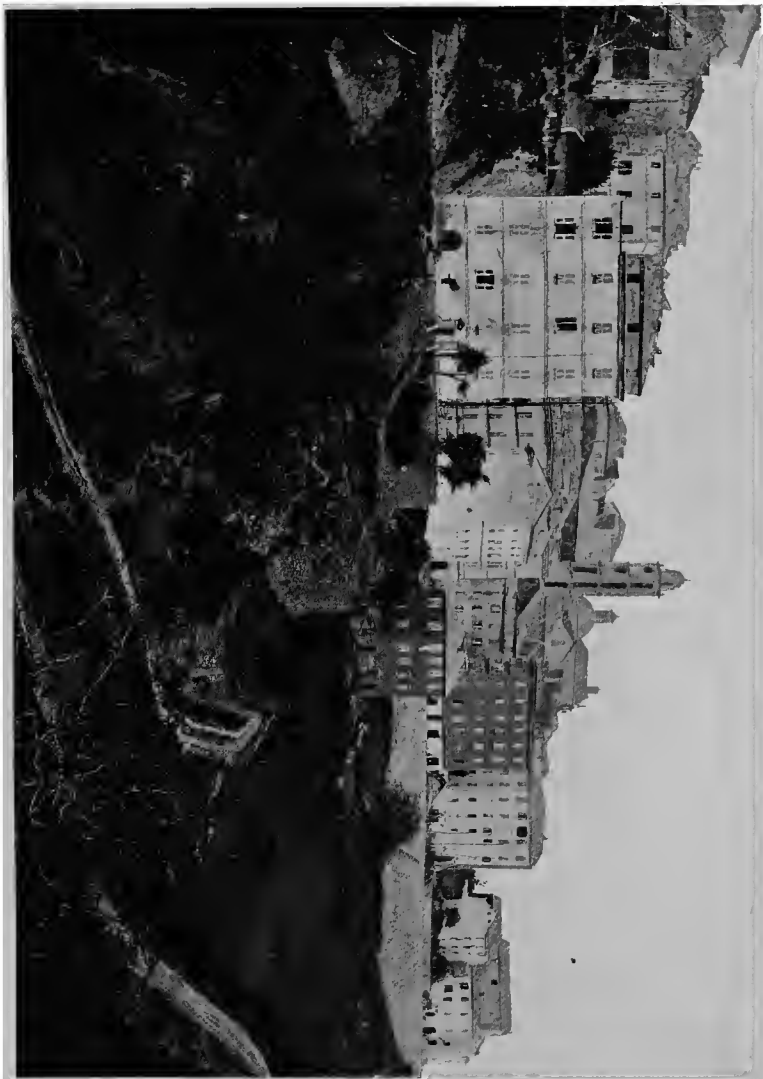
The inhabitants of Solenzara live a quiet, simple life. The women-folk appear to be mostly engaged in carrying water from the river. A large metal factory used to provide work for a number of men, but it is now closed. In

the middle of the village, however, there is a sawmill, and a number of the people are employed there. Others find casual employment in loading and unloading the few ships which come to this part of the coast. Large herds of goats and asses roam about, and looking after these provides an occupation quite in keeping with the village Corsican's idea of work. The gendarmes form the "society" of the place, and jolly, talkative fellows they are, spending most of their time by the seashore indulging in the gentle pastime.

Next day the humdrum life of Solenzara was relieved by an epoch-making event—the arrival of a circus. The little tent was laboriously pitched off the "main street," and the man with the big drum spent the greater part of the afternoon inviting all and sundry to "walk up." The crowd round the tent consisted of a couple of score of children, and they required none of his vivid oratory to stir their imaginations and rouse their enthusiasm, but they lacked collectively the *deux sous* necessary for individual admission. The afternoon performance looked like fizzling out, when I struck a bargain with the proprietor. He agreed to put in force the free list for the children of the village for the consideration of a five-franc piece.

Then the primitive performance soon began, to the accompaniment of the big drum—the only musical instrument. A pretty little pony capered round the ring, to the delight of the youngsters. The "master of the ring" himself did some weird feats with ominously light-looking heavy weights. His daughter, with a painted and pained expression, wasted a little time on the tight-rope. Another of the company jumped from one horse to another as they trotted round the ring in opposite directions. Then the pony appeared again and jumped over gates and through hoops, and

stood still while some rather stubborn fireworks were exploded round about it. Two frightened-looking collie dogs appeared, and gave an exhibition of chasing half a dozen goats into a pen, where they seemed only too anxious to go. The finale was a "grand tableau." Mademoiselle stood on the pony's back, two horses stood on their hind legs, the dogs barked, and Monsieur beat his drum—and the "greatest show on earth" was over.



CERVIONE.

CHAPTER V

BY A ROUNDABOUT WAY TO BOCOGNANO

“Over the grey stones and the windswept moor ;
And foaming down from pool to emerald pool
The clear stream leapt ; on either side the high
Grey bastions steadfast hung ; how still the vale !
No sound save rustling grasses, or the cry
Of sheep on bare hill ledges, or the wail
Of gulls aloft, on vague and aimless quest that sail.”

A. C. BENSON.

EIGHTEEN kilometres north of Solenzara, where the Fium' Orbo flows gently to the sea after rushing and roaring through perhaps the most rugged part of the island, the traveller once more meets the railway, which he has not seen since leaving Ajaccio. It is the direct line from Bastia, and it was intended to carry it to Bonifacio, but it stopped abruptly by the *route forestière*, three miles from the village of Ghisonaccia, and the builders even neglected to erect buffers. Your Corsican is proud of his little toy-like, narrow-gauge *chemin de fer*, its baby engines, its tiny carriages, its twelve miles an hour. “Petit, mais utile,” he says, in his pride. “Et cher,” is what any one if he is not a Corsican adds, and if he is a Frenchman he says it with a note of bitterness. This little railway is France's gift to Corsica, a gift which cost over £3,000,000. There are now open 185

miles of line, but it is long since *la patrie* got tired of buying land for its construction at about forty or fifty times its value.¹

On the west the projected building of the line from Ajaccio to Propriano and Sartène has been postponed indefinitely. On the east, as I have said, it halted at nowhere on the roadside, and a little inn and a few houses sprang up. The route to Bonifacio has not even been surveyed, and there is little likelihood of Corsica's railway system being extended in the immediate future.

I must admit that I never entered a Corsican train during my stay in the island, because in the majority of cases I could get along almost as quickly by wheel and on all occasions see and hear more. There is not the faintest suspicion of railway racing in Corsica. The journey from Ajaccio to Bastia, 98 miles, is performed in a shade under eight hours; from Bastia to Calvi, 75 miles, occupies nearly six hours.

Little Ghisonaccia has reason to be thankful that the railway comes to within such easy reach of its doors, for it brings the moneyed tourists—a small band but welcome—to an excellent sporting district. The *maître d'hôtel* at the village has an opulent look, and he is proud of the distinguished names in his visitors' book—a volume which the police regulations render necessary, and in which the traveller inserts his name, age, profession, and a few other details. The book is signed every now and again by a gendarme, the unravelling of whose signature would in most cases provide an exciting competition for a London weekly.

M. Romani points with considerable pride to the signature of a well-known and wealthy English Member of Parliament, who has visited Ghisonaccia several times with motor-cars, servants, and all the necessary imple-

¹ See p. 296.

ments of *chasse* and *pêche*, and who generally spent the fabulous sum of two hundred francs a day.

And M. Romani puffs hard at his cigar and rubs his hands as he imparts this information. "Deux cents francs par jour ! Ah ! bien ! Et il est beau garçon aussi." Then Monsieur has at his finger-tips more about this M.P.'s career than you will find in *Who's Who* ; he possesses a huge volume of biographies which has acquired the habit of falling open at the very page where this M.P.'s career is set forth.

As I have said,[†] Ghisonaccia is an excellent centre for a sportsman's paradise, and there is probably no place in the whole island from which it is so difficult to pull oneself away. Sea and river swarm with fish of many kinds. Sweet-water trout and eels are particularly abundant and are excellent in quality. Fine fishing is to be had in the numerous *étangs* in the neighbourhood.

As for game, there is sufficient to satisfy the cravings of the most strenuous and enthusiastic sportsman. Up in the mountains near the snows he may, with a little luck, come across the moufflon, that mysterious Corsican animal, akin to the izzard of the Pyrenees or the chamois of the Alps, only the hunter should take care not to slay by mistake the harmless goats of some mountain herd ! The moufflon is rapidly growing scarcer, and, experienced guides told me, infinitely more cunning. I only saw a moufflon once—a young one in captivity near Evisa. The hare abounds, too. He is a more dapper little fellow in Corsica than on the Continent. His coat is of a deeper grey and on the table he is not quite so self-assertive as his French or English cousin. In his native haunts, however, I know from experience that he is a nimbler fellow altogether. The presence of the wild boar in

[†] See Preface.

fairly large numbers raises Corsican sport above that of England. The Corsican *sanglier* is smaller than that found in France, but sportsmen may always be sure that the wild boar of the island will give them a good run for their money.

Up on the heights overlooking the coast a few stags will still wander, but these monarchs of the glen are becoming few and far between and difficult to get at. There will find their way into the sportsman's bag, too, pheasants, partridges, blackbirds (don't despise them—they are excellent on the table), moor-hens, woodcocks, quails, thrushes, wood-pigeons, and landrails.

A factor which renders Ghisonaccia an excellent centre for those of sporting inclinations is the maze of *étangs* in this region. Several large ones are within easy reach. To the south are the Étang de Palo and the Étang de Graduggine and to the north those of Urbino, Siglione, Sale, Diana, and Terrenzana. Round these the sportsman will find excellent sport, and, besides the game I have just mentioned, he will come across on the shores of the *étangs*, ready for his gun, curlews, snipe, water-hens, wild ducks, grebes, wild geese, black divers, plovers, and sandpipers, surely enough to make a delightfully varied *menu*.

The sporting season in Corsica opens in the middle of August, but I must warn the lucky individual who may be able to make up his mind to go a-hunting in the "Scented Isle" that he must beware of rushing off to Corsica as he would to the Scottish Highlands in order to be on the spot for the ever-glorious twelfth. When the season opens in the island the heat of summer is at its height; fever reigns on the eastern coast; the fierce sun makes sport even in the mountains a painfully fatiguing affair. Let August and September run their course. By November's commencement the mild

weather of the winter season is setting in ; the region is healthy. From the beginning of November till the end of February is the ideal season.

Of course, sport is obtainable even at the height of the summer in the higher parts of the island, but it is nothing when compared with what can be obtained on the eastern coast, and it is to that part that the seeker after "fresh woods and pastures new" would be well advised to direct his steps. On the spot it is advisable to hire a good guide who will open the gates of this sportsman's elysium.

The village of Ghisonaccia is a pleasant, straggling little place, some little distance from the sea, with about nine hundred or a thousand inhabitants. The place gains a certain importance, apart from its being a centre for sport, on account of the fact that it is near the railway terminus and on the best route between Bonifacio and Bastia.

The people of this part of the country—up the Fium' Orbo to Ghisoni and Bocognano—are still famous for their fiery patriotism and a sturdy spirit of independence. In their corner of the island the last fires of national independence burned. In fact, force of arms did not overcome these hardy mountaineers, but Louis XVIII., seeing that might was useless, went to great lengths to conciliate those in whom the stirring music of the Fium' Orbo, with its matchless song of freedom, had so deeply imbued a love of liberty and independence.

The men are fine, muscular fellows, and the women pretty and shapely, and not altogether unaware of the effect of dress. The young women, however, are not to be persuaded to face the camera without due warning. Even in out-of-the-way Corsica, be it understood, one knocks up against that familiar friend of all of us—Vanity. They will tell you, as you plead for a picture, that you

will show the photographs to people on the Continent, who will say that Corsican girls are not pretty. One particularly good-looking young lady of Ghisonaccia, to whom I was introduced, was emphatic in refusing to be taken. On Sunday she was arrayed with a charm and taste that one scarcely expected to come across in Corsica, but on Monday, when I suggested that she should stand before my camera, her reply was in no undecided tone.

"I never allow myself to be photographed on Monday," said this present-day Colomba.

What a confession, really, for a young lady to make ! So the supreme effort of looking well on Sundays does exact its tribute !

During my stay at Ghisonaccia I visited the site of the ancient town of Aleria, in a region connected with one of the most interesting chapters of Corsican history. The place lies eight miles north of Ghisonaccia. There is a modern Aleria consisting of a number of hamlets scattered north and south of the river Tavignano, the principal one being Cateraggio, situated about two miles from the railway station.

Of the ancient Aleria but little remains, and that little must, I think, be somewhat disappointing even to the most enthusiastic archæologist. Plenty of scattered stones there are and ruined traces of walls. The remains of what some authorities say was a Roman circus were pointed out to me, as well as the slight evidences of the existence of a house which the Corsican calls the Sala Reale, where the Roman Prætor is supposed to have held court. The ruins are certainly spread over a considerable area and the ancient Aleria must have been at one time a town of considerable importance, with the Etang de Diana, the shores of which are but a short distance away, as its harbour.

It is generally presumed that a Roman colony was

founded on the site by Sylla, but some authorities are of opinion that it existed as a port before that time, and confirmation of their belief is afforded by the inscription in Rome on the tomb of Lucius Scipio to the effect that he laid siege to Aleria and took it in 494. Roman money, vases and other *objets d'art*, and Latin inscriptions have been unearthed, but I think it must be admitted that the Roman colony at Aleria—and the same remark applies to Mariana—was never a very formidable or important one. The paucity of trustworthy Roman remains is striking.

“I have never visited a province,” says M. Prosper Mérimée, “at one time under the Roman Empire which has been left with fewer vestiges of Roman art and civilisation.” The Sala Reale Mérimée does not consider to be of Roman origin, because, had it been so, it would undoubtedly have been built in such a manner that it would have been to-day in a much better state of preservation. Even the circus this authoritative antiquarian refuses to attribute to the Romans. What remains of it leads him to believe that it was a rude structure, probably of Arab origin, whilst another authority set it down as having been a huge granary.

But it is the story of more recent times which makes the traveller interested in this part of the country. Aleria is connected with the history of Corsica's King, Baron Theodore von Neuhoff. It was on a day early in March, 1736, that a British ship steered along the Alerian coast, having on board a mysterious stranger, of whose coming news had already reached the island. His arrival was eagerly looked forward to by the Corsicans, for matters in the island were in a parlous state. During the year 1734, Giafferi¹—one of the greatest heroes of the wars of

¹ Louis Giafferi is not to be mistaken for Jean Pierre Gaffori, another great Corsican patriot.

independence in Corsica—had succeeded in driving the Genoese out of the island with the exception of a few of the strong coast towns. With Hyacinthus Paoli—father of Corsica's darling hero, Pasquale Paoli—he proclaimed the island's independence under a national Parliament. Three generals—Paoli, Giafferi, and Ceccaldi—were made "Primats" of the nation. They presided over a "Junta" or cabinet composed of twelve persons chosen from amongst the most capable men of the island, and these exercised a supreme power. A Department of War, of six members; an Intelligence and Advisory Department, of similar size; a Secretary of State; a Keeper of the Seals; an Exchequer and an Auditor-General were attached to the Junta. Genoese laws and taxes were promptly swept away and democratic legislation was soon in force. The Primats took the title of Royal Highness and the members of the Junta that of Excellency.

Surely this Constitution, if we look round the Europe of the time and see how it was bound by absolutism and autocracy, is one of the most remarkable in history. A poor people, stricken by years of war, almost driven to the last extreme, were momentarily favoured, and amid the sufferings and poverty which war always brought in terrible form to Corsica, they raised the banner of freedom whilst the smoke of battle had hardly cleared, they made their island home a gem of light in a Continent where but the morning twilight of popular freedom glimmered.

Military operations had to be pushed forward with vigour against the Genoese, who were determined to subdue the island again. The Republic's ships blockaded the Corsican ports and the position soon became desperate. But one day a peal of joy rang through the starving island. At Ile Rousse, on the west coast, two vessels appeared and landed great stores of food and war munitions. The captains of the vessels refused to say from whom the

goods came, rejected all offer of reward, accepted a glass of wine each, and, having drunk to the prosperity of the gallant little nation and to the success of its struggle for liberty, they sailed away.

This gift was from the other island home of freedom—Britain—the people of which were at that time watching with anxiety the islanders' fight for freedom. The relief thus afforded put such spirit into the Corsicans that the tide of war turned and Genoa sued for peace, but all overtures were rejected.

It was under these circumstances that the mysterious stranger landed from Captain Dick's vessel at Aleria. He was of noble bearing, every inch a king, and dressed in quaint Moorish garb. With a glittering retinue he landed, his staff consisting of two French officers, three Moors, and eleven Italians. If his following were not large, his stores and arms—which were much more important to the Corsicans—were abundant. He had ten cannon, four thousand muskets, and a vast quantity of provisions, munitions of war, and money. He was received by the people with wild enthusiasm and royal courtesy.

Baron Theodore von Neuhoff, a Westphalian nobleman, had, prior to his landing in Corsica, had an adventurous though not, perhaps, a worthy career. His father died when the future King of Corsica was a boy of tender age, and Theodore found himself at once ushered into the world of camp and court. He became page to the Duchess of Orleans, who later secured for him by her influence the rank of captain in a famous regiment. But soon his overpowering ambition—and, no doubt, also to some extent his huge gambling debts—caused him to leave the army. He went to Sweden and the Baron de Goertz employed him in negotiating with Philippe V. of Spain. After the siege of Frederikshall, where, in 1718, Charles XII. was slain, and the fall of

Goertz, he went to Spain with high recommendations from the exalted political personages with whom he had come into contact in Sweden. In the Peninsula he obtained the command of a regiment and became a great favourite of the Queen, Elizabeth Farnese. He eventually married Lady Forsfield, a young woman of great beauty, daughter of the Irish Lord Kilmallock and a near relative of the influential Spanish grandee, the Marquis of Monte Allegro.

About this time that notorious Scot, Law, was practising his great financial deals in France, and Theodore, soon crushed by fresh debts, abandoned his wife and, having possessed himself of her jewels and valuables, fled to Paris, where he was soon working hand in glove with Law. Law's swindles, however, soon brought about his fall, and against Neuhoff *lettres de cachet* were issued. This sent him on his wanderings again, and he is next to be found at Ostend, helping the Duke of Ripperda to form an East Indian trading company. The Baron's stay in the Netherlands, however, only had the effect of adding to the heavy load of his debts, and between that time (1720) and 1732, Theodore rushed from one country to another in search of fortune, an old-time adventurer.

At last we find him in Genoa just at the time when the position of the Corsicans was growing desperate and before England's gift had turned the scale of fate in their favour. From prisoners he heard of the plight of the island, and, through the medium, it is said, of a Corsican monk, he entered into negotiations with the Primats of the island. These chiefs of the little state, believing that Theodore's wide experience at the courts of Europe would be of immense service in preserving the independence of Corsica, were disposed to look with considerable favour on the proposal which the Baron made to them—that they should make him King of Corsica. Eventually

they agreed, provided that Theodore could secure provisions and munitions of war and that he did not come quite without money, all of which would be necessary to him were his kingship to be at all real.

Armed with credentials which he received in Florence, Theodore approached several of the courts of Europe with a view to obtaining assistance. In Constantinople he laid before Sultan Mahmoud I. a brilliant project of conquest. War at the time was imminent between the Turks and the Russians, the latter of whom had formed an alliance with Charles VI. The plan was that while the Emperor was joining hands with the Russians, Moors were to invade Italy and push on into Germany, while the Turkish army was to penetrate Hungary. Theodore was to take possession of Corsica and hold it as fief of the Sultan. The island was to form the base of operations for the Moorish campaign.

Mahmoud was struck with this great plan—in reality a fine piece of Neuhoffian bluff—and gave the Baron a huge sum of money to initiate the campaign, sending orders to the Bey of Tunis to give the Baron all he required in the way of arms and provisions. In Barbary, however, Theodore met with great difficulties. At first he was thrown into prison, but he managed to escape, and, doubtless by the aid of more bluff, prevailed upon the Bey to give him considerable assistance. In the end he was able to set sail, in regal state and with corresponding wealth, to the island of his dreams of kingship.

Thus this clear-headed Don Quixote, this Jacques Lebaudy—not, however, born a century and a half too late—arrived in Corsica regally resplendent. The idea of a king appealed to the Corsicans, and especially a king of the experience of the world which Theodore had. Was he not a Grandee of Spain, a Lord of Great Britain, a Peer of France, a Prince of the Roman Empire,

a soldier and a courtier who had gained knowledge and influence in all the courts of Europe ?

After landing majestically at Aleria, he informed the applauding people that the stores and wealth which he brought with him were but a tithe of what was to come. He was escorted with great pomp to Cervione, and there the new constitution, rendered necessary by the coming of the King, was drawn up. The adventurer became King Theodore I. of Corsica ; he was to have a Privy Council of twenty-four of the wisest men of the island, elected by the people ; no law could be passed and no taxes imposed without the assent of the popularly elected Parliament ; all legislative positions were to be held by Corsicans alone ; the Genoese were to be expelled and their property confiscated ; there was to be no tax on industrial or agricultural products ; taxes were not to amount annually to more than "trois livres de la monnaie courante" from each head of a family ; taxes paid by widows were to be abolished ; the price of salt—a Government monopoly—was fixed at 13½ sous for 22 lbs. ; towns were to retain all their privileges ; a university was to be established for the study of philosophy and law ; the King was to create a noble royal order for the reward of patriots ; forests and lands were to belong to the people.

This constitution, considering the age in which it was drawn up, is even more remarkable than that which it immediately succeeded, all the more so when we know that the chiefs of the Corsicans elaborated it in a few hours. On April 14th King Theodore was crowned with a crown of laurel and oak leaves. It must be said that he opened his reign well, though his court of semi-barbaric splendour must have been strangely incongruous in the midst of a people living the simplest of lives. Hardy, poor, earnest Corsicans were raised to such ranks as those of count, grand marshal, and

marquis. But the King did not devote all his attention to those outward displays of royalty. He brought about peace in the troubled island, reorganised the army, ranged about him a fine band of Corsican patriots as advisers in the work of making the island peaceful, prosperous, and happy ; he drove the Genoese from Sartène and Porto Vecchio, and acted the Richard Cœur de Lion before the impregnable walls of Bastia. Industry reared its head again in the island, commerce flourished, money was minted. The Genoese privateers were met on the seas by those carrying the Corsican banner—a flag of green and gold with the national motto, “In te Domine speravi.”

But though there is no doubt that Theodore did his best, he soon began to feel the need of those stores and munitions which he said would soon arrive. The King's success had naturally stirred Genoa to a supreme effort to reconquer the island. First of all robbers and murderers were hired by the Republic and turned loose in Corsica to work havoc by treachery and assassination. Genoa's cruisers became increasingly active and more numerous. The people, disturbed by the work of the Genoese banditti, often reduced to semi-starvation by the blockades kept up by the enemy, began to have doubts as to the power of their King to give them the peace and safety they so greatly desired. War drained the island of its wealth. The coins which Theodore had struck could not be used in commerce ; they only found a sale on the Continent as curiosities. The airy argosies of the King never materialised ; Genoa was spreading pamphlets throughout the island laying bare the King's “awful past,” and the poison was working.

Theodore's antidote was to scatter titles with a lavish hand ; but titles will not right wrongs and feed hungry people. His advisers soon began to desert him and to

form an opposition party. A royal tour through the island did not mend matters. On one occasion Theodore wished to attack the Genoese who had established themselves at Calenzana, but he found himself deserted by his army and even by his personal guard, whose arrears of pay were mounting up. The storm soon gathered thick round his head, and eventually he decided to go to the Continent himself to raise money and to procure supplies.

Three regents were appointed to rule during his absence, and on November 11, 1736, just eight months after his arrival, he sailed in a French vessel from Aleria, and soon began again his wanderings in Europe. He went, as he came, with a great show of promises, but the Corsicans had largely lost their faith in him. Ever in a hurry, the islanders had thought that a kingdom, ensuring them long-desired peace and prosperity, would rear itself, mushroom-like, in a night. When that hope vanished, they hurriedly got rid of their monarch and fell back once more on their own resources.

On two occasions subsequently Theodore visited Corsica. He appeared once more at Aleria on September 15, 1738, with the stores he had been able to secure. He had three ships and was even more lavishly equipped than when he landed the first time. Now he was flying the Dutch flag, for a number of prominent financiers of Holland, wishing to gain a hold in the Mediterranean, had advanced him the necessary funds. But, as far as Theodore's personal plans were concerned, the times were out of joint. While he had wandered on the Continent, a harassing, bloody war had been sapping the life out of Corsica, and the islanders, finding themselves almost driven from the last ditch, opened up negotiations with France in order to obtain help, and France naturally fell in with a proposal which appeared

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likely to leave her in possession of an island so near her own coast. But Genoa thought that Corsica's game was one at which two could play, as she herself was in need of aid. She had been borrowing large sums of money and hiring Swiss soldiery to carry on a war of which she was getting tired. So she, too, approached France, and France agreed that the French troops sent to the island were to make it their business to "subdue the enemies of the Republic" I Hitherto France had been the friend of Corsica, but now, when the island asked her aid, she declared her intention of handing it over to the enemy.

This was more than the proud islanders could endure, and once more throughout their stricken homeland the war signals flared from every mountain-top. The people rose *en masse* to face Count Boissieux and his six French regiments, and so determined a front did the Corsicans show that the Count opened peace negotiations with them, and these dragged out their weary length for six months. The main point was that the Corsicans should submit to Genoa, but, of course, they steadfastly refused to agree to this. At last the French King, Louis XV., issued a proclamation ordering the islanders to submit to the Republic, but their reply was that they would fight to the last rather than do so.

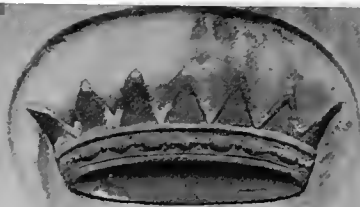
Such was the state of affairs when Theodore landed for the second time. He was certainly warmly received and escorted again to Cervione, but the time had gone when Corsica could play at being a kingdom. It was time for the stern work of war, not for pomp and show. Theodore was plainly told that his days as King of Corsica were at an end. He had left them in the lurch until their position became so desperate that negotiations with France had to be opened up. These negotiations had brought about a situation upon the face of which the arrival of Theodore could scarcely even bring about

a temporary change. Boissieux, too, issued a proclamation condemning Theodore as a traitor and stating that any one having dealings with him would be treated as a traitor and a rebel. As Theodore's resources would have been of little use in stemming the tide of conquest about to sweep over the island, the "King" was soon deserted, and on October 15th he left the island once more.

The French conquest was rapid. Boissieux was defeated in the first battle of the campaign at Borgo, and, dying at Bastia, was succeeded by the Marquis de Maillebois, who soon forced the Corsican leaders holding the north of the island to surrender. Hyacinthus Paoli, with his son Pasquale, then fourteen years of age and destined before long to become one of the world's finest patriots, Giafferi, and other leaders were banished. In the southern part of the island the French had to face the stubborn resistance of Theodore's relatives, the Baron von Dorst and Baron Friedrich von Neuhoff. After a long struggle they submitted and were allowed to leave the island.

Maillebois certainly ruled Corsica firmly. Under him no Genoese injustices were practised. In 1741, however, he was recalled with his troops. Charles VI. had died and Louis XVI. had crossed the Rhine with thirty thousand Frenchmen to aid the cause of Charles Albert of Bavaria. It was, therefore, deemed necessary to strengthen that army by recalling the French forces in Corsica. On leaving the island Maillebois did what still causes his name to be reviled: he handed over all the fortresses to the Genoese!

Yet again the Corsicans rose in anger, and just at that time the almost forgotten Theodore paid his last visit to the isl . He had received help from England, and he came with three English ships of war on January 30, 1743. He landed arms and ammunition, issued verbose



NEAR THIS PLACE IS INTERRED
THEODORE, KING OF CORSICA
WHO DIED IN THIS PARISH,
DECEMBER XITH MDCCLVI:
IMMEDIATELY AFTER LEAVING
THE KING'S BENCH PRISON,
BY THE BENEFIT OF THE ACT OF INSOLVENCY
IN CONSEQUENCE OF WHICH
HE REGISTERED HIS KINGDOM OF CORSICA
FOR THE USE OF HIS CREDITORS.

THE GRAVE, GREAT TEACHER TO A LEVEL BRING,
HEROES AND BEGGARS, GALLEY SLAVES, AND KINGS
BUT THEODORE, THIS MORAL LEARN'D ERE DEAD
HATE POUR'D ITS LESSONS ON HIS LIVING HEAD
BESTOW'D A KINGDOM, AND DENIED HIM BREAD.

MEMORIAL TABLET TO KING THEODORE, ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, SOHO.

proclamations, launched dire threats against his former supporters, called on the people to rally round his person—but there was no response. These acts angered the people, and soon there were clear evidences of hostility against him. So, deeming discretion the better part of valour, he left Corsica—for ever.

The disappointed King retired to England. In London he fell into the direst poverty, and was at last cast, as a debtor, into the King's Bench Prison. Horace Walpole started a public subscription for him, but only a sum of £50 or so was received. He was eventually released, and soon afterwards died—on December 11, 1756—at a tailor's shop in Chapel Street. His funeral expenses were defrayed by a kindly oilman in Compton Street. Walpole wrote an inscription for his tombstone, which has a crown cut in the stone "exactly copied" from one of Theodore's coins :—

"The grave, great teacher, to a level brings
 Héroses and beggars, galley-slaves and kings,
 But Theodore, this moral learned ere dead ;
 Fate pour'd its lessons on his living head,
 Bestow'd a Kingdom and denied him bread."

It seems that there was some disinclination on the part of the churchwardens of St. Anne's, Soho, in the churchyard of which he was buried, to allow him to be described as "Theodore, King of Corsica," on the ground that he had abdicated his sovereignty by flight from his kingdom to London, and had been made a bankrupt and imprisoned. The wardens, however, evidently relented, for in a letter to Sir Horace Mann, on February 29, 1757, Walpole says: "You will laugh to hear that when I sent my inscription to the vestry for the approbation of the minister and churchwardens, they demurred. . . . Happily they have acknowledged his title."

A tablet is still to be seen on the south-west corner of the tower of St. Anne's Church, underneath which the King was buried. The inscription on the tablet is as follows :—

“Near this place is interred
THEODORE, KING OF CORSICA,
Who died in this parish,
December 11th, 1756,
Immediately after leaving
The King's Bench Prison,
By the benefit of the Act of Insolvency,
In consequence of which
He registered his kingdom of Corsica
For the use of his Creditors.”

In the burial registers of St. Anne's is found an entry recording his funeral under the title of “Baron de Neuhoff, from Chapel Street, December 15th, 1756.” There is also to be found the following entry: “February 6th, 1797, Colonel Frederick, son of Theodore, King of Corsica, aged 70 years, from St. Margaret's; shot himself.” This “Colonel Frederick” was the only son of Theodore by his marriage with the beautiful daughter of the Earl of Kilmallock. He committed suicide in the porch of Westminster Abbey. He was buried, according to the register, “at the end of the steeple by the King of Corsica's tablet.” He must have lived for a considerable time in the parish, for his name appears on the rate-books of St. Anne's.¹

It would be difficult to find a parallel to the strange life of King Theodore. He was one of the most picturesque of adventurers, indulging in make-believe to the end, and proudly presenting to Walpole his royal seal. It is a page from a story only possible in a fantastic

¹ I am indebted to Mr. William Hall, the Lodge, St. Anne's Vestry, for the facts relating to the latter part of the story of King Theodore's life.

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age; his life embraced all that a man of his stamp could wish for, and all that he would avoid—royalty and lack of bread, a kingdom and a pauper's grave.

After he left Corsica for the last time the islanders and the Genoese came to terms, and peace was established for some time in the war-worn island.

There are two routes to the interior from the neighbourhood where historic associations have bade me linger to recall an interesting picture of the heroic past of Corsica. One is the *route nationale* from Aleria to Corté direct, skirting the southern confines of La Castagniccia (Chestnut Land), a beautiful stretch of undulating forest land lying between the River Tavignano, along which the road runs, and the Golo in the north. The other is that from Ghisonaccia to Vivario, on the Ajaccio-Corté road, *viâ* Ghisoni. It is a *route forestière*, narrow all the way and roughish in many places, but, where not steep, quite fit for cycling upon. From Aleria I had reconnoitred the first; I had heard glowing accounts of the rugged, inspiring scenery through which the second ran, so I chose the rougher route.

There are no villages along the rock-hewn road; cottages are but few in number. Here and there a road-mender or a *berger* guarding his goats or pigs is all the company the traveller comes across. For ten kilometres or so I found it fairly easy going, for the climb to the proud little Col de St. Antoine is not at all abrupt. The Col is 300 feet above sea-level and affords a charming view of Aleria and Ghisonaccia gleaming brightly in the fertile plain. Four miles farther on is the entrance to the Defile de l'Inzecca, three or four kilometres long, the portal standing imposingly on high like the gateway to the vast domain of some barbaric giant of old. The narrow road clings to the side of

towering heights like a thin ivy branch to the wall of a ruined keep. Far below the Fium' Orbo, the Blind River, utters its chant of fury in Weberian notes. Now it rushes with fantastic harmony along its smooth-worn channel, then, dashed into bluish foam against huge rocks hurled into it from dizzy, enskied heights, it catches a deep-thrown sunbeam and tosses it upwards, a shower of all the colours of light. The fierce, ironical roar of the waters almost strikes terror to one's heart among the lonely rocks in the midst of what might be a stricken, petrified city of the dead in another world than ours. In every little crevice in the rocks the *maquis* mixture finds a foothold and ferns grow everywhere, some being greatly prized as rarities, but these are perched in places which would only tempt the skilled and surefooted edelweiss hunter of the Alps.

A distant rumble broke through the river's roar, and round a sharp corner came a huge cart drawn by half a dozen horses and carrying several long tree-trunks. The driver cracked his whip, yelled, and pulled at the horses. His companion was sitting at the end of the longest trunk where it scraped the ground. At the angle in the road there was no wall guarding the edge of the precipice, and I soon saw the reason for this. As the heavily-laden vehicle negotiated the corner the ends of the trunks swung off the road, so narrow is it, and for a minute the young Corsican sitting there hung over the gaping river ravine yawning a couple of hundred feet beneath him. I held my breath almost as the horses strained and kicked till back once more the ends of the trunks came to the road to act as a brake to the ponderous load as it creaked downwards to the next bend.

The sun early leaves this deep defile and the shadows impart to it a still more fearsome form. Those astounding walls seem to shut one in like a prison and twilight



THE DEFILE DE L'INZECCA.

almost hides the narrow path to freedom. In mysterious gloom the dark masses range themselves in ghostly array till one is almost ready to flee in terror. Nowhere in Corsica is Nature's rough hewing so grandly done. Like motionless avalanches gigantic rocks are poised, smitten into profiles so varied, into shapes so colossal. The Defile de l'Inzecca should be seen by moonlight, when the shadows are deep, when the night is still, save for the river's music, and when fleecy clouds pile themselves upon the heights, transforming the whole region into a white, glistening mass of spectral Alps.

Then by another imposing "gate" in what looks like a great, dry, mortarless Wall of China the defile is left behind. It was dark when I reached this spot, but early next morning I took a run back to this point with the treble purpose of seeing the scenery, spending a part of the day fishing in the finest pools of the Fium' Orbo, and having a bathe. Outside the gate the change of scenery is both restful and charming. Turning one's back on the defile, one sees the river flowing through delightfully green countryside, gradually rising to the distant horizon. Pines, larches, eucalyptus-trees, and oaks shade the long valley through which the Blind River flows so gently. Before it begins to sing the weird music of terror it murmurs the gentle, hesitant song of beauty's lover. Little hamlets lie scattered here and there on the hillsides and tiny rivulets water the fertile land.

A few miles farther on is the Defile du Salto della Sposata, a ponderous name not often used, for the cutting is generally called the Defile de Strette. Here, as in the Defile de l'Inzecca, the road is blasted out of the side of the rock, but this second passage is poor as compared with the first, and the only thing to recommend it is its unique *rochers des portes*. At that spot the road is cut, door-like, through three huge rocks. Passing

through the third, the traveller naturally enough looks back, and what a sight meets his eyes ! Far down the valley is the Defile de l'Inzecca, like a giant gateway opening to the east and displaying a *coup d'œil* which holds the visitor to the spot for a round five minutes. Dim on the eastern horizon the silky, azure haze of the sea almost matches the pale, glowing blue of the sky, with here and there darker spots looking like shadows, but surely the islands of the Italian coast. A last glimpse, too, is caught of glittering Aleria of the plain. It is an entrancing vista ; the *point de vue* must be carefully looked for ; it is passed in a moment, and then the vision is gone for ever.

Leaving this gorge, the country becomes open again. To the south tower two rugged peaks, the Kyrrie and the Christe Eleison, the first, I think, about five thousand feet high, the second a thousand feet lower. They stand like the stately guards of the little township of Ghisoni, which clings to the side of Monte Calvi and is divided into two by its steep street. Round it is a circlet of mountains and beside it the little Casapietrone rumbles by to add its tribute to the Fium' Orbo, about a mile or so distant. The road runs on the left bank of the stream for some distance, and the tired traveller who, as I did, approaches Ghisoni in the dark sees its lights twinkling across the little valley. Will they never come any nearer ? Suddenly the strain of hard pedalling ceases, the road goes downhill steeply, takes a sharp curve across a narrow bridge, and ascends into the town by a stiff hill on which the lowest speed-gear and the hardest muscles are useless.

Ghisoni is a particularly well-to-do commune. It possesses a wider extent of commune lands than any other and is therefore the richest commune in the island. When Ghisonaccia gets too hot in summer all those who

can do so come to Ghisoni. It is an excellent sporting centre and is a good deal frequented whilst sportsmen are waiting for the coast land to cool. Trout and *gibier* are excellent and abundant.

The hotel was full when I reached it, but Madame said, as she ushered me into the dining-room, where dinner was already in progress, that she could easily put up another *voyageur*. It was a particularly bright party, consisting of the mayor, the chief of the gendarmes, the village schoolmaster—who smoked a pipe between the courses—two commercial travellers, an inspector of schools, who was doing his rounds *à la bicyclette*—we sympathised with one another about hills and rough roads—a retired sporting colonel from Corté, and a tired tourist from England. The inn was one of the best I came across in the smaller towns of the island. Madame found me an apartment at the house of some of her friends near by, and by them I was treated with every attention. It was rather strange, I thought, that I had to come to the wilds of Corsica to get the largest bedroom I have ever slept in. It would have made an excellent concert-hall. Taking my candle, I went on a tour of exploration and soon discovered my bed. The room, too, was excellently furnished. A huge mirror stood on the mantelshelf and was attached to the wall by a terribly thin-looking wire. It was hung at an alarming angle, and only by sitting on a chair right into the fireplace and tilting backwards till one almost fell over was a position attained in which the mirror could be made use of.

An excellently equipped library kept me out of bed. "Colomba" caught my eye in a gorgeous garb of pink, white, and black, the cover evidently the work of an enthusiastic local amateur bookbinder. A history of the Franco-Prussian War was complete in six volumes, each

weighing about half a hundredweight and embellished with pictures of almost alarming carnage. "Æsop's Fables" were there, with those coloured pictures which in one's unsophisticated days were so exciting. A quaint coloured Bible, too, a series of volumes of a now extinct French magazine, a row of comparatively recent French novels—with pages uncut!—and many other ponderous tomes kept me awake till a cracked bell in a neighbouring steeple told me hoarsely that it was one o'clock.

The climb over the watershed to the slopes along which runs the Ajaccio-Corté road has nothing about it which is noteworthy. The *route nationale* is reached in about four hours, and at the right of the junction, deep in a hollow into which the road twists like the ridges on the side of a whirlpool, is Vivario. I decided, however, to turn southward, leaving Vivario to be visited when I came north again to Corté.

Monte Rotondo and Monte d'Oro tower up to the snows across the valley and the river, and to the south Monte Renoso makes a bold bid to equal them in stately grandeur. The road descends for a little while, and then begins the long, glorious ascent to the Col de Vizzavona, stretching far in front up the tree-clad valley, through which the route cuts its twisting way, throwing off numberless *sentiers* into the woodland maze. It is a delicious walk through the most charming forest in the island. The tall pines mix their stolid majesty with the gay foliage of the beech-trees, while the air is delightfully clear and invigorating.

Near the station of Vizzavona there are two excellent hotels, which are much frequented, chiefly by Ajacciens, though many foreigners are just becoming aware that Vizzavona is a charming *station d'été*.

A long, delightful climb brings the traveller to the



FOREST OF VIZZAVONA,

To face p. 136.]

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height, and unrolled before him is a vast extent of Corsica lying at his feet like a map. Ridge after ridge, the wooded swelling country spreads as far as the eye can reach, and there is to be seen the chestnut forest hiding Bocognano and the upper reaches of the Gravone, the river which we left as it skirted the Campo dell' Oro near Ajaccio. For eight or nine kilometres the road falls abruptly, and I swept quickly along it to Bocognano, bandit-land, and bed!

CHAPTER VI

IN THE HOME OF THE KING OF BANDITS

“Schiopetto, stiletto, strada.” *

“There are two presents to be made to an enemy—hot shot or cold steel.”

CORSICAN SAYINGS.

DURING long ages of disorder, of war, and of oppression, the Corsican was bred in an atmosphere of vengeance. In his earliest years he was lulled to sleep by a woman's song of revenge; the stories of his country to which he listened were stories of vendetta born of wrong and dying in outlawry; he saw mothers and sisters preserving the bloodstained garments of the slain and the bullets that struck them down to act as incentives to those whose duty it would be to carry on the dread drama. He was accustomed to hear sombre songs of vengeance sung over the bodies of the victims of vendetta by young girls. Vendetta, in fact, was grafted on the Corsican's being, and the result has been that this little island, so peaceful to-day, looks back on a blood-red past. This terrible state of affairs is traced back to the time when Genoa sought to impose her authority on the islanders by methods of unheard-of barbarism, when justice was a mockery and murder a

“Rifle, dagger, or flight.”

part of law-making and administration. As I have said in a later chapter,[†] before Corsica was opened up by roads and rail each little *piève* was a tiny world apart, and it will easily be seen that the administration of such a cluster of would-be independent communities was regarded by the governed as a personal matter. In addition, the history of the relations of the *pièves* with one another was but the story of the warring world of that time in miniature. Their land of high mountains and deep valleys afforded the Corsicans ample means of defying what they disliked and of striking with a force which, had Nature not been their ally, would have been impossible. Circumstances in a violent age compelled the islander to take the law into his own hands, to rise now against the invader of his homeland, now against an aggressive neighbour who was encroaching on his land.

Out of this fierce spirit, then, was vendetta born, and it has left its tale, a livid streak, on the pages which hold the story of Corsica till the nineteenth century had more than half spent its course. The Corsican bandits were the creatures of this spirit. For generations they roamed the *maquis* in hundreds, evading the hand of the law or pursuing their deadly purpose to its end. Though there can be no gainsaying that banditism had flourished to a greater extent in the island than in any other part of the Continent, the Corsican bandit has been, I think, on the whole, a badly libelled, much maligned individual. The fact is that he has suffered in reputation by being compared with quite a different species of outlaw—the brigand of Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and the Balkans. In these countries brigandage was, and is, as far as it exists at present, a matter, first and foremost, of plunder and robbery; personal revenge was a secondary considera-

[†] Chapter XIII

tion. With the Corsican, on the other hand, personal vengeance was always the reason of his outlawry. He seldom, if ever, "disgraced" himself—the word is that which a Corsican would use—by resorting to common robbery, and a stranger would have been as safe in a *biève* of outlaws as his money in the Bank of England.

The Corsican's nature was fertile ground in which to sow vendetta, for he possesses a fierce love of country and an intense love of family. He is still the most fiery of patriots, and perhaps in no other land are the power and influence of family ties so strong. The long wars which tended to deprive Corsica of collective power as a state strengthened the bonds of family life, and each family or group of families was thus driven to look after itself. Now, though vendetta is almost dead, though bandits are few and far between, though the *pièves* are at peace, this love of family is a deeply planted religion in the soul of the Corsican. The names of brother and sister still remain the highest terms of endearment, and it is quite a common thing to hear a wife call her husband "brother." Family honour and family right, the Corsican has always believed, must be protected at all costs, and if he has spilt blood on that account he has ever been ready to die for the same cause. Thus the terrible vendetta and its sequel of banditism have had a common fount in the most sacred of human feelings, their duration in a condition of affairs of which the Corsican was the victim and not the cause. The dawn of the twentieth century finds the lovely island peaceful and almost banditless, and never again likely to have to fight for its freedom, and it must be admitted that only a race of the highest courage and the greatest virility could have come through a terrible double ordeal of blood and fire.

But vendetta has left a terrible page in Corsica's story. It is estimated that during the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries no fewer than 750,000 dead and wounded were the victims of personal quarrels. There are two kinds of vendetta. In one case a man may cherish ill-feeling against another and kill him. The former then is compelled to take to the *maquis*—"he has taken to the *maquis*" means that a person has become a bandit—to avoid the arm of the law or the reprisals of the dead man's relatives or friends. In the wilds he lives a roving life; provisions will be supplied to him by friends; often under the cover of dark he will seek shelter at a friendly fireside.

But more terrible was the *vendetta transversale*. The act of vengeance in this case involved the whole of the family on either side. Even the doctor who attended the wounded of one of the warring parties would find the vendetta extended to him and all his relations. If the other side consulted a lawyer, vengeance would encircle another family. The houses of the belligerents were fortified; their farms would run to waste and their flocks run wild. No one might tend the latter or look after the lands who was not prepared to join in the fray. The very children caught the spirit of revenge. The combatants could not stir beyond their thresholds without infinite care, or go any distance without being armed to the teeth and in considerable numbers. Even to-day, when one looks at the larger houses which date back to vendetta times, it is seen that they were built to withstand attacks of an enemy and to do duty as a fort. A *vendetta transversale* would often last for a couple of years. The roll of death slowly but gradually rose till both sides got tired of the long struggle and the law, which dared not have interfered before, came weakly into its own.

A treaty of peace would generally end the little war, a treaty drawn up with all legal formality, and its conclusion would generally be the occasion for great rejoicing.

These treaties were mostly signed in church, with the bells ringing and the neighbourhood *en fête*. I was able to procure a copy of one of these treaties which put an end to a two years' *vendetta transversale* near Porto Vecchio. The document read as follows:—

The undersigned, wishing to put an end to the bloody enmity existing between them, having a sincere desire to come to an honourable and lasting peace, and wishing, after their terrible experience, to give to all an example of humanity and self-abnegation, bind themselves on their honour, before God and man, to fulfil faithfully the following conditions:—

- I.—All hostility between the two parties will cease as from to-day, and they engage on oath to respect honourably the terms of peace.
- II.—The members of both parties will surrender to the authorities on the same day and at the same hour.
- III.—Each party, whilst allowing justice to take its proper course, reserves to itself the right to defend its cause by all legal means, and engages to respect loyally the decisions of justice.

The undersigned hereby declare that these terms have been drawn up in the presence and with the aid of M. —, deputy, M. —, deputy, and M. —, advocate, who append their signatures to this act in order to give it a higher moral and legal authority, and whose generous efforts, combined with those of M. —, *préfet*, have led to this much desired reconciliation.

(Signed)

(Here follow the names of the representatives of the two parties.)

The persons who will be required to surrender to the authorities are, on the one side, —, — and —, and on the other side, —, — and —.

Given at —, this — day of — 18—.

(Signed)

—, Deputy.
 —, Deputy.
 —, Advocate.

In some districts of the island vendetta was long recognised by law, as, for example, in one of the southern

communes, where, until a few years ago, two by-laws were as follows :—

- I.—The carrying of arms is forbidden in the commune.
- II.—Exception is made in favour of those “in a state of enmity.”

Though the law, of course, endeavoured to deal as strongly as possible with bandits—those guilty of having yielded to the spirit of vendetta as well as those who “took to the *maquis*” for other reasons—the law was never very successfully administered in Corsica, and even to-day is very lax in many parts. Continental culture, however, succeeded where the arm of the law failed, and has made the bandit practically a figure of the past and has put vendetta in chains. An excellent example of the spread of more modern ideas is given in Prosper Mérimée’s “Colomba”—the “Odyssey” and the “Iliad” of the Corsicans—in which the fiery, attractive heroine’s brother, though his sister prompts him by all means possible to avenge their father’s death, is prevented from doing so, wilfully at least, by the state of mind which Continental education has bred in him.

In half a century this spread of culture has reduced the number of bandits from five or six hundred to very few indeed. To-day the Corsican will tell you that there are none, but what the gendarmerie state is really the case. The number can, indeed, almost be counted on the fingers. Round Sartène and Porto Vecchio, the wildest parts of the island, there are about half a dozen outlaws, while there are probably about an equal number in the rest of the country, roaming about, most of them, with only the consequences of petty misdemeanours hanging over their heads. The motives which drive a Corsican into the *maquis* are often of the most trivial description, and whilst he is an outlaw he is not a person whom any one

can regard as dangerous, save those who try to bring him to book for his wrongdoing.

The stranger in the land has certainly nothing to fear even though he met all the bandits in the island face to face in the loneliest part of the country. Whilst travelling in wildest Corsica, alone and with no means of defending myself, I often thought how easy it would have been for any Corsican with a thieving inclination to have made short work of me—and if he had succeeded the proceeds of the encounter would have kept him in idleness for a year or so. But no. Hospitality to the stranger is written large in the Corsican's code of honour. The visitor is everywhere received with the utmost hospitality, almost embarrassing because it is so frequent, and it is, of course, quite impossible to repay it in the slightest degree. In many a humble home I was assured—needlessly in my case—that while I was under a Corsican roof I was as safe as when at home.

“You are one of us,” I would be told, “and, in case of attack or insult, we would be compelled to defend you to the utmost.”

The Corsican assures you of this because he thinks that foreigners are convinced—and he has some reason for his belief—that Corsica is a very dangerous spot to visit.

It is wrong, too, to suppose that every one who ever “took to the *maquis*” can be described as a bad character. Often when a person is only faintly suspected of a misdemeanour he exiles himself from society rather than run the risk of being mistried. This is practically the only kind of bandit—if bandit he can really be called—in the island at the present moment. At Porto Vecchio I heard of one who was suspected of a theft of fifty francs, and whose fear of being wrongly condemned kept him in the *maquis*. His father, to whom I spoke,

said his son would remain an outlaw until the real thief was brought to book. The old man smiled significantly when I asked him how often his son slept at the "Belle Étoile," and I concluded, rightly enough I think, that this outlaw slept in a bed quite as often as in the *maquis*. The prospect of a small fine or a few weeks in prison is too grim for the islander to contemplate without the greatest repugnance. He goes quietly to the *maquis*, keeps out of the way of the gendarmes, and never commits any crime.

The loose administration of the law is even to-day a great blot on French rule. I had a good example of this slackness—to put it mildly—told me while staying at Ponto Nuovo. A young man had dangerously wounded a neighbour on account of a slight personal quarrel and had taken to the *maquis*. His family and many neighbourly sympathisers saw to it that whilst outlawed he had all he wanted. Then they entered into negotiations with the legal authorities, did everything they could to arrange for a friendly jury and favourable witnesses, and were so successful that when the young man surrendered he was tried and acquitted.

Vendetta during "the good old days" was sleepless and untiring. Near Propriano a house was pointed out to me where a man, who had killed a neighbour in a quarrel, barricaded himself for nine years, never as much as leaving his dwelling. One dark night he went out stealthily to visit an uncle who was on the point of death, but he had not gone five hundred yards from his dwelling when his enemy's bullet pierced his brain. At Bonifacio a Corsican told me a story of a relative of his who had been involved in a vendetta. After killing one man and wounding another, he fled to Sardinia and did not return for thirteen years. When he came back his friends could scarcely recognise him, but though he had

changed his name and occupation, less than a week after his return he was found with the avenging bullet in his heart.

Perhaps the most famous of Corsican outlaws were the brothers Bonelli, known as the Bellacoscia. One of them was certainly not the most exemplary or typical specimen of his kind, but the extraordinary exploits of the pair—which read more like romantic fiction than sober fact—gave them almost a world-wide repute and a big place in the story of the “Scented Isle.”

Their deeds are associated with one of the most pleasant districts in Corsica—Bocognano and its neighbourhood—to which the end of the previous chapter brought us. Bocognano is a lovely cluster of hamlets lying between Ajaccio and Corté. It boasts some sixteen hundred inhabitants and, situated in a district which is not very fertile, it derives the bulk of what little wealth it requires from the fact that it is a favourite resort for Ajacciens during the heat of the summer. It is certainly ideally situated for the purposes of a *station d'été* in a charming, cool chestnut forest by the murmuring Bronco, near to where it pours its gently rippling waters into the Gravone. The chestnuts from the forests provide food for huge herds of pigs, which wander everywhere, proudly presumptuous in that, in this other green isle, they are the “gentlemin who pay the rint.” The Bonaparte family were in the habit of passing the summer here, and here it was, too, that on May 4, 1793, Napoleon himself was arrested. He was at that time a captain of artillery, and Paoli had just raised the standard of revolt in the island against the Convention. Napoleon was shut up in a house, but was rescued in the evening by some of his friends, and he fled to Ajaccio.

A tiny but well-conducted and comfortable hotel



ANTOINE BONELLI, KING OF THE BANDITS.



JACQUES BONELLI'S HOUSE, PENTICA.

makes Bocognano a delightful place for a long halt, and one day, when the village lay sweltering under a fierce noonday sun, when there was not a breath of air in motion, my sturdy guide, Charles Manenti, and I tramped down the Ajaccio road on our way to the valley of the Penticca, for so long the home of *le roi des bandits corses*. About a mile from the village we left the road, crossed the Bronco, and struck across country, over the Gravone and then up the valley. Over rocks and through the *maquis* we pushed our way. The road by the side of the pretty little Penticca is little frequented and rough. Crossing the stream as it flows delightfully cool and clear from the green uplands, the ascent becomes rougher and more fatiguing. My guide, however, had a fund of anecdote and humour, and time passed quickly, so that when we reached the bandits' home I could scarcely believe that we had been struggling away for two solid hours.

We came upon Penticca suddenly—three houses standing almost at the head of the valley, looking downwards to where the Gravone glitters, a faint, elusive streak of silver, on the distant horizon of a little world of green. What an ideal outlaws' domain! Why, the place was surely made to be a bandits' home! No wonder the Bellacoscia lived in security for such a long time in this retreat. Approach to it is only possible by laborious paths in one direction, up which no one can come without being seen.

The houses are those in which there lived the two famous Corsican brothers, Antoine and Jacques Bonelli, and an outlaw named Peccuroni who joined hands with them. The houses are rudely built and not very large, and were evidently, at the time the outlaws flourished, surrounded by extensive kitchen gardens. Only one house is now inhabited, the largest, that of Jacques. Here

an old woman lives, wringing a scanty livelihood from a half-tended garden, making and selling excellent *broccia* and keeping a few pigs which live literally in clover, which overruns the pastures. By her door is a spring of ice-cold, crystal-clear water, the best in the district, she says—*l'eau de la montagne*. She is a pleasant old lady, but it took me a long time to persuade her to come to the doorstep to be included in the photograph of the house. By the well is a huge outdoor oven—a common sight in Corsica—in which the bandits baked their hard-earned bread.

Here it was then that the famous Antoine Bonelli held out against the authorities for nearly half a century, within half a score of miles of a brigade of gendarmes at Bocognano. Antoine and Jacques were the natural sons of a Corsican whose descendants form the majority of the people of Bocognano even to-day. It is only to be expected that a maze of stories more or less true should have gathered round them; one person will tell the inquirer that the murders which the pair committed numbered only two or three; another knows positively that they total not less than one hundred. The following sketch of their life-story, however, was one I obtained from a granddaughter of Antoine, and I verified each particular in a number of quarters and from a host of local authorities, so that I set it forth as the plain and unadorned tale of the famous outlaws.

Antoine was born in 1817, and until he was thirty-one he led a comparatively quiet peasant's life. At that time his relations with the mayor of Bocognano became decidedly strained. Years before, the future bandit wished to avoid military training and the mayor had refused to grant him a false certificate stating that Bonelli had already a brother in the army, and making it thus unnecessary for Antoine to join the colours.

This might have been forgotten and forgiven, but when he was thirty-one Antoine declared that he wished to marry one of the mayor's sisters. The mayor refused to permit the wedding. To add fuel to the fire, the worthy dignitary, who was much too active and enterprising to be a Corsican mayor, attempted to exact a payment for the occupation of the land which Antoine's father had seized at Penticca and which his sons still held. The Bonellis resisted the tax and in the end the mayor endeavoured to seize the lands. This was the last of his official acts, for Antoine and his brother Martin assassinated him.

Meanwhile Antoine had transferred his affections to the daughter of M. Casati, a wealthy Corsican living at Scanafighiaccia, between Penticca and Vico. His crime of killing the mayor had, of course, compelled him to take to the *maquis*, but this, in his opinion, was no reason why the course of true love should run with anything but smoothness. He persisted in his demands for the lady's hand, but the father obstinately refused to consider the requests, which gradually grew more and more menacing in their diction. At last Antoine decided to bring matters to a head. With three companions he went one night to Casati's house and demanded there and then the hand of his daughter, Jeanne. The young lady herself refused, and the bandits succeeded in carrying off her father, who was placed in confinement in one of the numerous caves in the Penticca valley.

Jeanne's *fiancé*, a young man named Marcangeli, and two of his friends armed themselves and set off to endeavour to rescue Casati. The bandits, however, got wind of their plans, and the members of the relief expedition were soon captured and shut up with the first prisoner. Eventually they were released on the condition that Casati should give his daughter to Antoine and

that Marcangeli should renounce all claim to her hand. When, however, they returned to Scanafaghiaccia, which is a good distance from Penticca, they failed to carry out their agreement. Marcangeli married Jeanne, and about a month later he was killed by Antoine, being assisted in this affair by his brother Jacques, who then became an outlaw.

The love affairs of Antoine's sister, Isabeau, were the cause of the next crime. The brothers caused it to be known that Isabeau was going to marry a certain young man, who had been informed by them that he must carry out their order, which was immediate marriage with the young lady. Two uncles of the young man objected and the Bonellis decided that they must be got rid of. They prepared an ambush for the two unsuspecting uncles, who came past the spot accompanied by another man, named Vizzavona. In the hail of bullets with which they were greeted the two uncles managed to escape, but Vizzavona was killed.

By this time the bandits' stronghold at Penticca had been thoroughly established and the long struggle between the outlaws and the gendarmes at Bocognano was in full swing. The bandits were, however, too well informed to be taken by surprise. On one occasion—in 1856—a shepherd was persuaded to betray them, and he led the gendarmes by a devious route, but the Bonellis knew all about it long before the expedition started. They let the troop approach, then a shot rang out and the shepherd fell dead. A withering volley played havoc amongst the gendarmes, and all of them who could turned tail and fled.

On five occasions the Bonellis had battles with the gendarmes, and in one of these Jacques received a severe wound in the hand. Later, Antoine was wounded in the leg, and was only saved from capture by his knowledge

of a secret cavern, to which entrance was obtained by climbing up a tree and going along one of its branches, which brought the covered entrance within reach. The secret of that hiding-place, of which he often spoke in more peaceful after-days, is one which Antoine took to his grave with him. The gendarmes fared badly in all the fights, and at least sixty were killed and wounded in the encounters in the Penticca valley. A strong force of gendarmes at one time seized the outlaws' settlement and held it for five months, but its inhabitants merely retired up the mountain slopes and looked down on their little village until the gendarmes got tired of waiting and went away.

The story is told, as an illustration of how well the bandits were kept informed, that in 1886 the Minister of War in Paris authorised an expedition of one hundred and twenty men against Penticca, but the bandits had full information regarding the matter a week before the Corsican authorities knew anything about it. The Bonelli and their dependents calmly took refuge with a neighbouring friendly mayor, in whose house they were safe, until the storm passed. The least movement of troops or police was instantly communicated to the bandits, and all news arriving by diligence at night was flashed up the valley by means of a code of lights.

At the height of the power of the *roi des bandits* no fewer than thirty persons lived at Penticca. Antoine was always respected by the people in the neighbourhood, for he remained poor and refused to make use of his unique position in order to amass wealth. He is said to have been of kindly disposition though gruff and commanding in appearance, a bearded, typical Corsican. He was tall, agile, and muscular, a giant with a giant's strength, and those who remember him as he lived the last years of his life quietly at Bocognano talk of him as a quiet, unob-

trusive old fellow, with little to say, and who could but seldom be persuaded to tell stories of his bandit days.

Jacques, on the other hand, was cordially hated. In addition to being a bandit he was a robber on a large scale. The Corsican hates no one so intensely as he hates a thief. Jacques seized a large tract of land, used it for his own purposes, drew revenue from it, and imposed taxes on those who lived on it. At the point of his gun he extracted toll from his neighbours, and public works could not be carried on in the district until a percentage of the total expenditure had been paid to him. He bought a large extent of land round Bocognano and his herds were the largest in Corsica. He kept a number of workmen and servants. It was quite a common thing for him to imprison people at Penticia and hold them to ransom.

Both outlaws were condemned to death four times as well as to various terms of imprisonment, but the judges soon got tired of trying the outlaws in their absence and many of their acts passed unnoticed by the law. On one occasion, for some misdemeanour, the flocks at Penticia were seized and sold by the authorities, but a day or two later the outlaws appeared on the farms of those who had been imprudent enough to buy the cattle and drove them back to the bandits' valley.

Both outlaws had families, Antoine a son and a daughter, and Jacques a son and four daughters. Jacques sent his son to a good school in Ajaccio, but the young man could not be civilised, and a few years after leaving Penticia he was sent to prison for ten years for murder. Jacques' daughters, of course, had large *dots* and "married well."

The two brothers exercised undisputed influence at all elections, taking care that the mayors in the surrounding



AMONG THE SNOWS IN THE FOREST OF VIZZAVONA.

districts were their friends. Penticia, too, in bandit days, received state visits from lordly tourists ; it was one of the places to be " done " and the Bonellis received well-to-do travellers *en prince*. An exchange of presents was looked upon as customary, and the bandits, who were excellent shots, generally gave their visitors ten-franc pieces which they had knocked down at a hundred yards as souvenirs of their visit. Antoine carried a watch given to him by a Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha ; the outlaws defended themselves with guns given to them by English nobles.

Jacques died in 1897 of pneumonia, an outlaw to the last. The fact of his death was concealed from the outside world for months after the event, and it is not known where he is buried. Five years previously Antoine had surrendered and was tried at Bastia Assizes. All the crimes that could be brought against him were *prescrit*, having been committed more than twenty-five years previously, with one exception, and for that he was exiled to the Continent. He went to live at Marseilles, but soon returned and settled down to a peaceful life, first at Ajhione, near Puzichello, and subsequently at Bocognano. His favourite occupation was to act as a guide to those visitors who wished to explore the beautiful country round Vizzavona. At the end of February, 1907, he died an unbrigand-like death from influenza. In the little cemetery between the church at Bocognano and the Ajaccio road, a neglected place with long grass, rough wooden crosses here and there, and a few gaudy wreaths, the King of Corsican bandits sleeps.

CHAPTER VII

IN OLD-WORLD CORTÉ

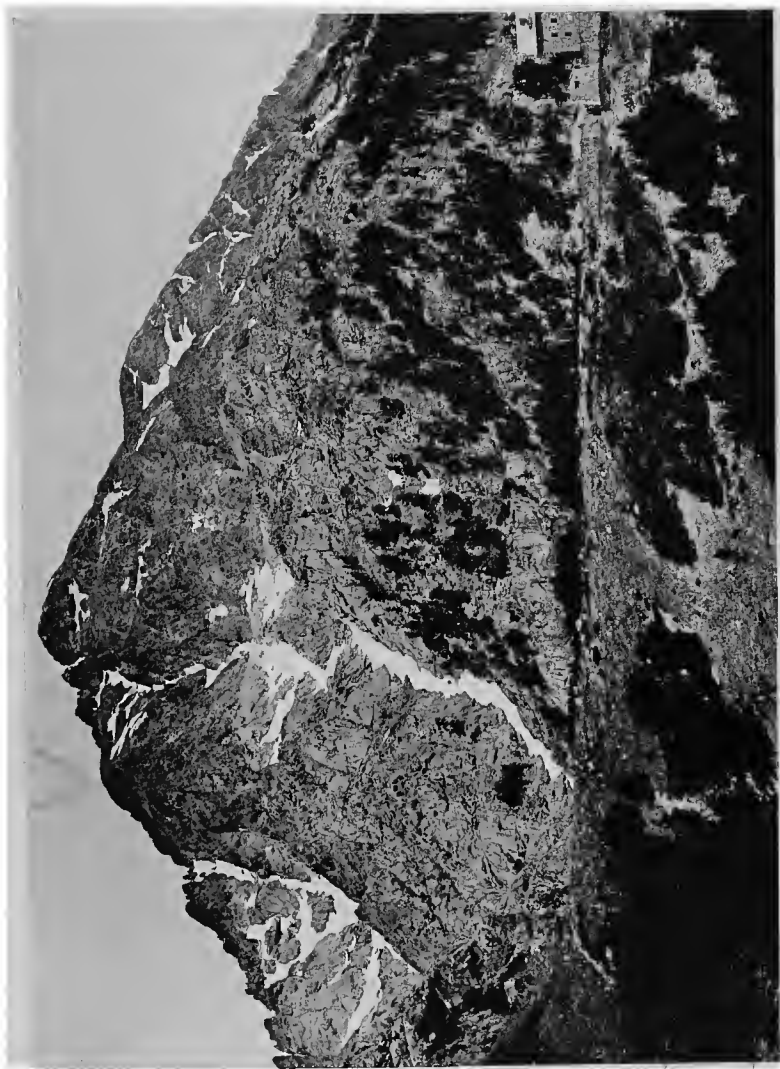
“Corté’s fortress is the Acropolis of Corsica. . . . It has been stormed and defended oftener than Belgrade.”

F. GREGOROVIVS.

FROM Bocognano to Corté, the ancient capital of the island, is a distance of 42 kilometres ; it is a road to saunter over, a road to be lazy on. No other bit of country presents such infinite variety. There is Scotian ruggedness immediately after leaving the village of bandit-land and again between Vivario and Venaco, round Vizzavona forest and peak are Swiss-like, while in the neighbourhood of picturesque Corté itself much of the landscape has a touch of England about it. Pleasant little villages, cool rivers and plenteous shade abound ; south-west stands the snow-clad barrier of Monte Renoso, Monte d’Oro, and Monte Rotondo, and in front a vast, irregular valley looms away into the north.

Where the road from Ghisoni joins the *route nationale*,

“I gain the peak ; and lo, the fertile land
Lies like a chart ; the river wanders wide
In shining loops . . .
From hamlet roofs, embowered deep in wood,
The blue smoke rising hangs.”



MONTE D'ORO.

A herd boy on a donkey points out the landmarks and names them for me, and insists on having his photograph taken, but when I suggest that he should give me his address so that I might send him a print, he says he would not think of giving me such a great deal of trouble! And shaking his patient donkey into slow-paced motion, he disappears Ghisoni-wards.

Down on the right in a huge natural amphitheatre is pretty little Vivario, scattered oddly on the sides of this huge bowl with well-cultivated little gardens, curiously propped up by walls and banks of earth, through which a network of tiny streams carries its life-giving flood from the mountain-side. These gardens must take an infinite deal of looking after, and it seems to me that where Nature has imposed the greatest difficulties on the cultivator, there the Corsican has his greatest triumphs.

Everywhere here the vine flourishes. Down, down goes the road, through a perfect panorama of natural beauty, twisting in such a manner that it becomes painful to hold the cycle brakes continually. The little town, where I found a comfortable inn—boasts slightly over a thousand inhabitants, and when Bocognano is full, Vivario does good business with those whose affairs do not keep them in Ajaccio through all the blaze of summer. There is a large number of picturesque villas which make Vivario even a more pleasant *station d'été* than Bocognano; in fact, the town is specially well built, and has not that semi-ruined appearance which in other places is an evidence of the Corsican's indulgence in the art of jerry-building. On the Place—I cannot recall its name, if it has one—is a fountain surmounted by a particularly fine statue of Diana, a work of art of which the people are extremely proud. The little church, too, will draw the visitor from the road to look at that

curious *pierre funéraire* beneath which an avenger lies buried, and on which is the inscription :—

“ Maledictus qui percussit
clam proximum suum, et dicat omnis
populus Amen.”^{*}

This anti-*vendetta* commandment is stated to have been placed there as a result of the revulsion of feeling caused by a *vendetta transversale* which occurred during the seventeenth century, a revulsion which took hold of the minds of the people to a great extent on account of the fact that the spirit of *vendetta* had scarcely ever been known in the town, and since that date Corsica's curse has been practically unknown in this part of the valley.

The full name of Vivario is Gatti di Vivario, which gives the Frenchman who knows a little Italian the opportunity to make a most ponderous joke. He will inform you that *gatti* is the Italian for “cats” and that it is added to the name of the town because the people come there in *mi-août!*

Another thing of which Vivario is proud is the fact that it is the birthplace of one of the Popes—Pope Formosus—who first saw the light of day in 816, and who held the “Saint Siège” from 891 to 896. Formosus had in him the real pugnacious spirit of the Vivarians. I have said that it is a fact that his Holiness was born in the town—because the townspeople say it is. I was told that the actual hamlet in which he was born was Perrello, but I could find no one who could trust himself to go into details of street and house. His successor at the Vatican, who had quarrelled with the appointment of Formosus, had the body of his predecessor disinterred, dressed in

^{*} “Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly, and let all the people say Amen” (Deut. xxvii. 24).



SCENE NEAR VENACO.

full state, tried, condemned, mutilated, and thrown into the Tiber. The remains, however, are said to have been found by some fishermen, who buried the body at the dead of night in the basilica of St. Peter's, where the grave is still to be seen. The wrong done to the memory of Formosus was soon redressed by a ceremony of rehabilitation performed by Pope John IX. in 898.

Another interesting little place before reaching Corté is Venaco, or, to give it its full title, Serraggio di Venaco, for there are no fewer than three other Venacos almost within sight—Lugo di Venaco, Santo Pietro di Venaco and Poggio di Venaco. From Vivario to Venaco the scenery is rugged and grand, and, as I wheeled slowly along one evening in the gathering twilight, I could see far up the spacious valley sweeping away towards Corté. Ravine and river, mountain and valley are scattered in picturesque profusion; the road, an excellent one, zig-zags round sharp corners and down steep hillsides. Near at hand the railway, indulging in wide sweeps, runs over viaducts and through tunnels. Particularly fine is the view to be had from the Pont du Vecchio down the savage valley of Verghello.

Venaco is another little *station d'été*. It lacks Vivario's symmetry, having a bewildering irregularity all its own. Some of the houses look as though they had been thrown on the top of fantastically shaped rocks, and have an appearance as though they were about to obey the long-defied law of gravity. The tiny *auberge* has a rushing river on two sides, while *la place*, shaded, as the whole of the little town is, by lovely chestnut-trees, is cut in two by a little stream which rushes from a curious grotto with a gurgle and splutter, and trickles down over a rough channel behind the houses forming one side of the main street.

The four Venacos stand in a lovely region of hill and

dale, robed in forest. As I approached the little place towards sundown I thought that it would be difficult to surpass in beauty a sunset amongst the Venaccian hills when the sun is throwing its shafts of gold over all the far-spread forest target. Round Lugo di Venaco the land is particularly well cultivated, and near Santo Pietro di Venaco is a *château* of the famous Pozzo di Borgo family (see Chapter XIII.) with lovely grounds looking towards Vizzavona and the valleys of the Tavignano and the Vecchio.

The morning after my arrival at Venaco I was early on the road, and just outside the town I was hailed by the *Général commandant* of the military in the district, who was taking an early morning constitutional on the terrace of his beautiful *château*, perched high above the road. We chatted for some time, and he laughed when I told him I was "cycling" through Corsica. He called his wife to "come and see the Englishman who was doing Corsica à la bicyclette." But Madame was gracious enough to say that it was a *bonne idée*, and filled a large bag of delicious oranges for me while the General wrote a letter of introduction to a relative of his in Corté.

At a little place called Casanova I left my bicycle in order to visit Poggio di Venaco, reached after a short ramble by a riverside road. At the inn the previous night a talkative Corsican had told me how to reach the place, connected with one of the little tragic narratives of the past of which there are so many to be heard as one wanders in Corsica.

During the twelfth century there lived at Poggio di Venaco Arrigo Colonna, Count of Corsica, who dwells in the native memory as Arrigo bel Messere. Throughout the whole of the island he was beloved, and received his popular name on account of his fascinating manners and handsome bearing.

His wife was an exceptionally beautiful woman, and the lordly pair had seven children. A dispute arose between the Count of Cinarca, one of the ancient *pièves* of the island and one of its richest regions, and the lords of Tralaveto, regarding the possession of the castles of Cauro and Tralaveto. The quarrel, however, had really been brought about by the Tralavetan lords in order to draw into it the Count of Corsica, against whom they harboured a fierce ill-will. They adroitly arranged that Arrigo should act as arbitrator in the dispute, so that, as a judgment against them was a foregone conclusion, they would have a plausible reason to attack the overlord. Everything turned out as the conspirators wished. Eventually a Tralavetan band waylaid the Count and assassinated him, seizing his seven children and drowning them in a lake. The Countess Arrigo, with a host of retainers, marched against the Castle of Tralaveto, and, assisted by the Count of Cinarca, took it and put everyone within it to the sword. Plague followed the slaughter, and the other figures in the drama fell victims to it. The Castle of Poggio di Venaco was deserted and fell into ruins. And for many long years, so it is said, the ghosts of the handsome Arrigo and his wife and of the seven children roamed the hills round Venaco.

Still in the mouths of the people the couplet lives :—

“ E morto il Conte Arrigo bel Messere,
E Corsica ve andra di mal in peggio.”¹

Corté, to my mind, is the most interesting town in Corsica—and it is quite the dirtiest. It is a little city of dreams, with no spacious new squares and broad, shop-girl boulevards where reveries are out of place. Corté still stands whole from the past ; no modern veneer has

¹ “ The Count Arrigo bel Messere is dead ;
Corsica, you will go from bad to worse.”

been spread over it ; its old, grizzled, war-worn countenance is still to be seen, "warts and all." In other towns the old stands out prominently amongst the new ; in Corté it is the new that startles. Even on the Corso, the only street of any size in the town, one sees but the meagre advance guard of modernity—a photographer, an up-to-date chemist, a *chic* milliner. But the old merchant, who has dozed the years away, still waits for the stiletto-buyer, who never comes now, and the peasant in want of a water gourd, who seldom appears. The age-old shops which served many a bygone generation are good enough to-day. Women still go to the fountain in the Corso to get water, a custom born in years out of mind. Though the railway brings the journals of Ajaccio and Bastia, the people have not got out of the habit of clustering round the dusty diligence to hear the news. The passer-by has still time to escort the stranger who asks the way to his destination.

The town stands at the junction of those two charming rivers, the Tavignano and the Restonica. It was founded as far back as 713 by the Moors, was used as a summer retreat for Saracen kings, and its history has been war. No place in the island and few places in Europe have known so much of man's armed strife. The lofty, proud old citadel, lifting itself grotesquely into the air, has the story of four warlike centuries to tell ; the surrounding gorges and mountains protected some of the last hardy fighters for freedom ; down the Corso the cry of "Corse nationale" was heard for the last time in any of the streets of the island's towns. As far back as the eleventh century the Genoese were to be found in the town. The famous island hero, Vincentello d'Istria, stormed the fort in 1419, after having cut the Genoese army to pieces near Morosaglia, and it was he who built on the rugged, precipitous rock the citadel which still stands.



CORTÉ FROM THE RESTONICA RIVER.

In the previous chapter I got as far in Corsican history as to the departure of the French in September, 1741, and in Corté the thread of the story can be taken up. The island was in a parlous condition, and for a time Genoa was constrained to be merciful. Spinola, the Governor, received orders to grant the islanders all reasonable requests, so he issued a general pardon and ordered that taxes should only be paid in December. Suddenly, however, he changed his policy, replacing the civil tax-gatherers by soldiers and sending the military round on their mission of extortion in November. Everywhere the people fled before the soldiers, and rebellion was about to break out when Spinola died. His successor, Giustiniani brought about reconciliation and allowed the people to elect an advisory commission of three, one of whom was Gaffori, one of the great heroes of Corsica whose name is intimately associated with Corté.

Meanwhile, on the Continent strife was the order of the day. The war started by the Elector of Bavaria for the succession to the throne of the Empire was running its dread course. Marie Thérèse had concluded, in 1743, an alliance with Charles Emmanuel III., King of Sardinia, by means of the cession of the marquisate of Finale, which Charles VI. had sold to the Genoese in 1713. The republicans were determined not to give up the marquisate, and allied themselves by treaty with France, Spain, and Naples. While Europe was thus engaged, a Corsican count, Domenico Rivarola, considered the time opportune for striking a blow in favour of King Theodore. Rivarola had commanded a Corsican regiment in the service of Piedmont, and he thought that his action would be a stroke for that gallant little land as well as for Corsica, to both of which Genoa was a hereditary foe. He approached the King of Sardinia as

well as the Court of St. James's, finding both favourable to his enterprise. He published a pompous edict, the literary bombast of Theodore, who issued many high-flown, wordy proclamations and pamphlets, evidently being infectious, and in it he promised the Corsicans a host of good things. He went to the island with the English Admiral Tounshend, and Bastia and St. Florent fell into his hands. Meanwhile Marie Thérèse counselled the Corsicans to resist the aggression of Rivarola and the English, and "covered" the islanders with "her high protection." A tempest scattered the English fleet, and the Count was thrown back on his own resources. He managed to hold the two captured places, but an advance into the interior was impossible, owing to the smallness of his forces and the enmity of the now powerful Gaffori and Matra, Gaffori's brother-in-law.

Genoa's attention being a good deal taken up with other matters, Gaffori resolved to strike for Corsica, as Rivarola's connection with Theodore kept the Corsican leader from the side of the presumptuous Count. Gaffori laid siege to Corté, and the Genoese commander, seeing that the fort was sure to fall before the cannon of the islanders, made a sortie, seized Gaffori's son and bound him to the wall of the fort, so that if the besiegers fired the lad would most likely be killed. For a moment Gaffori blanched as he saw the vile Genoese stratagem, then with firm voice he shouted to the artillery, "Fire!" A breach was made, the Corsicans rushed in, captured the citadel, and rescued Gaffori's son uninjured.

All Corsica now rose in arms and declared the island independent. The commission of three, Gaffori, Matra, and Venturini, became "protectors," and Genoa soon found her fortresses war-ringed once more. She appealed to France for aid and the French Marquis de Cursay landed at Bastia with nineteen hundred French-

men and Spaniards. Rivarola, having previously lost St. Florent and Bastia, departed to the Continent, the hope of all help from the King of Sardinia having vanished with the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Cursay, an able administrator, persuaded the Corsicans first to agree to an armistice and finally to accept the mediation of France in their dispute with the Republic. Cursay filled a difficult position well for some time, during which France permitted him to give the Corsicans liberties greater than they had hitherto enjoyed. The Marquis, too, caused art and science to flourish, and founded an educational academy at Bastia. But Cursay's methods were not Genoa's "way of doing business." The Marquis, by his liberal measures, soon drew upon himself the enmity of the Republic; intrigues were set in motion against him, assassins were let loose around him, and on one occasion Gaffori had great difficulty in saving him from a mob of Genoese at Ajaccio. In the end France was prevailed upon to recall Cursay, and his enemies were strong enough to have him thrown into prison.

To see the Governor she had learned to admire treated thus brought all Corsica once more to arms. Gaffori was appointed "protector" of the nation, and in the fierce fighting which followed against the Republic he earned for himself the title of "the terror of the Genoese." Everywhere successful, he drove them from pillar to post, till at last the invaders had recourse to the dastardly plan by which they got rid of Sampiero. Gaffori had enemies—every Corsican has—and these the Genoese bought over. Amongst them was a family named Romei and also Gaffori's own brother, Antoine François. These men ambushed the famous warrior and assassinated him on October 3, 1753. The whole island shuddered at this ghastly deed and looked with anger at the terrible picture

of her fallen patriot. The brother murderer was seized and he died on the rack, while the house of the Romei was razed to the ground, for years remaining a charred and blackened ruin with a nation's curse upon it.

But Corsica did not abandon hope. If one patriot had gone, another stood ready to take his place. In the background of a tragic picture stood the pathetic figure of a young man—Pasquale Paoli—soon to be not only the island's greatest hero, but one of Europe's finest patriots.

Gaffori's house still stands in Corté "with all its wounds in front." It is to be seen in the *haute ville*, facing the Church of Sainte Croix, and in front of it stands a fine statue in bronze of the patriot erected in 1901. The dwelling, a four-storied one, is still inhabited and still carries the scars of war. The marks of Genoese cannon balls are plainly visible, and, as though the house had not had enough of war, a little shop in it still drives a good trade in gunpowder. On one occasion in this house—in 1750—Madame Gaffori in the absence of her husband was besieged by the Genoese. The defensive force at her command was a small one, and amongst them there were murmurs of discontent, talk of surrender to the enemy. But Gaffori's wife had determined that if the Genoese took the building it would be nothing but a ruined house of the dead. She rolled a barrel of gunpowder into one of the rooms, and, calling the company to her, stood with a flaming torch in her hand and threatened to throw it into the powder and blow up the house and its defenders if any one refused to take an oath to fight to the last. They all did so, and the battle against the besiegers was continued with such energy that they were held in check until Gaffori himself arrived with aid. The episode of the barrel of gunpowder is commemorated on one of the bas-reliefs on the Gaffori



HOUSE AND STATUE OF GAFFORI, CORTÉ.

statue. It was in this house, too, that Napoleon's father and mother lived, and there Joseph Bonaparte, afterwards King of Spain, was born in 1768.

The town still, as of old, clusters round the citadel on the lowest reach of the Pointe de Zurmoto, which is over three thousand feet high. The thoroughfares on one side of the Corso, therefore, rise abruptly, generally in steps, while those on the other slope gently downwards. The finest view of the town is obtained when approaching it from the south. The cluster of high white houses is first seen at a considerable distance, when it suddenly bursts into view across a wide expanse of the valley running northwards.

"How like a part of old Edinburgh!" was what I involuntarily exclaimed as I dismounted to take a photograph, and the closer I got the more exactly did it appear to resemble some old prints I have seen of Scotland's capital. There were high, closely packed old houses, the citadel standing on a precipitous rock, and was that not Arthur's Seat behind?

At the southern extremity of the Corso—which, by the way, is the popular name for the Cours Paoli—is the Place Paoli, buried in the poorer quarter of the town. It is a large circular space graced by a fine statue of the great patriot. Curiously high and curiously low houses, mean and half-built, dingy, poorly furnished and comfortless, form this *quartier* of Corté. Round the statue the children shout at their play, and in the numerous little *buvettes* men are to be seen lounging and drinking; in the little fruit and vegetable market old women do a meagre trade. Some old women, I noticed, with the snows of many a hard winter on their brows and Time deeply stamped on their features, sat knitting while customers came up and picked from the stalls what they wanted. Behind, a steep street of steps leads up to the

haute ville, and on one side of the incline vicious dogs, hungry and lean, cast covetous eyes on the contents of the evil-smelling butchers' shops, which are huddled together there. And the dwellings ! Filth lies in heaps at the doors ; pretty, happy little children play in the dark passages, and families crowd into the small, sombre rooms. The women sit by the doorstep stitching away to the accompaniment of endless gossip. A peasant will come along and barter a couple of cabbages and a small basket of apples for a lump of coarse-looking mutton ; a butcher's wife will seize a piece of beef and in five minutes return with a load of potatoes. Money in this little corner of Corté is scarce and the old custom of barter serves in its place.

I saw an old dame go up to a stall and take a dozen large onions. She paid nothing for them, but, "I will send Mattei down with the chair to-night," she said.

"I want a new chair," said the stallkeeper to me, when I asked her if she did most of her business by means of barter, "and Mattei promised me one if I gave his grandmother some vegetables every day for a week."

It is a curious old-world picture. Repulsive it may be in some aspects, gloomy and saddening it undoubtedly is to the visitor, but amidst the greatest poverty and dismal surroundings there is happiness. There is little, after all, to trouble about, and no one starves. Time only brings its wrinkles ; care and discontent do not seem to write their signs on the brow or cut their ways into human hearts.

Not far off is the Place d'Armes—a sloping space above Gaffori's house, where, overshadowed by the ramparts of the fort, stands the Collège Paoli. Here it was that the great Corsican lived during the time he was "protector"—from 1755 to 1769 ; here is the little study where he worked and the room where he slept.



GENERAL VIEW OF CORTÉ.

Paoli bequeathed to Corté a capital sum, the revenue from which was to be applied to maintaining four chairs in the University which he established in 1764. The University was subsequently turned into what may be called a secondary school, and such it remains to-day, attended by about three hundred pupils. Paoli also caused to be established the first printing press and the first newspaper in the island.

Corté is a lazy place. There is nothing of the bustle of Bastia about it ; not even the mild activity of Ajaccio. Officers and civilians alike begin to drink their *apéritifs* at an hour which would shock the Parisian *boulevardier* ; *déjeuner* and *dîner* seem to be at once the principal occupations and the chief pastimes of the majority of citizens. Only once in the twenty-four hours are things at all lively, and that is after dinner. Then the Corso is a pretty sight. Corté and his wife—charming people they are—stroll about enjoying the deliciously cool atmosphere ; the little tobacco shops do excellent business ; every *café* and every *buvette* is full of merry people whose evident enjoyment would give one the impression that nowhere in the world did people work so hard, and that, in consequence, nowhere was leisure more fully appreciated.

The fact of the matter is that Corté has fallen on evil days. Not so very long ago, when the visitor stood on the citadel, the country that stretched on all sides was one vast vineyard. Up the valleys of the Tavignano and the Restonica the husbandman tended the vine for many a mile. But the dreaded phylloxera invaded the green, glittering fields, and now, alas ! the hillsides run wild ; by the rushing Restonica the husbandmen's cottages have fallen to ruins ; far and wide the vine has vanished. Your Corsican is something of a fatalist ; he looks upon misfortune as largely irreparable, and puny are

the attempts which have been made to restore Corté's prosperity. Here and there the place of the vine has been taken by plots of cereals and by tiny fruit gardens ; now and again one sees the vine in flower in tiny allotments—Corté's blossom of hope—but there is little chance of the town's prosperity returning for many a long, dreary year.

The business in the town is chiefly concerned with olives, olive oil, chestnuts, chestnut flour, cheese, cattle, and vegetables. There are fairly good marble quarries near at hand, and the railway has certainly galvanised a little life into the town. As yet Corté cares but little for the traveller ; he is driven away by the appalling sanitary condition of the place. So much so is this the case that visitors from Ajaccio and Bastia generally arrive by an early train and resume their journey after an interval of a few hours. There are only two hotels in the town, and that in which I stayed was sufficiently modern to make a stay of a few days comfortably possible, as its position in the newer part of the town is excellent. It is certainly a pity to have to hurry away from Corté, with its old-world associations and the magnificent scenery round about it.

A favourite excursion is the ascent of Monte Rotondo by way of the valley of the Restonica, but I found the two valleys too charming to lure me into a new diversion—that of mountaineering. The Tavignano's gorge with its chestnut woods, its series of picturesque ravines and its changing views, the even more beautiful Restonica valley, with Rotondo and Cinto looking into it, and its marvellous pine and oak forests, were quite enough for me without wandering to the snows of Monte Rotondo.

And besides all this, I may add that Corté is famous for a renowned *plat—peveronata*. As I was passing through Paris on my way to Corsica, a Parisian friend and *gourmet* told me to be sure, when in Corté, to



THE CITADEL OF CORTÉ.

demand *peveronata* at dinner, and he supplied me with the name of a restaurant where the *chef* made the dish so excellently that it was worth crossing Europe to taste. *Peveronata* means, literally, "something peppery." "Corsican Curry" it might be called by the alliterative, though in its pristine peppery form it is somewhat of a rarity. *Déjeuner* over one day, I visited the restaurant, and, after chatting to the proprietor for some time, I told him I wanted *peveronata*—the real, original kind of *peveronata*—for dinner that evening. He smiled and said he would tell the *chef*. But I wished to see Monsieur myself and to discover the secret of "something peppery." The proprietor agreed, and so, some time before dinner, I stumbled down into the kitchen, and, introducing myself as the gentleman who wanted "something peppery," I found that the *chef* was just commencing on this famous *pièce de résistance*, and while he worked he told me the story of *peveronata*.

Once upon a time—though this is not a fairy tale—when Corté was ringed round by vineyards, she produced during one season six million gallons of wine too much, and this vast quantity was left in the cellars of the makers. In addition there were left over enormous quantities of grapes in a semi-prepared state. The latter were taken up the valley of the Restonica and thrown into the river. The result was that for some considerable time this mountain stream ran wine; the fishes became intoxicated and floated down on their backs towards Corté, and in this condition they fell an easy prey to the angler. These wine-saturated trout were found to be excellent when cooked, and Corté was just beginning to relish the new dish when the supply ceased. The *chefs* of Corté were, thereupon, required to supply as near a substitute as possible. But the *chefs* in the meantime had been consulted by the merchants who had six million

gallons of wine to dispose of, and a working agreement was entered into.

Then my *chef* rolled up his sleeves and *peveronata* came into being before my eyes. He thoroughly cooked a fine trout in boiling oil, meanwhile preparing a delicious *soupe au vin*, which would have brought light to the eyes and a long discourse from the lips of old Peter the Magician. Setting it on a gentle fire, he placed the trout, well peppered, in it. To the whole he added some more pepper—some chinilas—and pepper—some tomatoes—and pepper—some carefully selected legumes—and pepper—some salt—and pepper—some pepper—and pepper—and pepper. How long the mixture remained on the fire I do not know, presumably until the pepper was sufficiently cooked. It is served with pepper.

As it was handed round at table that evening I saw a number of people look sadly at the waiter, as if to say that they were not yet tired of life, and, from my experience of the famous Corté dish, all I will say is that I do not wonder that the six million gallons of wine soon vanished when the Corté *chefs* put the new *peveronata* on the *menus*. When the wine supply was again adjusted to the demand, *peveronata* disappeared almost entirely. It takes some courage to eat it, but a dish with such a remarkable origin is surely too good never to experience!

Corté is the gateway of a land of inspiring memories—the land of Pasquale Paoli. North-east stretches La Castagniccia, Chestnut Land, a lovely, unspoiled earth-corner, where stands Morosaglia, the Mecca of Corsica. Strange it is to think that backwards across nearly a century and a half Freedom chose this out-of-the-way spot to raise her brightest banner in the breeze and found men ready to gather round it, to fight and die that it might float higher and prouder still—men who for

nobility of mind, singleness of purpose, heroism of deed, and triumph of achievement, though shrouded by the greatness of the years that followed, must ever stand out above Oblivion's darkening pall. Time plays havoc even with the memory of the greatest; the rolling, wave-like generations wash away the records of those whose names once filled the world; the sun sets on all save the highest mountain-tops; but in fairest Corsica great names live still, proud memories are undimmed, heroic achievement is unforgotten and unforgettable.

“Idly clanged the sudden portal,
Idly the sepulchral door.”

Corsica keeps a priceless heritage of deeds enshrined in Morosaglia.

CHAPTER VIII

TO MOROSAGLIA, THE MECCA OF CORSICA

“Omne solum forti patria.”

BETWEEN Corté and Ponte Leccia there is much to attract the attention of the leisured traveller. The road is an excellent one, girt on either side by a long panorama of natural beauties. The hillsides are well cultivated, and little towns and villages are ensconced in the well-tilled countryside. Soveria, the birthplace of General Cervoni, whose relations with Paoli are mentioned in this chapter, is on the left; Omessa is on the right, and in its church some remarkable religious pictures are to be seen, one, a Madonna and Child, having a frame encrusted with gems. The scenery here does not, as in many places in Corsica, suddenly blaze out into a fire of beauty; it preserves an even charm all the way. At about half the distance to Ponte Leccia the Golo sweeps quickly round to the left to run beside the railway. The river at this point has just left one of the most ruggedly picturesque valleys in the island, and one which it will repay the visitor to explore. With a goat-herd for guide, I wandered up the valley—the Scala di Santa Regina, as it is called.

The yelling Golo recalls the fierce music of the Fium^r

Orbo in the Defile de l'Inzecca. It rushes along between great walls of marble, porphyry, and granite, while flung loosely over all is a spreading forest of *lariccio* pines. Here, again, as between Propriano and Bonifacio, wind and rain have carved gigantic profiles, fantastic and varied in outline and on a vast scale. The route must have been blasted out of the rock. Enormous walls of stone now shut one in; now one plods along above a dark ravine; then suddenly there appears a huge amphitheatre, its side looking like a fretwork design. Unlike the Defile de l'Inzecca, the Scala di Santa Regina never treats the spectator to a wide, far-reaching view. In fact, the view is generally very restricted, but this change is an acceptable one, and every turn of the road brings into sight something fresh in rocky grandeur, whilst ever above hang battered boulders which might be the ruins of the aerial castles of a long past age.

About half way between the main route and the Pont de Santa Regina, where I turned back, is the Pont de Castula, or, as the people call it, the Pont du Diable. My guide told me the story of the bridge, a story which has a touch of "Faust" about it. One wintry night a horseman came galloping up to the ford, but the water was too deep and wild for him to cross. He was riding against time to Bastia with proofs of the innocence of his brother, who was to be executed the following morning. For a time he sat by the bank of the river bemoaning his bad luck, when suddenly there appeared before him a beautiful woman, to whom he told his plight. She promised to endeavour to help him, and just at that moment his Satanic Majesty came on the scene. With the beautiful woman he struck a bargain. If he completed a bridge across the river before the cock crew, he was to have her soul. The woman agreed, and suddenly the whole neighbourhood was swarming with

goblins, hewing, carrying, and placing the stones in position. Some time before daybreak the horseman was able to resume his journey and Mephistophelès turned to demand the fulfilment of the compact.

“But,” said the beautiful woman, “your work is not completed. Every true artist puts his name to his work before he calls it finished.”

Mephistopheles turned to do so, and while engaged in the task of carving his name on the bridge, the beautiful woman went into a neighbouring fowl roost and gave one of the roosters such a shaking that he heralded the dawn somewhat prematurely and for once the devil did not get his due.

Ponte Leccia is a quaint little place; it is the great railway junction in Corsica, the only other being Casamozza. This state of affairs has certainly added to the little town's importance and given it a certain air of prosperity. There is a post-office of some pretensions to size, an hotel which even the coming of the railway has left quite Corsican, and a number of scattered houses. The Golo is bridged by a fine structure of four arches, and on the northern side one road leads to Bastia and another to Morosaglia, and farther into La Castagniccia. Ponte Leccia, or, to give it its full official name, Ponte alla Leccia, makes no attempt to be orderly. It does not appear to have the slightest desire to have a street; it has planted itself down just as it pleased, a house here, a house there, the station five minutes away.

Here again the traveller reaches the outskirts of fever-land. The country is low-lying and the inhabitants are never seen out of doors after sunset during the warm weather. Every one, too, disappears when the sun is at its height, so that when I reached the little town, in the full broil of mid-day, it was veritably a deserted village.

The afternoon, too, was hot beyond all adjectival

qualification, and it was, therefore, pleasant to sit in the cool shade of the trees in a little garden near the hotel to which a friendly peasant had invited me. Half a dozen of us talked about a host of subjects, and when I announced that I intended to go to Morosaglia that evening, I was told that it was only twelve kilometres distant and that on my bicycle I should reach the place in an hour and a half. So I sat chatting and listening, and it was half-past five before the pleasant company broke up. I should, I admit, have known better by that time, for the average Corsican has a highly exaggerated idea of what it is possible to do on a bicycle, and the fact that my machine was laden to make it weigh fifty pounds, at least, never suggested to him that mountain-climbing feats were not rendered easy on that account. I was informed that I would have to "march" a couple of kilometres and then I would be able to ride the rest.

The end of the couple of kilometres placed before me a vista of the road stretching steeply on in front for miles, and riding was quite out of the question. On and on I struggled, but the walk was exquisitely enjoyable, and I spent the time admiring the lovely scenery and, for a change, watching my cyclometer gradually reach the five-hundredth mile of my Corsican wanderings. It was hard work, but I never enjoyed hard work so much before. Besides being in an interesting part of the country from an historical point of view, I think the only scenery in the island to match in rugged grandeur that to be seen on the way to the Mecca of Corsica is to be found around the Col de Bavella. On the Morosaglia road it is not rugged, as in the Defile de l'Inzecca or in Les Calanches on the west coast, for the route cuts through pleasant pasturages where numerous herds of sheep and goats feed, and here and there are dotted down quaint,

tiny, dry-stone, weather-beaten *bergeries*, round which happy little mountain children play with the flowers and send their pleasant shouts and laughter down on the breeze from the crags. The *maquis* has not invaded this part of the island to any great extent, but large patches of the countryside are stripped bare of vegetation entirely, and there are many signs of landslips on the mountains. In the winter, it is said, the road is hardly passable for carriages owing to the large boulders hurled down upon it from the heights above, and the traveller will see many great masses which seem ready to fall. Round deep ravines the road serpentine, and for a long time there is a magnificent view on the right-hand side. Thirty miles almost due south I could just descry the proud Rotondo lifting its snow-peak into the pale sky of evening. Westwards, far across the twisting Golo, rose the sierra-like range of Popolasca, red in the glow of sunset. Beyond it were the forest-clad peaks round Asco, terminating to the south in the lordly Monte Cinto.

Then the road twisted and wriggled up a gentle mountain slope ; I took a short cut across the pasturage, through a clump of trees, and eventually reached the road again with the height shutting out the west and leaving a wide eastern vista to feast the eyes upon. To the north I could then see dimly the lower valley of the Golo, on the northern bounds of La Castagniccia, and beyond it the mountains of the Cavanaggia, on the slopes of which Corsica made her last, desperate, unsuccessful bid for freedom. A spray of villages lay in the intervening space, rapidly being covered by the dusk. Night comes quickly in these regions, with but little twilight. Soon the moon burst from its coastline of cloud like a welcome shell from some giant mortar. The long sequence of shimmering ranges looked like motionless avalanches in the pale, ghostly light. The shining rocks towering high



MOROSAGLIA.



FONTE LECCIA.

above me seemed to change into glittering cascades ; the valleys appeared to be huge treasure-troves where great precious stones, in profusion untold, had been spread out in sparkling array—Nature's Golconda, guarded by an ocean of waves beyond which floated silvery stretches of glistening, gleaming chestnut-trees.

Then suddenly the twinkling, welcome, scattered lights of the hamlets which form Morosaglia greeted me out of the night, and soon I was sitting in a charming little inn enjoying an excellent dinner.

I have, in a previous chapter, reached that point in the rough island story of Corsica when treachery robbed the little fatherland of that Sampiero-like hero, Gaffori. After his death four men were appointed, with the title of "Directors," to rule the island and to carry on the war with Genoa. They were Clément Paoli (eldest son of Hyacinthus Paoli), Thomas Santini, Pierre Frediani, and Doctor Grimaldi. For a couple of years or so the four governed and fought with equal skill, and one of their acts was to address to Europe a letter setting forth their determination to have liberty and justice in their isle. "Our Antonies," said the letter, "cry to our nation to avenge the slaughtered Cæsars ; perhaps we have amongst us an Augustus to set up on indestructible foundations that peace which we have desired so long."

The hour brought the man ; the Augustus was Pasquale Paoli, brother of Clément and youngest son of Hyacinthus. It was in 1754 that the four "Directors" recognised the need for a single great mind to direct the destinies of the nation, and their choice was Pasquale Paoli, then twenty-eight years of age. When Pasquale was scarcely fourteen years old, he went with his exiled father to Naples, studied under the guidance of the famous philosopher Genovesi, and gained his first military experiences in

Sicily, where, for his successful work in wiping out brigands, he attained officer's rank. In the Calabrian War he achieved a certain amount of fame for cool bravery, whilst among his brother officers he was esteemed for his high intellectual powers and his broad humanitarian views.

"Go, my son," said his father to him when his country's call came. "Go. Do thy duty and be the deliverer of thy Fatherland."

On April 25, 1755, Paoli landed at La Porraggio, at the mouth of the Golo, and one cannot help thinking what a great difference there was between the coming of Corsica's great deliverer and that of her only, pompous, prodigal King. Paoli landed with none of the pomp and circumstance of royalty and power which Theodore called to his aid. He brought no munitions of war, no money, no proud-miened retinue; he made no specious promises; he scattered no grotesque titles among his followers; he aspired to no kingly throne. He came, with hope and determination in his breast, to be the "deliverer of his Fatherland." In the following July, Paoli was proclaimed General-in-chief of the Corsican nation, and he took in hand at once the reins of state.

The condition of the island at the time might have caused the stoutest heart to quail. True, the Genoese had been driven out of the island, save from several of the strong coast towns, but for years all law had been a dead letter, trade and agriculture had long been neglected, want was rife, vendetta was blazing in all its red fury throughout the land. Probably at no other time was this Corsican evil so widely rampant. But Paoli set himself in earnest to the stupendous task before him. Without order he knew laws and government were useless, so his attention was first turned to vendetta. After having caused full and adequate warn-

ing to be spread throughout the length and breadth of the island regarding his intentions, he issued a law decreeing the punishment by death of those who took vengeance into their own hands. The law was sternly fulfilled, and on one occasion a kinsman of Paoli himself was handed over to the hangman to suffer the extreme penalty for a crime of revenge. Paoli's decision not to interfere with the course of the law even in this case did a great deal towards stamping out this red horror.

With its marvellous innate virility, the nation soon began to flourish again under Paoli's peace. Trade revived; the fields were tilled again; fortune smiled on the fair island; beneficent laws were passed, and man lived at peace with his neighbour. So intense was the reverence which the people had for the great patriot who had banished war and its blight, that it was no uncommon thing when Paoli went through the country to see women kneel before him and hold up their children to receive his blessing.

James Boswell, in the course of his journey through Corsica, became very intimate with Paoli, and in his book, "An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour in that Island," gives an extremely interesting description of the great Corsican patriot. Paoli was at that time staying at Sollacaro, near Olmeto, the village, by the way, portrayed by Dumas in "The Corsican Brothers."

"I was shown into Paoli's room," says Boswell. "I found him alone, and was struck with his appearance. He is tall, strong, and well made; of a fair complexion, a sensible, free, and open countenance, and a manly and noble carriage. He was then in his fortieth year. He was dressed in green and gold. He used to wear the common Corsican habit, but on the arrival of the

French he thought a little external elegance might be of use, to make the Government appear in a more respectable light.

“He asked me what were my commands for him. I presented him with a letter from Count Rivarola, and when he had read it I showed him my letter from Rousseau. He was polite but very reserved. I had stood in the presence of many a prince, but I never had such a trial as in the presence of Paoli. I have already said that he is a great physiognomist. In consequence of his being in continual danger from treachery and assassination he has formed a habit of studiously observing every new face. For ten minutes we walked backwards and forwards through the room, hardly saying a word, while he looked at me with a stedfast, keen, and penetrating eye, as if he searched my very soul.

“This interview was for a while very severe upon me. I was much relieved when his reserve wore off, and he began to speak more. I then ventured to address him with this compliment to the Corsicans: ‘Sir, I am upon my travels, and have lately visited Rome. I am come from seeing the ruins of one brave and free people; I now see the rise of another.’

“He received my compliment very graciously, but observed that the Corsicans had no chance of being like the Romans, a great conquering nation, who should extend its empire over half the globe. Their situation, and the modern political systems, rendered this impossible. ‘But,’ said he, ‘Corsica may be a very happy country.’ . . .

“Some of the nobles who attended him came into the room, and in a little we were told that dinner was served up. The General did me the honour to place me next him. He had a table of fifteen or sixteen covers, having

always a good many of the principal men of the island with him. He had with him an Italian cook who had been long in France, but he chose to have a few plain substantial dishes, avoiding every kind of luxury and drinking no foreign wine."

Boswell spent some time at Sollacaro, and he and Paoli became very intimate. "One day," says Boswell later, "when I rode out, I was mounted on Paoli's own horse, with rich furniture of crimson velvet, with broad gold lace, and had my guards marching along with me. I allowed myself to indulge a momentary pride in this parade, as I was curious to experience what could really be the pleasure of state and distinction with which mankind are so strongly intoxicated. . . .

"I asked him if he understood English. He immediately began and spoke it, which he did tolerably well. When at Naples he had known several Irish gentlemen who were officers in that service. Having a great facility for acquiring languages, he learnt English from them. But as he had been ten years without ever speaking it, he spoke very slow. One could see that he was possessed of the words, but for want of what I may call mechanical practice he had a difficulty in expressing himself.

"I was diverted with his English library. It consisted of some broken volumes of the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, Pope's 'Essay on Man,' 'Gulliver's Travels,' a 'History of France' in Old English, and Barclay's 'Apology for the Quakers.' . . .

"Paoli was very desirous that I should study the character of the Corsicans. 'Go among them,' said he; 'the more you talk with them, you will do me the greater pleasure. Forget the meanness of their apparel. Hear their sentiments. You will find honour, and sense and abilities among these poor men.'"

The visitor to Corsica should keep Paoli's words in his memory ; the people are to-day as they were in the patriot's own generation.

Paoli's position, of course, was certain to arouse jealousy, and the first internal disturbance of the peace of the land was an armed rebellion by Marius Emmanuel Matra, the scion of a noble Corsican house, who thought that he should stand where Paoli stood, and, supported by a large army of followers, he determined to achieve his ambition. Paoli suggested to him that they should place their claims before the National Assembly, but Matra would not listen to this, so Paoli had no choice but to march against the rebels. At first Paoli's forces were defeated in several encounters in La Castagniccia, but the tide of victory eventually turned in their favour, and Matra was driven towards the coast at Aleria. There he obtained help from the Genoese, who still held out in several of the island fortresses. Again he marched against Paoli, who was defeated and forced to take refuge in the convent of Bozio, not far from Corté, with fifty or sixty men. His position was indeed a desperate one, for the convent was fiercely besieged, and many of his men were slain in the attacks. One day, when the walls were tottering to their last fall, when blazing faggots were piled up against the doors, suddenly there came from far up the hills the sound of horns. Help was coming just as the last hour of despair was ebbing to its end. The relieving force dashed upon the enemy, and Matra found himself between two fires. Like a lion he fought against the now heavy odds, and like a lion he fell. Riddled with bullets, where the fire was hottest he closed his desperate bid for power, leaving behind him at least a great reputation for a personal courage worthy rather of the cause he fought against than of the desperate, selfish enterprise which

had his bravery for its only ornament. When the battle was over Paoli came out from the blackened and blurred convent, and, kneeling beside the body of his enemy, burst into tears.

The relieving force was commanded by Clément Paoli, Valentini, and Thomas Cervoni, and the story of how the force was raised is a strange one. Cervoni's mother had heard of the patriot's desperate position and said to her son that he should go to Paoli's aid. But Cervoni was one of Paoli's enemies and he refused. His mother then brought him his sword and his gun and commanded him to go. And when a Corsican mother commands a son must obey. Cervoni took a few men ; he was joined by Clément and Valentini ; and the little band gathered strength as it advanced. The people even to-day say that it was Cervoni himself who slew Matra, but he remained Paoli's enemy, and left the field of battle without seeing Paoli or allowing the great patriot to thank him. Paoli, however, journeyed specially to Soveria in order to thank his deliverer.

The island peaceful once more, Paoli turned his attention to Genoa. The time was favourable, for the old warlike Republic was tottering to its fall ; hired Germans and Swiss were fighting her battles for her, and it was these mercenaries whom she now sent against Paoli. But they were not strong enough to face the revived Corsica, and in 1756 the Republic appealed once more to France for aid, and France occupied the strong places in the island, on this occasion perhaps more for the reason of preventing the English from seizing them than to oblige or succour Genoa. The Corsicans and the French, however, remained on fairly good terms till 1759, when the garrisons were recalled and the Genoese returned. But though the Corsicans were unable to drive the Republicans out of the fortresses, the invaders

were totally incapable of conquering the island as of yore. Corsica was the old, warworn Corsica no longer. United and with manufactures flourishing and trade increasing, the islanders were in a better position than ever to resist Genoese aggression. Ile Rousse, between Calvi and St. Florent, two active Genoese ports, was founded by Paoli in 1759 and succeeded in attracting a great deal of the trade of the two neighbouring ports as well as of Algajola, then a busy commercial town. From Ile Rousse, too, Corsican cruisers sailed to play havoc with Genoese shipping. The islanders were well armed, and even Corsican traitors and Genoese conspirators, well paid with Republican gold, failed to raise successful insurrections. Well might Genoa exclaim in despair that the island was now unconquerable.

Again in 1764 she found that holding even the coast towns was too much for her, and again France relieved her of the burden.

It was at this time that the islanders drove a wedge into the crumbling edifice of the Republic by the capture of the island of Capraja, and this practically caused Genoa to decide that the time had come to abandon the stubborn island altogether. At Versailles, therefore, on May 15, 1768, she sold her "rights" to France, and that country decided to subdue the island, which she now deemed of great strategic value to her.

Paoli called together the National Convention at Corté and it was decided to fight to the last. A large French army under Marbœuf landed, chiefly at Bastia, and the invaders were soon masters of that town, of St. Florent, and the surrounding country. The Marquis de Chauvelin, who was commander-in-chief, with fifteen thousand men, marched southwards before the Corsicans had gathered their full strength, and at Furiani two hundred islanders performed a magnificent feat of arms. "No surrender"

was the watchword, and sternly they held Chauvelin's thousands at bay, driving back attack after attack and inflicting huge losses. It was only when the little place scarcely contained one stone on the top of another that the sadly reduced garrison decided that further resistance was useless. But even then they did not surrender. Under cover of the darkness the remnant of the defenders cut their way through the French lines.

Meanwhile Marbœuf had moved on Biguglia, and, thanks to his powerful artillery, drove back the Corsicans. Chauvelin then split his forces and attacked the islanders simultaneously at Nebbio and Mariana, winning successes. This was followed by the occupation of Vescovato, but soon Paoli's warrior brother, Clément, was ready for battle with the flower of the island's forces, and in a desperate battle on the banks of the lower Golo the French were driven back in wholesale rout on Borgo. The town was at once besieged, and Chauvelin, who had gone to Bastia to bring up reinforcements, moved southwards to the relief of the hard-pressed garrison. But Paoli sent a strong force to stand in Chauvelin's way, and while the relieving force was being attacked Borgo was assaulted. The French could make no headway against the meagre line of determined Corsicans that held the way to Borgo, and the picked regiments of France were hurled back with sickening slaughter and in total disorder on Bastia, Marbœuf being one of the wounded. Over eighteen hundred French were left dead and dying on the field that day, and the garrison of Borgo, seven hundred^d men with twenty pieces of artillery, fell into the hands of the heroic islanders.

The triumph for the moment was complete, but, alas! only for the moment. The French seized Capraja, and ten battalions were sent from the Continent to reinforce Chauvelin, who, however, opened his second campaign

with a severe defeat at Murato, where he lost four hundred men in killed alone. He was then recalled and Marbœuf took his place until the arrival of the new commander, the Comte de Vaux, who had already seen service in the island. Meanwhile Paoli proposed to France that Corsica should recognise the King's sovereignty, but that his Majesty should allow the island to retain its constitution. This proposal was rejected by France, and Corsica was then face to face with a war *à l'outrance*.

Paoli and his general laid their plans well. The first line of defence stretched from Monte Tenda, some distance north of Ponte Leccia, to Murato on the west, and Borgo on the east. The second line lay to the south along the banks of the Golo, and the third south of Corté, along the Vecchio and round Ghisoni, the most rugged of the three regions. The key to the first line was, of course, Monte Tenda. I spent a couple of days rambling about this district, and from the summit it is easily seen that Paoli's left wing held the finest strategic point north of Corté. Every invader, from the Romans to the French, indeed, has seen that to hold Monte Tenda is to dominate Cap Corse on the left and the fertile province of La Balagna on the right, whilst in front lies an easy route into the very centre of the island.

Towards this *point d'appui*, then, de Vaux's formidable army moved. The French commander placed his right wing at Santo Pietro, between St. Florent and Monte Tenda, his front stretching to Biguglia. At the latter spot Marbœuf was in command. The forward movement against the Corsican lines was the signal for the garrisons at Ajaccio and Calvi, which had been greatly strengthened for the purpose, to advance into the interior and so draw off a certain number of the Corsican army opposing the main French advance.

The campaign was opened in a curious manner. At Oletta, where the French centre rested, held by the Marquis d'Arcambal, reports were spread that a plot was being planned to admit the Corsicans by night to surprise the garrison. D'Arcambal heard of it and immediately put the town under martial law, arrested the principal inhabitants, put fourteen of them on the rack and hung seven. In addition, a proclamation forbade prayers or burial for the dead. This barbaric business roused the whole island to the height of passionate indignation.

It was on May 3, 1769, that de Vaux put his whole army in motion. Marbœuf attacked Borgo and took it, his plan being to get behind the main body of the islanders before de Vaux's right and centre delivered their main attack. He was, however, prevented from crossing the Golo, and that part of his scheme fell through. Meanwhile d'Arcambal was sweeping forward with one section of the centre, while de Vaux, who was with the centre, sent one part of his forces, under the Marquis de Bouffieres, to attack Paoli at Murato, another advancing on Monte Tenda under his own guidance. D'Arcambal threw all his weight on the Col de San Giacomo, but so desperately did the Corsicans hold their positions that the French were driven back no fewer than five times.

On the 6th the position of the islanders would have been hopeful had they not been greatly outnumbered. De Vaux, one of the most skilful tacticians of his time, was, as he advanced, massing his troops on a solid and highly formidable line. On the 7th the French carried several of the *cols* leading up to Monte Tenda, and in addition de Vaux, on whom the teaching of the Genoese had not been altogether lost, had been scattering gold freely amongst the islanders, so that once again there

appeared that hideous head of treason, that treacherous spirit which has, alas ! so often dimmed the glorious story of Corsican heroism. Paoli, with weakened forces, was driven from Murato and established himself beyond the Golo at Rostino. One of the Corsican leaders—Grimaldi—who was facing d'Arcambal, succumbed to French gold and, turning traitor, yielded up to the enemy important positions at the pass of San Giacomo, whilst south of Murato another island general, a Corsican bearing the great name of Gaffori, about the last one would have wished to see tarnished, abandoned his positions. The French occupied these points and were masters of Lento and Canavaggia.

The first line of the Corsican defence had, therefore, been penetrated under conditions auguring very badly indeed for the success of the Corsican campaign, which could have only been made successful by miracles of valour. The island forces fell back on the Golo, the pick of them retreating in good order during the 7th and 8th, disputing as they retired every inch of ground. Heavy losses and numerous desertions had sadly weakened the numbers of the patriots and several of the remaining leaders, even, were disaffected. But where Paoli was there was spirit, and he opened the 8th with one of his last desperate throws, magnificent but not war. A strong force was pushed forward towards the lost position at Lento ; it fought a fierce little battle, captured the place, and made prisoners of the French garrison. The reinforcements, which de Vaux had despatched too late, took up the fight, and the islanders, in no condition to face fresh troops, had to retire, while a second French force pushed out of Canavaggia and joined in the pursuit. The Corsicans found themselves all but surrounded and, turning round, they fought with leonine, cornered courage. But the bravery of desper-

tion even has its bounds. Among the *maquis*, behind trees and rocks, the despairing fighters held their own magnificently for a time, but a stupendous French musketry fire triumphed. The Corsicans were soon caught between two fires and only a broken remnant escaped.

De Vaux, now in full possession of the heights, moved his whole army forward to the river, concentrating particularly on Ponte Nuovo, practically midway between Ponte Leccia and Casamozza. The bridge across the Golo was defended by a thousand men, amongst whom was a company of Prussians, for many foreigners had, of late months, come to the aid of the struggling patriots. The Prussians had orders to cover the retreat of the remnant of the two thousand men whom Paoli had flung forward on Lento. De Vaux was following fast on the heels of this band and driving them from the heights of the left bank of the river. Whether by treachery or error—the point will never be settled—the Prussians fired on the retreating Corsicans. The bridge was barred by a dry-stone wall with only a small passage left in it, and, coming towards this, driven by the fire of the French, the heroes were met by showers of lead from behind the barrier beyond which they thought was safety.

That hideous cry, "We are betrayed!" rent the air and spread disorder everywhere. The French seized the opportunity to push forward their attack with the utmost ferocity. On the bridge the fight was terrible in its savagery—and the Golo ran blood. For several hours the islanders clung in the frenzy of battle to their position. They were waiting for Gaffori, the Gaffori who had played his country false a day or two before but who had repented. But again he acted the traitor, and the heroes on the bridge awaited his coming in vain. He

had under him a strong force, one which might have reasonably been expected to turn defeat into victory, for the French were suffering terribly. But he left his countrymen in the lurch.

Soon the hardy islanders, unnerved by a slaughter unparalleled in the annals of their bloody wars, gave way and scattered in the hills of La Castagniccia. The darkness put an end to the awful slaughter. The last battle on Corsican soil had been fought; the night rang down the last curtain on the tragic and glorious drama of the Corsicans' struggle for national freedom.

The third line of defence was useless, even if the islanders had had the spirit to fight again. General Narbonne had marched out from Ajaccio and was threatening the rear of the line of the Vecchio. Gaffori surrendered, and though guerilla warfare lasted for some time, de Vaux soon effected a junction with Narbonne, Corté fell easily, and southern Corsica was flooded with the victorious soldiery of France. De Vaux was far from being merciful in his triumph. Large portions of the country were laid waste, villages were burned, people massacred, laws brutal in their severity enforced. Paoli and his brother Clément, with a number of the faithful, could only flee. They went across country to Porto Vecchio, sailed to the Continent, Paoli eventually going to England, where George III. gave him a pension of two thousand pounds a year. For twenty years he lived an exile's life in London.

Time is a fickle jade; it loves to play tricks with men and nations. Scarcely twenty years passed away after the despatch of the French armies to slay freedom and representative government in its island home, when France discovered that she wanted freedom and representative government herself, that for it she was ready to rush, in fire and blood, into the greatest, most

hideously carried out revolution the world has ever seen, and out of

“ . . . the smother,
Shame and slaughter of it all,”

she rose greater from her ashes.

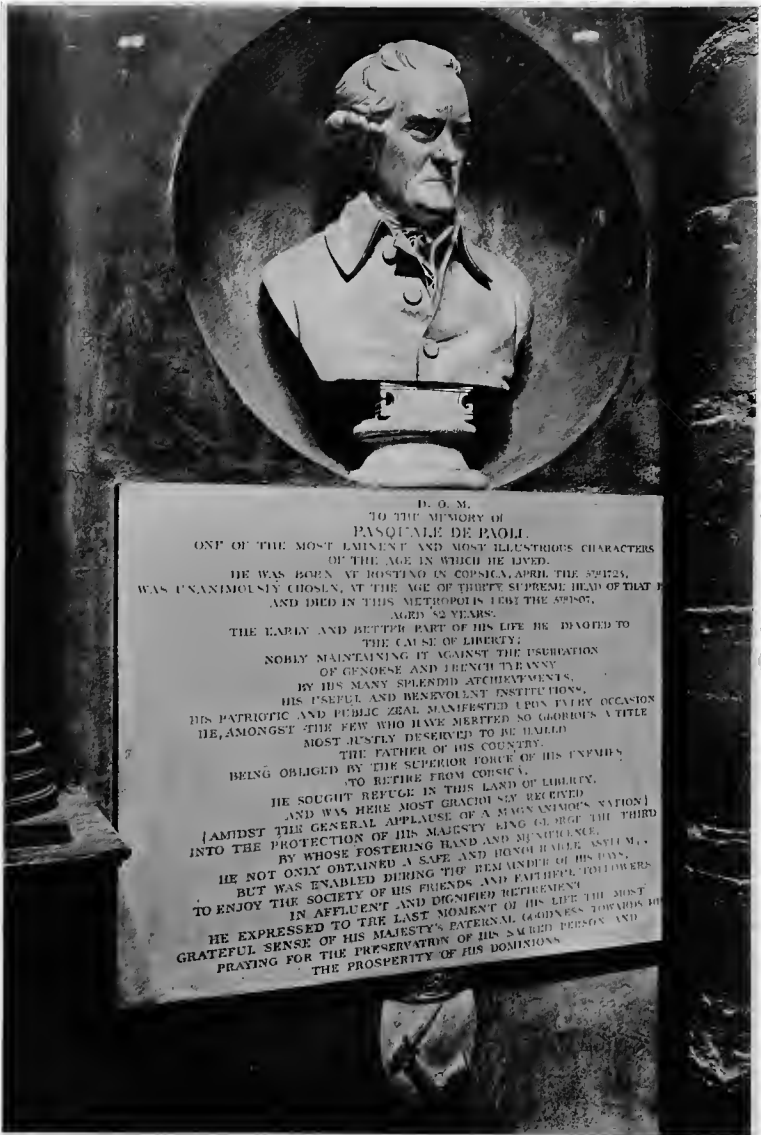
It was the first trumpet-call heralding a changed order of things in France that stirred Paoli in his quiet retreat in London. He hastened to Paris, to the capital of Corsica's enemies turned friends. The President of the Assembly hailed him as “the hero, the martyr of liberty.” The King received him with every mark of affection, and Robespierre addressed him in these words: “Citoyen généreux, vous avez défendu la liberté à une époque où nous n'osions pas même l'espérer. Vous avez souffert pour elle, vous avez triomphé avec elle, et votre triomphe est le nôtre.” Corsica was to enjoy her freedom again, alas! for only too brief a period, for France, desiring fuller freedom herself, could not and did not refuse the same to the island. Paoli landed in Corsica, at Macinajo in Cap Corse, on July 16, 1789. Falling on his knees and kissing his native soil, he cried, with tears in his eyes, “O ma patrie! Je t'ai laissée esclave et je te retrouve libre!”

All Corsica rejoiced at the return of the great patriot. He was at once made President of the National Assembly, and he set about to do all he possibly could for his little country. But his task was more difficult than ever. Though it had been the beginnings of the French Revolution which had called him back to his island home, the subsequent phases of “France's madness” had a powerful influence upon him. Paoli was, first and foremost, a humanitarian. The Revolution's hideous nightmare of slaughter horrified him and wounded his very soul. It split his people into two parties—those who would break

with France altogether and those who looked upon the Revolution as only a momentary, terrible means to a glorious end. Eventually the French Convention accused him of endeavouring to secure the entire separation of Corsica from France, and at last, goaded by accusations, the Paolist party published a proclamation declaring the island free and independent. For this the French Convention declared Paoli to be guilty of high treason. The island itself was divided, and internecine war was on the point of breaking out when Paoli called the English to his aid.

Admiral Hood appeared off St. Florent, took the town and Bastia as well, while Calvi fell after a terrible siege. The Paolists made themselves masters of the southern part of the island and their new allies subdued the north. The ancient constitution of the island was restored, with alterations to the effect that the legislative power was vested in the King of England as well as in the people of the island and that the King's representative was to have the title of Viceroy. It was Sir Gilbert Elliot, later first Earl of Minto and an ancestor of the present (1909) Viceroy of India, who ruled Corsica for the next two years. Gregorovius accuses him of being an incapable governor, and describes English rule as "perverse and bad." But while in Corsica I could not find anyone who looked upon this part of Corsican history in that light. Paoli himself said after the restoration of his country's constitution, "Enfin, ma chère patrie a trouvé un refuge permanent dans le cœur du roi d'Angleterre ! Enfin, nous avons échappé aux cannibales de la Convention ! L'avenir est à nous !"

Elliot has been accused of quarrelling with Paoli and of finally bringing pressure on the home authorities to have him removed. But as I read Corsican history—and I have argued the point with many Corsicans—Elliot and



MONUMENT TO PASQUALE PAOLI IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Paoli were on the best of terms and almost wholly in agreement on all matters of government. Why, Paoli had but to raise his hand and revolt against the English would have been instant. The fact of the matter was that Paoli was growing old; he had lived his years strenuously; he was almost seventy and, seeing his country prospering, he availed himself of the invitation of the King of England to spend the evening of his days in the land for which he had such great admiration. In October, 1795, he left Corsica for the third and last time, and, after living quietly in London for twelve years, he died on February 5, 1807. On the 13th he was laid to rest in the churchyard of St. Pancras, and what is more fitting than that beneath the proudest roof of our own island home of freedom, in Westminster Abbey, there should be a monument to one of Europe's brightest patriots! The monument, which consists of a bust by Flaxman with a lengthy inscription below it, is to be seen in the south aisle of the choir. The bust was erected, says Dean Stanley in his "Memorials of Westminster Abbey," "not merely from the general esteem in which he was held, but from his close connection with the whole Johnsonian circle, of whom he was the favourite."

Sir Gilbert Elliot, meanwhile, had turned his attention to the defence of Corsica, putting the island in a better position than she had ever been in before. He chose the best men for public positions, and the island was peaceful and prosperous. Elliot, says a historian, was "a true gentleman, distinguished alike by his high birth and his knowledge of affairs. Although young, he could count to his credit many important services on behalf of his country." Altogether the English remained in Corsica two years. Disintegrating forces were at work; the Corsicans, Sabine-like, had learned to love their

conqueror during the period of French occupation ; the great Corsican—Napoleon—surrounded by Corsican officers, was leading a glorious campaign in Italy, and his name and fame were beginning to dazzle the world. The French party in the island gained in strength, and one morning the tricolour was seen floating from the tower of Bocognano. Soon the whole of the south of the island was aflame with insurrection, and, though this was quelled, the English position quickly became an uncomfortable one. At last Elliot received orders from the Duke of Portland to evacuate the island. The French immediately took possession of it, and over it the tricolour has since floated. Corsica has merged herself completely in the life of France ; she has withdrawn from the world of strife and has become almost a forgotten land.

Morosaglia is a charming old-world place. A scattered array of hamlets, it lies at the top of a broad, far-reaching vale with "leagues of dreaming woods." One of the first buildings which the traveller reaches is the École Paoli, the patriot's gift to his native place. It is part of an ancient convent of the Franciscans, and about a hundred boys and girls learn their simple lessons with the inspiring example of the darling hero of Corsica ever before them. The convent is a venerable and interesting pile, but, like many another monument of Corsican history, it has been allowed to fall sadly into decay. I cannot do better than quote Gregorovius's description of it, as it contains something about Clément Paoli, Pasquale's wonderful brother.

Gregorovius says : " The convent is perhaps the most venerable monument of Corsican history. It looks like a hoary legend—petrified, brown, and gloomy. At all periods of the history national parliaments were held

in this old Franciscan monastery. Pasquale had rooms and offices here, and was often seen in the summer with the monks, who carried the crucifix into battle at the head of the army whenever necessity offered. His gallant brother Clément was fond of residing in the same convent, and died in one of its cells in the year 1793.

“Clément Paoli is a highly remarkable character, perfectly resembling one of the Maccabees, or a Crusader glowing with religious fervour. He was the eldest son of Hyacinthus. He served with distinction as a soldier in the Neapolitan service, and subsequently became one of the generals of the Corsicans. But public affairs had no charm for his fanatical spirit ; and, when his brother had come to the head of affairs in Corsica, he retired into private life, donned the dress of a lay brother, and relapsed into religious contemplation.

“Where the danger was greatest he appeared like an avenging angel. He delivered his brother from the Convent of Bozio, when besieged by Marius Matra ; he drove the Genoese out of the province of Orezza, after a terrible battle ; he carried the assault upon San Pellegrino and San Fiorenzo ; he was victorious in innumerable battles. When the Genoese were storming the fortified camp of Furiani with all their force, Clément remained unshaken in the ruins for fifty-six days, though the whole place was battered down.

“To Pasquale Corsica owed its freedom, from his leading mind ; but to Clément solely from the achievements of his sword. He achieved most brilliant feats of arms also after the French had proceeded to assail the Corsicans in the year 1768. He gained the glorious battle of Borgo, and he fought desperately at Ponte Nuovo, and when all was lost hastened to rescue his brother. He dashed to Niolo with a small and valiant band to oppose General Narbonne and cover his brother’s

flight. As soon as ever this movement was crowned with success he flew to Pasquale at Bastelica, and then embarked with him, sorrowing, for Tuscany.

“He did not accompany his brother to England, but remained in Tuscany ; for a strange language would have made his heart sad. In the delightful, lonely convent Vallombrosa, he relapsed again into fervent prayer and severe penance.

“After a convent life of twenty years in Tuscany, Clément returned to Corsica shortly before his brother. Once more he glowed with hopes for his country ; but events soon discovered to the aged hero that Corsica was lost for ever. He died in penance and grief in the December of the year in which the Convention had cited his brother Pasquale on a charge of high treason.”

The valley is famed for its brave men and beautiful women, and there could be no doubt to whom a Corsican Paris would award his apple of gold. It would be to some fair maid of Morosaglia. They have particularly regular features, clear complexions, and the figure of Venus. They are, too, charming in manner and speech. The men are of splendid physique, and in the days of war the Morosaglians, to whose homes the tide of battle was ever near, fought splendidly for Corsican freedom. To-day, when peace reigns, their strength is put forth in the pursuits of peace, and they have the reputation of being the most industrious people in the island.

At the head of the valley, looking towards the setting sun, stand three white houses. That in the centre was the birthplace of Pasquale Paoli, and it is where he sleeps. Corsica could not allow the ashes of her first patriot to rest in foreign soil, and on August 31, 1889, they were exhumed and taken to Morosaglia, where, on September 7th, they were laid to rest in his beloved vale.

The house, prior to this time, had been allowed to fall almost into ruin ; but it was restored, and Paoli rests in a tiny mausoleum built on the ground-floor at the rear. In it there is a fine bust of the patriot, the gift of the famous di Borgo family, and wreaths cluster in the little place, put there by those who do not forget.

As I stood in the tiny *chappelle*, a bare-footed little Corsican boy, with his cap under his arm, and twisting something in his hands, entered. Squatting down by the slab beneath which Paoli rests, he spelt out to himself the proud title which the patriot earned for himself—"Il Padre della Patria"—and then he placed on the tomb what he had been carrying. It was a little wreath of rosemary—rosemary for remembrance !

One's mind cannot but call back the picture of that great mausoleum by the banks of the Seine where the other famous Corsican is asleep, in pomp and splendour. But in Morosaglia stands a prouder sepulture. There come no bitter thoughts ; there the spirits of no slaughtered thousands rise up against the memory of him who sleeps to curse his name ; his fame lives with "no carnal triumph of the empurpled sword" ; he reigns in human hearts for ever.

The roomy, dim, silent house is looked after with conscious pride by a charming old dame. For the few visitors who come that way she generally pulls a few of the humble wildflowers from the box at one of the windows. Mine lie withered before me as I write. She points out, speaking in short Corsican sentences all that there is to be seen—the library founded by the "Union Corse," the staff Paoli was in the habit of carrying, and the different rooms. The patriot has left little behind him.

Several interesting excursions may be made from

Morosaglia. The Col de Prato is worth climbing to get the magnificent view afforded there of La Castagniccia and the Tuscan Sea. It is a vast natural Versailles that is spread out before the eye, an Elysium where Nature's colossal ideas of beauty have had full play, a great fairy-land cut by alleys which a Titan must have hewn. The springs of Orezza, too, are not far distant. The chalybeate water is said to be *unique au monde*, and so very remarkable is its effect that a Frenchman has it that it must have been *eau d'Orezza* that Mephistopheles gave to Faust. The surrounding district is the most thickly populated part of Corsica, and, indeed, has a higher population per square kilometre than the average density of France. The people are most hospitable and interesting, being mostly employed in woodwork, making chairs, wooden forks and spoons and pipes, whilst the preparation of leather is also carried on. For miles on every hand chestnut forests lie dotted with little villages, and the countryside is an ideal one to wander in at random. Giant chestnut-trees tower high above, monsters of whom one feels inclined to ask—

“ . . . Fantastic sire,
Girt with thy guard of dotard kings,
What ages hast thou seen retire
Into the dusk of alien things?
What mighty news hath stormed thy shade,
Of armies perished, realms unmade ? ”

These fathers of the forest, whose fruit sustained the armies of Paoli, still provide food for the numerous *bergers* and the inhabitants of the forest villages. In La Castagniccia very large quantities of chestnut flour are made. Slightly sweetened with the addition of sugar, the people make bread and cakes of it, whilst it also goes to form *polenta*, a thick pottage, very nourishing and

not unpleasant, recalling to some extent pease-pudding, that staple diet of some of our nursery-rhyme heroes and heroines of long ago, whose tastes I admit I could never account for.

The run from Morosaglia back to Ponte Leccia is delightful on a cycle. The distance is about fourteen kilometres, and the free wheel is in use all the way. For some time after reaching the Bastia road again going is extremely easy, the route undulating gently by the river. At Ponte Nuovo I halted to explore the great and almost forgotten battlefield. The river flows gently through the broad valley, and on its right is a little garden village near the railway station. The bridge is a massive one of stone, with five arches, dating from Genoese times.

The battlefield of Ponte Nuovo, I think, is one of the most interesting in history. To the casual reader or observer, it may mean simply the last fight between France and Corsica, the Corsican's last battle, really but an incident in a by-way of history. But it is far more than that. It was the opening of that storm which was to roll over Europe from Moscow to Madrid, and never did the God of War and the Muse of History play such a desperate game of hazard as on that fatal May morning nearly a century and a half ago. If Paoli had won the field, there is every reason to believe that Corsica would have established her claim to freedom, and it was practically Paoli's intention to have placed the island under the sovereignty of England. But Ponte Nuovo made Corsica French. Amongst those whom it caused to flee into mountain fastnesses was a mother waiting the coming of a son, a mother before whose eyes were unrolled all the glories, the horrors, the privations of war; and ninety days after the battle, on the very day that France issued her proclamation annexing Corsica, there was born in Ajaccio, under the tricolour of France, Napoleon

Bonaparte, that dreamy boy yet to drench Europe from end to end with blood. Ponte Nuovo made Napoleon a Frenchman. Fate had played to see whether his colossal genius should be shut up in the tiny frontiers of Corsica, whether England should claim it, or whether it should be France's glory. Fate gave it to France in a humble lieutenant, one day to raise his country to the dizzy height of an Empire of Mars, and at last to hurl her in the dust of humiliation. So Ponte Nuovo, then, was the forerunner of that great series of battles which reddened and blackened history, and which kept the Temple of Janus open till the Old Guard wavered and broke at Waterloo.



LA CANONICA.

CHAPTER IX

BASTIA AND ROUND ABOUT

“Bastia, indeed, has, like the majority of men and women, its history written on its face.”

H. SETON MERRIMAN.

APPROACHING Bastia from the south, from the point where the murmuring Golo leaves the fertile uplands of the Castagniccia to swirl sedately through an extensive reach of glowingly fertile yet fever-stricken lowland, to empty itself half into the peaceful, shallow Lagoon of Biguglia and half into the sea direct, the countryside assumes an aspect differing completely from anything else in Corsica, an aspect which, while preparing the traveller for surprise, seems to tell him that he has left happy-go-lucky Corsica behind. The long, tiresome, dusty road is fringed on either side by well cultivated fields; there is an air of prosperity present not even equalled in the neighbourhood of Ajaccio; the flats between the road and the sea and inland for some little distance towards the slopes of the western mountain wall are dotted with clusters of curious little huts, where the nomadic farmers live till the summer's heat, spreading fever over this part of the coast, drives them to the healthier and less fertile uplands round Murato and Oletta.

In the sunny days of April and May, which see those people preparing for flight, the vast Pontine Marsh, with the heavy hand of silence upon it, in the vague mists of sunrise lies like a stretch of watered silk dotted with diamonds softly gleaming under the eastern light, fringed with the tremor of the Tuscan Sea, matching it in colour and beauty and glitter. The fiercely flung darts of the noonday sun cannot touch this mysterious, hesitant, elusive charm; the Pontine Marsh keeps its sunrise glory till evening sunbeams, with their infinite range of colour, limn the western mountain tops.

Here, where the fierce mistral leaves its pestilence in the air, the vegetation is tropical in its luxuriance. Grass shoots up to jungle height; corn grows as rank as on the fertile slime of the Nile; in three or four years a eucalyptus forest will rear itself. I was told that it is possible to obtain no fewer than four crops of excellent lucerne grass in a twelvemonth. Here, again, if the Corsicans were a little more energetic and France a little less apathetic, this Pontine Marsh, the most fertile part of all Corsica, of all France, might be made safely inhabitable all the year round and still more useful. The Romans, during their stay in this part of the island, a period during which they established their colonies at Mariana (or Marana) and Aleria, turned their attention to salutary works with success. Yet to-day this wide expanse of land lies like a spell-bound fairy Princess awaiting the coming of the Knight of Enterprise; the Pontine Marsh is to-day a realm of fever and waste; it should be a flawless Paradise of Nature.

The Lagoon of Biguglia, peacefully reposing like a shroud of imperial purple on the right of the road across the marsh, covers an expanse of something like 3,500 acres. At one time it formed a magnificent harbour, but a succession of landslips has not only rendered it shallow

and treacherous, but it is now a matter of difficulty and danger for vessels of any size to enter it. During the winter season eel-fishing is extensively carried on, and great quantities of this fish are caught and exported alive to Naples. At Naples, and to a lesser extent at Bastia, eels grilled in a certain manner form a highly favoured dish which is invariably seen on the table on Christmas Eve. In the middle of the lagoon is the island of Santo Damiano, covered with rich vines. Viniculture is also carried on to a large extent on the narrow strip of land between the gulf and the sea.

Apart from its hectic beauty, this corner of Corsica possesses much that is of interest. Six miles or so from Casamozza, taking the rough road along the left bank of the Golo, is the site of the ancient Roman colony of Mariana, where there rises in solitary grandeur *La Canonica*, a fine basilica dating back to the eleventh century. The immediate surroundings of this unique building are arid and desert-like. Stripped of its doors and roof, this cathedral, the finest of the few romanesque remains in Corsica, one of the most interesting relics out of the past of which Corsica can boast, is in a sad state of neglect and ruin. It is given over entirely to the careless custody of Time; shepherds find shelter in it. Corsica, ever dreaming of the past though she be, has but little reverence for what Time has preserved for her out of the inspiring by-gone ages. As has been mentioned, the island people as a nationality have not been responsible for the preservation of a single relic of Napoleon; Paoli's birthplace was allowed to become a blackened hovel before it was restored to its now presentable state by a private individual; nothing has been done in the case of *La Canonica* to ward off the attacks of Time and vandalism.

M. Prosper Mérimée thus describes *La Canonica* :—

“The architecture of La Canonica is distinguished by the greatest simplicity, but this simplicity does not exclude elegance. It is in the form of a basilica measuring thirty-two mètres by twelve, divided into three naves by square pillars, which are rather too high for their diameter—0·55 m.—and which support arches of a little less than semicircles. The general appearance is one of extreme fragility, and in this respect La Canonica is distinct from the majority of Byzantine works of architecture. There is no ornamentation on the pillars with the exception of a slight moulding on the abacus.

“The structure of La Canonica is remarkable. It is an *opus incertum*, the interior being similar to the exterior inasmuch as it is formed of slabs placed alternately horizontally and vertically. These slabs are regularly cut and set in place with singular precision. They are of grey silicium of a very fine grain and of great durability. The decoration of the building is only distinguished by a rigid simplicity from that of the most ancient Byzantine churches. The chief outstanding characteristic of its construction is its lightness and its excellent arrangement, made noteworthy by an antique tasteful simplicity not to be found in churches infinitely richer in architectural beauty.”

Looking on La Canonica, the stranger cannot help marvelling that absolutely nothing has been done to prevent the destruction of the most beautiful monument which Corsica possesses, all the more so because the island possesses so few. In the neighbourhood of the cathedral are to be found traces of a Roman bridge across the Golo, the remains of baths and a canal, whilst sarcophagi, ancient tiles, and graves have been unearthed.

The historic town of Borgo lies just a little off the main road. It is, of course, the scene of the great

French defeat in 1768, recorded in the previous chapter. In those far-off days it was a very important place, but the rise of Bastia has drawn most of its glory from it, and to-day I should think there are scarcely a thousand inhabitants in the place. It stands on the top of a hill, three or four hundred feet above sea-level, and commands a fine view of the vast plain stretching all around it. Any one who delves in the scant fields of Corsican literature will come across mention of "the sublime Borgo" in rather an interesting connection. M. Salvator Viale, one of the best known of Corsican poets, a bright orb in a sparsely enstarred firmament, has, in his mock-heroic poem, "La Dionomachia," found a theme in a somewhat unedifying quarrel which took place in the year 1832 between the inhabitants of Borgo and those of Lucciana, a short kilometre distant. One Saint's day a religious procession was going from Lucciana to a neighbouring church, when suddenly it was brought to a halt by a dead donkey lying its full length across the road. The animal was identified as having belonged to the commune of Borgo, and the priest at the head of the procession hurled angry words at the people of that town, some of whom were standing near. He said that those who had thrown it there had been guilty of offering a deep insult to religion. The priest's imprecations angered the people of Borgo, blows followed words, and a religious ceremony soon degenerated into a pitched battle. No definite result appears to have attended this fight, and for many days the people were engaged in sending the carcass from the one commune to the other. One morning it was discovered at the door of the church of Lucciana, and the people of the latter town replied by rushing Borgo and leaving the carcass in front of the church there. This went on for some time till a miniature civil war was imminent, but before matters

reached such a pitch the authorities at Bastia stepped in, seized the carcass, and buried it.

The road as it approaches the little town of Biguglia, perched up on the left, is beautifully shaded by olive, lemon, and chestnut trees, maples, and cypresses. Quaint farmhouses are to be seen on either side, buildings with curious, slight touches of Italian architectural skill, decorations which stand out curiously inappropriate, almost grotesque, in their surroundings. Here is a tumble-down little *buvette* with a pretty Italian archway—and rough, cracked, and blackened walls; there two romanesque pillars forming the doorway to a pigsty! Biguglia itself is a little interesting historical town, and was, both under Pisan and Genoese domination, the capital of Corsica, until its capture in 1372 by Arrigo della Rocca.¹ The loss of Biguglia caused the Genoese governor, Leonello Lomellino, to build a fort or bastion a little to the north, and round it sprang up the town which is now Bastia.

It was towards the close of a beautiful evening when I cycled slowly along the picturesque road towards beautiful Bastia, lying a cluster of sunbeams fringed with the blue of sea and sky, looking like “a rose-red city half as old as Time.” I had previously turned aside—how often I turned aside between Ponte Nuovo and Bastia I can scarcely count—to visit Furiani, lying about four kilometres from the road. The little place is on the top of a hill with the ruins of an ancient fort. It was here that Giafferi, one of the great heroes of the Corsican wars of independence, first roused his countrymen to enthusiasm by a brilliant feat of arms, the first of that long and bloody struggle. He was besieged in

¹ See page 60.



BASTIA AND ITS HARBOUR.

Furiani by the Genoese, but, though greatly outnumbered, he defeated them with great slaughter.

And now I will promise not to turn aside again. On the main road each wayside inn, each trellised, vine-clad porch, had its little knot of gossiping men and women, and playing children. The traveller is greeted now with a cheery "Evviv', Signor'," now with a friendly invitation to refresh himself with the generous wine of the countryside—"with beaded bubbles winking at the brim"—and to tell once more how he can be energetic enough to tour through all Corsica, what he thinks of the island, if he has been to Ajaccio, to Bonifacio—Ah! what energy!—if he believes that there are bandits still in Corsica, and a score of oft-repeated questions.

Bastia within the last half-century has doubled its population, which now stands at close upon thirty thousand, and that period has witnessed an astonishing growth in commerce and industry. When Gregorovius visited the place in 1852, fifteen thousand people were closely packed in the tall tenements of the *haute ville*, which lay "in an amphitheatre round the little harbour," that is, the *vieux port*; here were the "best streets"; the Via Traversa was then only "a few years old, with six or seven-storied houses; a Palais de Justice at least is being built in the Via Traversa," said the German wanderer. "The Via Traversa is the most lifeless of all the streets of Bastia. All the public life is concentrated upon the Piazza Favaleui, the quay, and the fort."

A quarter of a century seems to have done but little to bring Bastia in line with the times. Mr. H. Seton Merriman has given us a picture of the town at the time when Prussia and France were locked in the struggle of 1870.¹ I wonder what poor Monsieur Clément would

¹ In "The Isle of Unrest."

say if he saw his beloved Bastia as it is to-day! The little wooden playhouse of his day is now no more; a large theatre has taken its place. Colonel Gilbert could no longer say to him at dinner-time, "Your Bastia, my good Clément, your Bastia is a sad place." Bastia is a sad place no longer; it is gay, debonair, workaday; it has blossomed out into a proud, miniature Paris. "Notre grande ville," your Corsican calls it. The modern Colonel Gilbert will not find to-day a town with one hotel and one street. Monsieur Clément would now have a score of rivals in his own particular line of business where once he reigned supreme. But if Monsieur and his donkey have vanished, the affable Corsican *chef's* spirit goes marching on in more ambitious fashion. Bastia, in which, in 1852, Gregorovius had great difficulty in finding an inn, having to be content on landing with "a very unclean room" and a supper of wheaten bread, sheep's milk, cheese and wine, has to-day half-a-dozen large and excellent hotels, a score of restaurants, and a hundred *cafés*. The Via Traversa, which Gregorovius saw building, has run away towards the north for half-a-mile. It is now the Boulevard du Palais, and the newer portion, the Boulevard Paoli, though the ancient name of the thoroughfare still lingers in the mouths of the people.

Merriman stigmatised the Boulevard du Palais as the place "where all the shops are and where the modern European necessities of daily life are not to be obtained for love or money." Here is the novelist's description of how the shopkeepers of the boulevard thirty years ago catered for human needs. "There are two excellent knife shops in the Boulevard du Palais, where every description of stiletto may be purchased. . . . There is a macaroni warehouse. There are two of those mysterious Mediterranean provision warehouses, with some ancient

dried sausages hanging in the window and either door-post flanked by a tub of sardines, highly, and yet, it would seem, insufficiently, cured. There is a tiny book-shop displaying a choice of religious pamphlets and a fly-blown copy of a treatise on viniculture. And finally, an ironmonger will sell you anything but a bath, while he thrives on a lively trade in percussion-caps and gun-powder."

But, although Mr. Merriman ventured the opinion that Bastia never would change, the old order has indeed yielded place to new. The shops have run down to the very end of the growing Boulevard Paoli, and in this street and the Boulevard du Palais millinery can be bought quite as up-to-date, every whit as startling and just as expensive, as in the Rue Royale or Regent Street. Here is a restaurant as well equipped as a first-class London establishment; there, cheek by jowl with a shop where Deutsche Delicatessen find a ready sale, is a "new style tailor," and a vendor of Kodaks and all descriptions of photographic goods. An excellent book-shop offers the latest French and German fiction, together with the works of Sir A. Conan Doyle and Mr. J. M. Barrie, as well as scores of Continental and native periodicals.

Within a stone's-throw of one another are two newspaper offices, for the newspaper, so little in evidence in Ajaccio, is a very necessary thing in Bastia. *Le Bastia Journal* and *Le Petit Bastiais* are similar in "get-up" to the smaller Paris journals, though the range of their news is somewhat limited. They are *journaux à un sou*, and to those accustomed to English and the better French papers the Bastia journals' *dernières nouvelles du monde entier* is more amusing than instructive. One day I picked up a Bastia paper, and here are a few of the news items, each having a number of headings in

big type and consisting of but a few vague lines of matter :—

Bandits in China.
 Fire in Peru.
 Yellow Fever in San Francisco.
 Lynch Law in America.
 Bomb Outrage in Russia.
 Rain in India.

From China to Peru in very truth.

There was no news as to what was going on in Corsica. If there was anything happening in the island, news of it could be learned in the *cafés*. England, France, and Germany were evidently bathed in deepest *dolce far niente*. There was a tearful leading article regarding a shipwreck which had happened a week before on the north coast of France, and—this was really interesting—an article by a Corsican *député* shrieking at the French Government for neglecting Corsica in about a hundred and fifty different directions. The rest of the sheet was filled with what must have been very useful information to those who required it—commercial intelligence of remarkable fulness. In an odd corner was an important item of news—the fact that I had arrived in Bastia and was staying at the Hôtel de France, but any pleasure I might have obtained from the statement was nullified by the atrocious manner in which my name was disguised by bad spelling.

At the top of the Boulevard Paoli the visitor in the afternoon can have coffee and delicious French pastry in a dainty *café*; farther down the English traveller is offered “afternoon tea and plumkek,” commonly supposed to constitute the staple food of the dwellers in our isles. Two cinematograph shows will provide an evening’s entertainment.

Bastia, then, is the part of Corsica into which has

penetrated something of the hustling outer world, something of its life, its art, its fashion. Here the past is not sufficient; Bastia considers the present and the future. Through its gates come more than half of Corsica's imported necessities; its quays are busier than those of Ajaccio; it is full of projects for shortening the distance to and from the lands beyond the Tuscan Sea; it pours forth oil and wine—the generous wine of Cap Corse—and sends to France and Italy the finest lemons in the world, game from the wilds of Monte Cinto and the regions of Luri, dried fish, early fruit and vegetables, flour, maize, chestnuts, and antimony. Bastia has a Chamber of Commerce, a Chamber of Agriculture, and a lady barrister at its Assizes; it is the chief town of the *arrondissement*, the headquarters of the military government of the island, and the commercial and industrial metropolis.

The most striking thing about the town is the difference in the life of Bastia as compared with that of Ajaccio. The southern town is the haunt of the stranger, the Nice of Corsica; Bastia is its Marseilles. Everybody is at work, busy building up a fine future for the town in particular and the island in general. Favoured to a large extent by its geographical position, it has taken to industry and commerce with surprising alacrity and success. As long as Bastia was simply a strong place, it remained huddled under the shadow of the citadel on the south side of the old port. Then as it grew in importance it spread itself slowly but deliberately round that harbour. With the progress-inspiring peace that followed the *année terrible*, it forged ahead northwards along the sea, indulged in broad boulevards, built big warehouses—still carrying the indications of feverish haste—laid out the handsome Place St. Nicolas, and then discovering that the old harbour was much too small, built

another four or five times its size. The coming of the railway, about this time, added to the size of the town, increased its prosperity, and enlarged its opportunities for trade.

The "old town" of Bastia, the most interesting part of the whole place, somewhat resembles Sartène. It is a maze of narrow, tortuous streets, and here, too, an open shutter impedes the traffic. Great houses tower often as high as seven storeys, a common staircase runs up to the top, and a house in many cases gives shelter to a veritable little town of two hundred or three hundred people. In the humbler homes there is but little comfort; furniture is of the scantiest description; life is a dreary succession of simple meals, neighbourly gossip, work, and bed. When the housewife is not cooking, she is chatting with her neighbours; the simplest incident will keep tongues wagging for hours. It is here that most of the fishermen of Bastia—and there are many—live.

The rest of the inhabitants of this neighbourhood keep shops and let shops keep them. These establishments are regarded partly as places for the purchase, often effected by the primitive method of the exchange of goods, of the few necessaries of life, but to a greater extent as a rendezvous for gossip and scandal. Dull little places these shops are. Here is one "merchant" who combines the selling of fruit and fish with old iron and walking sticks. The tiny, cracked and plastered window might have been dressed an æon ago; fruit in boxes makes it impossible to move about in more than a square yard of space inside; pails of fish are strewn on the pavement, and as a "merchant"—they all employ that spacious term—indulges in similar business tactics on the other side of the narrow street, only very little space is left in the middle of the thoroughfare for the passer-by. Not far off a "merchant," whose stock-in-

trade consists of daggers, knives, and trinkets, is asleep on a chair by his shop, the *Bastia Journal* on his knees. In vendetta days he did a splendid trade, for his stilettos were sharp and beautifully pointed. He rouses himself to find me examining a ponderous dagger with "vendetta" carved menacingly upon it.

"A fine souvenir of the good old days in Corsica," I remark.

He shrugs his shoulders and thinks again of the days when hate was hot and business good.

"If Monsieur wants a souvenir of that description," he says slowly, "that is not the thing. Let Monsieur strike a bargain with a peasant for a stiletto which has been—used. This is a new dagger and has not been used. That is not what Monsieur wants. It would be wrong of me to sell it to him as a souvenir."

I think the reader will admit that for a "merchant" to take up such an attitude towards a would-be customer from whom he might have made a franc or two of profit without trouble is sufficiently remarkable. He refused to sell the article—the only thing I fancied in the shop—so I had to depart in search of a less scrupulous trader.

In the little *buvettes* people sit, endlessly it seems, over their glasses of absinthe, that green siren which has ensnared the Corsican to such a lamentable extent. A well-thumbed *Petit Bastiais* or *Bastia Journal* provides something to talk about for hours, and cards and a few simple games occupy the attention of many quiet old men from morning till night. Women pass up and down the narrow streets carrying on their heads pails of water, their scanty purchases, or their goods for sale, some knitting as they go, and now and then stopping to indulge in gossip.

Articles of food, I noticed, are, as a rule, cheap enough, judged from a visitor's standpoint, fruit especially so.

But if the means at the command of the people in this part of the town, and the fact that some strange idiosyncrasy permits them to do no more work than is absolutely necessary are taken into consideration, then it is seen that the struggle to live is a fairly severe one. Yet every one looks strong and well nourished; the poorest houses are strikingly clean. There is, of course, nothing of the fetid atmosphere of a city about Bastia; industry has not yet brought that to any part of Corsica; I hope it never will.

I made the acquaintance of a number of fishermen living in the "old town," and I was thus enabled to obtain an excellent insight into the life of the poor of Bastia, and I must say that it was an experience which does not pull at one's heartstrings as a similar one would amongst the poor of countries where the people are held in the grip of industrialism. At meal times the lower-class Bastia housewife makes excellent use of the cheap vegetables, fruit, and fish which are so plentiful. Meals are well cooked and wholesome, and even in the very poorest families the children are bright, healthy, and happy, hugely interested in their lessons and their games. Pleasant little boys and girls they are, carried into a fifth heaven of delight by the gift of a stick of chocolate or a simple toy.

Just as from Regent Street one can reach the worst London slums in a minute or two, or from the fashionable boulevards of Paris arrive in the narrowest, darkest *ruelles* by a few turns, so in Bastia do high life and low life exist side by side. A distinctive feature of the "new town" is the height to which the houses facing the main streets are built. Five storeys is the usual height, six or seven being quite common. The architecture is that plain, clean-looking style usual in French towns, with nothing of those florid decorations with which the German





A CORNER OF BASTIA.

house-builder loves dearly to adorn his handiwork. And how your busy Bastiais loves to keep his house white and glittering, with utter disregard for the eyes of those who must be out in the streets when the strong noonday sun is shining fiercely on the brightly coloured walls! It amounts almost to a passion with him, and it certainly gives to the streets a charming air of freshness and an appearance of beauty.

There is a good deal of the Parisian about the upper-class Bastiais. They are not "home-keeping hearts," like the Ajacciens. They like to lunch and dine in restaurants; in fashionable attire, they have made the afternoon promenade "the correct thing"; they indulge in visits to *cafés* for "afternoon tea," when they nibble at *petits pains* and talk scandal. Between six and seven o'clock Monsieur appears with Madame in Parisian splendour. Their boys and girls, charmingly mannered children, accompany them. Friends meet friends, and happy chattering groups find their way to the hotels or restaurants to enjoy the evening meal. After dinner the band will play in the spacious, brightly lighted Place St. Nicolas, and there fashionable Bastia promenades in the delightful cool of the evening. The streets on Sundays, and especially the Boulevard Paoli and the Boulevard du Palais, present a pretty sight—a picture of fashion. Why, I do not believe that even *la ville lumière* can match the charm and beauty of this miniature Paris by the Tuscan Sea.

There is one thing in Bastia, however, that I do not like. That is the statue of Napoleon on the Place St. Nicolas, representing Bonaparte gloomily gazing, in moody surprise as it were, across the sea to the island of Elba. As a piece of sculptural work simply, it is excellent, even if too huge. The Florentine sculptor, M. Bartholini, has chosen his marble with rare skill; the

mere workmanship is flawless. But when one comes to consider it as a statue of Napoleon Bonaparte there is only one word which can be applied to it, and that word—grotesque. The great Emperor is in Roman costume such as Brutus or Cassius would have hesitated to wear in public. The head is not that of Napoleon; the face is not that which a hundred pictures have accustomed us to regard as the visage of the conqueror. The body is given a muscular development which Napoleon certainly never possessed. And the feet—sandalless—well, as the Bastiais says, “Oh, Napoléon, ces pieds!” How is it, I have often wondered, that Corsica is so unfortunate in her statues of her great son? There is the terrible “inkstand” on the Place du Diamant at Ajaccio, and the ridiculous statue of the Premier Consul amongst the *palmiers* near by, and this awful thing scowling over at Elba. Not only Corsica, but the world, appears still to be waiting for a really great statue of the world’s master military mind.

On the Place St. Nicolas it can be seen how Bastia is being added to with skill and foresight. The beautiful Place, open to the sea, cannot be spoiled or lessened by buildings, and the town is growing to the north in regular, straight streets and square blocks of buildings. The railway-station is roomy, and is the largest in Corsica. There is a good attempt at drainage, which Corté lacks so greatly, and with regard to which even Ajaccio is so far behind. Its water supply from the surrounding hills is undoubtedly better than that of any other town in the island, while it has to mix with it the delightful wines of the surrounding country and of Cap Corse. Its climate, too, has a tonic effect, and a Bastia doctor whom I met during my stay was loud in its praises. He maintained that it was second to none in Europe. There is not the slightest reason why Bastia

should not rival Nice one of these days as a holiday resort. It is within easy reach of the French Mediterranean coast ; its hotels may be termed excellent without reservation ; the scenery within easy reach of the town is altogether charming. Living is a great deal cheaper on the best scale than in Ajaccio, though, of course, that recommendation may vanish with the coming of tourists in anything like large numbers. As yet it is comparatively unknown ; its charms are not hymned in attractive pamphlets, lauded in big-type newspaper advertisements, nor exaggerated in huge five-colour posters at the railway stations.

Again, Bastia is a fine base of operations for seeing Corsica. St. Florent and lovely Cap Corse are within easy driving reach, and the railway will take the sportsman down the east coast to the quiet sporting paradise round Ghisonaccia, or the lover of Swiss-like scenery and un-Swiss-like calm to the charming regions round Vizzavona.

In the neighbourhood of Bastia, too, the country is particularly beautiful. Away to the north stretches the lovely region of Cap Corse, which deserves, and must have, a chapter to itself. Between Bastia and St. Florent is the Col de Teghime, a trifle over ten kilometres distant and an exquisite day's excursion. The town is left by the Boulevard du Cardo, on the western side of the town. The route is beautifully shaded, and vista follows vista of beautiful gardens, well-kept vineyards, and here and there lovely villas. Then the cultivated countryside is left behind, and the *maquis* appears again. The *col* itself is nearly 2,000 feet above sea-level, and on reaching the height of land a glorious view of the western sea, with shining St. Florent by its tideless shore, bursts into view. Behind, the Tuscan Sea, with the islands of Elba, Capraja, and Monte Cristo, is

equally beautiful ; while to the north there spreads away to the horizon the mountain-chain which is the backbone of Cap Corse, with Monte Stello—over 4,000 feet high—standing up proudly, and the green and fresh slopes on either side stretching to the sea.

I did not go any farther than the *col*, because it was my intention to reach St. Florent in the manner described in the following chapter. Lovely walks abound in the vicinity of the town, and a picnic, to which some kind friends invited me, convinced me that the neighbourhood of Bastia is indeed a picnicker's paradise.

It was with infinite regret that I turned my back on Bastia to start my journey round Cap Corse, for that little Paris is the most charming town in an island of charm, and if Fate ever wishes to be specially kind to me, it has only to guide my steps once more to beautiful Bastia by the Tuscan Sea, and to allow me greater leisure to appreciate its beauty and enjoy its perfect climate.

CHAPTER X

THROUGH CAP CORSE, THE GARDEN OF THE "SCENTED ISLE"

"Cap Corse is the good boy of Corsica, where men think sorrowfully of the wilder communes of the south."

H. SETON MERRIMAN.

LONG ago at school, when the study of very elementary geography often degenerated into the discovery of human, animal, and other forms in the world's rugged coast-line, we termed Corsica a scent-bottle—which was a much more appropriate description than we deemed it then—with Cap Corse as the neck, so that I was somewhat surprised to come across Corsican schoolboys who had hit upon the same comparison. But, though this does some credit to schoolboy imagination, the visitor to the "Scented Isle" will always recall Cap Corse as the "Garden of Corsica." "The Cap" is, of course, the long peninsula extending from Bastia and St. Florent northwards for a distance of about 30 miles and varying in breadth from eight to ten miles. The distance by "the Cap" road between the two towns is nearly 72 miles, or slightly over 100 kilometres. The Col de Teghime road is its southern bound. South of this route the unruly mountains spread themselves out in loose array from Borgo to Belgodere, but marshal themselves in

single file along the peninsula until the most advanced of their line looks sternly down on the little northern islet of Giraglia. It is a fine and imposing chain, sloping gently down to the sea on the eastern side, but rugged and rough where it faces the west. From the Col de Teghime the southern peak of this chain is scarcely a mile away. It is the Sierra di Pigno, marked on the map as being 957 mètres high. A little farther north is Monte Pietra Pinzuta, nearly 1,200 mètres high, while Monte Stello, an imposing mass, ties with its neighbour—La Cima della Follice—for highest place. Both are said to tower 1,305 mètres above sea level, but doubtless the odd centimetres have been disregarded for the sake of alpine peace and quietness.

Beyond La Cima is Monte Alticcione, which, judging by the look of its name, should be the highest, but it is out-topped by the mountain twins by a mere beggarly 160 odd mètres, a trifle which Alticcione doubtless thinks is not worth fighting about. What it loses in altitude, it gains in stately grandeur and picturesqueness. The extreme northern ridge of the chain is guarded by the Pointe de Tarricella, 550 mètres high, a mountain so taken up with its important geographical position that it accounts altitude a vainglory. Nature has certainly excelled herself in crowding into such a narrow space an imposing array of mountains and attendant valleys. She has crowded her canvas, but her picture hangs on the line in the palace of the world's masterpieces.

Cap Corse is well watered. A hundred streams rush down on their short journey from their mountain cradle to their ocean grave ; the soil is fertile ; the *maquis* not too greedy. This all-devouring shroud has been vigorously repelled by the Cap cultivators, and it is really surprising to notice to what an extent the soil is tilled on the mountain sides. Where the earth is only a few feet deep,

the ground has been banked up and ingeniously watered. In fact, where one least expects cultivation in Cap Corse, there it is to be found. In some parts it has even been necessary, before the ground would yield its fruits, to protect it from the sea winds, and this is done by hedges of briar. Fruit trees of all kinds grow in profuse abundance and are carefully tended. The vine, too, is sedulously cultivated, and the wines of Cap Corse are, of course, well known and excellent. The dreaded phylloxera a number of years ago played havoc with the vineyards, and even now in many parts of the peninsula the result of its ravages is visible, but the damage is gradually being repaired. In the north of the Cap a considerable amount of antimony is mined. I was told that the yearly output is about two thousand tons. Most of this is sent to England.

The mountainous nature of the peninsula has not been without its effect on the people. Mountains have been responsible for much of the world's history and for the rearing of its finest races. So it is with Cap Corse, though the spell of the height has had another effect on the inhabitants of the peninsula as compared with the spirit it has instilled farther south. I have attempted to show how the mountains of the south have bred a race with a fierce love of liberty, a passionate hatred of oppression. In the Cap the mountain spirit has engendered a love of hearth and home, a gentler nature than that of the warlike Southrons. In early days Pisans and Genoese settled in this part, and the people, judging there was room for them, were friendly and the two races lived together peacefully. The result has been that the Cap has always been Genoese in sentiment. Did not the Pisans and the Genoese build that string of watch-towers round her coast to ward off the raids of the marauding Saracens ?

Gregorovius says : " Cap Corse always had the reputation, confirmed by its very position, of Genoese sentiments, and its inhabitants were deemed unwarlike. Even at the present day the Corsican mountaineers look down with contempt upon the gentle and stirring people of the peninsula." The historian Filippini says of the inhabitants of the Cap : " They dress well, and are from their commerce, and the vicinity of the Continent, much more domestic than the other Corsicans. There obtains among them great integrity and good faith."

The Cap people, besides having the iron of the mountain in their souls, have learned the lesson of freedom which the sea teaches by its sonorous music hymned round a rugged coast, while La Castagniccia, where, after Cap Corse, the most distinctive of the divisions of the Corsican race has been reared, is shut off from a listless sea by a belt of feverland. The Cap people are bold seamen, unlike other Corsicans, and whenever Corsica has boasted its little navy, it has been largely led and manned by sailors of the peninsula.

Even if history were silent the traveller could easily read of the storms of the past as he goes through the peninsula. In addition to the crumbling watch-towers with their speechless tale of unrest, the arrangement of most of the villages tells of stormy ages. The villages are split, as it were, into two, one part being perched for safety in time of war well up among the mountains, the other being on the coast and peopled when peace, having brought security, allowed the people to pursue their occupations by the sea, for even to-day the majority of the Cap people gain their livelihood from the ocean. For example, in the north of the peninsula, mountain-rimmed, stands Luri, while down the valley on the eastern coast is the Marina de Luri. The *marina*, in most cases, is a poor place, generally consisting of but a few houses. It never

appears to have lost its sense of insecurity, the heritage of ages of unrest.

Cap Corse owes a great deal of its prosperity to a section of the people called, in popular parlance, *Americains*.

For some reason or other, a large number of Corsicans are to be found in Central and South America, and, as I have said, the Corsican makes a bad exile. When he has made his "fortune" abroad—and to the Corsican "fortune" is not a huge sum—he returns to his native land to live out the remainder of his days. The fertility of the soil of Cap Corse attracts the majority of these returning "millionaires," and they mostly decide to settle where the cultivation of the soil will bring them the best return. Cap Corse has still room for many a "millionaire," and you may be sure, when wandering through the peninsula, that those houses which are bigger and better than their neighbours belong to this class of society.

The busy world has not penetrated much into Cap Corse; still a sturdy peasant life flourishes; its old passions are calmed and its struggles, save with Nature, are long past; it goes its ancient ways, knowing little of the new things which time pours out on the restless nations and wishing no other life than to be happy amongst its vineyards and gardens, its orchards and its flocks.

Between Bastia and Rogliano—that is, along the eastern side of the Cap—there is much to be seen. On the first part of this section of my journey I had the company of a Bastia gentleman who took a great deal of interest in my wanderings and who accompanied me as far as to Brando, where he wished me to see the wonderful grottos. It was an exquisite morning when,

about five o'clock, we wheeled—for my friend was an ardent cyclist—out of pretty Bastia by the coast road leading north. A gentle breeze with just a touch of cold in it came from the mirror-like sea ; in the early light Elba, Capraja, and Monte Cristo loomed out, ghostly islets on the horizon.

The condition of the road round the Cap is all that can be desired, though near Bastia the dust lies on it five or six inches in depth. It follows the ins and outs of the irregular coast line, now dipping down almost to a level with the gently murmuring, rippling wavelets, now rising far above them. Walnut and chestnut trees line the route on the landward side ; from the road picturesque valleys cut their way inland. It is not long before the traveller is presented with many a typical Cap Corse view. They are unique in the island. One of the prettiest on the east coast is at the Tour de Toga. The old Genoese watch-tower is falling gradually into the realm of the past and taking its story with it ; the fresh green *paysage* is indeed charming to be amongst, with the perfume of its early morning purity ; here and there somnolent little villages and white villas cut the landscape up into pictures ; out at sea the fishermen are busy with their nets and lines.

Our first halt was at Pietranera, where we filled our pockets with delicious oranges from the basket of a smiling peasant girl who had hailed us from a somewhat elevated seat on the wall of a ruined cottage. We passed the Marina de Miomo, a quaint little fishing village with the inevitable Genoese tower, and, at six kilometres from Bastia, Lavadina with its pretty little church. Little more than a kilometre farther on a flight of stone steps runs down to the road, and this, my companion said, led to the grotto of Brando. We left our cycles at a mill near by and climbed up the steep, stair-like path leading

through a cluster of oaks, nettle-trees, and cherry-trees, banks of rock hemming us in on either hand. The guardian of the grotto, who lives near it, had just risen, and he was pleased to see two early morning visitors.

The grotto was discovered rather more than half a century ago. It is entered by a stairway, and the visitor first finds himself in a cavern about twenty-five feet long with stalactites, some red, some yellow, and others as white as snow. The caverns are lighted by lamps, and the dim flickering radiance plays amongst the stalactites in a curiously lurid fashion, recalling the ghostly treasure houses of many a fairy tale. In the *grande salle* as the guardian called the larger cave, red stalactites predominate, and the peculiar formations, like mystic forms from a forgotten past, are seen at their best. Another *couloir* beyond is the farthest bound of the grotto. The grotto is, of course, by no means a large one, but one striking feature is the great number of stalactites packed into a small space and the remarkably peculiar formations which many of them have assumed.

Gregorovius, in his account of the cavern, mentions a story told to him by a girl who showed him over the grotto. He says that when the cavern was discovered, shortly before his visit, a bandit's bones with a gun beside them were found in it, and the inference is that the last of a band of outlaws crawled wounded into the grotto to die—a place, probably, which had often previously been used by bandits as a refuge. The story, however, is doubtful; the guardian himself did not believe it when I asked him about it. He had been showing people over the grotto for many long years and he declared that when it was discovered the entrance was only large enough to admit an arm. He was certain, he said, that neither human bones nor a gun were found inside.

Outside once more, my friend and I lingered for a little

in the immediate neighbourhood of the grotto, while the kindly guardian showed us some of the natural splendours on the estate on which the grotto is situated. Vines are cultivated in abundance, and orange, fig, and olive trees, laurels, cypresses, and pines, with flowers of all kinds in bafflingly beautiful array, are spread out like a carpet of many colours and cunning texture. When we reached the road again my friend turned back to Bastia.

At short, irregular intervals after this *marinas* are planted all along the coast, and about half a mile brought me to Erbalunga, which is the Marina de Brando. The *hameau* is situated on a little peninsula above which frowns an old ruined tower. It was from Erbalunga, in days long gone by, that Cap Corse was ruled by that powerful family, the Gentili, and the imposing ruins of the castle of that powerful clan are still to be seen near the little town. Leaving this place, I began to look out for the Church or Convent of St. Catherine, and at the Marina de Sisco, near Cape Sago, the most easterly point of Cap Corse, I was told that it was about a kilometre distant. I soon found it in a cluster of tumble-down houses near the road. About the church itself there is little of interest; there is an appearance of Byzantine style about it, but I believe it only dates from about the beginning of the fourteenth century. At any rate, if we are to believe an interesting little bit of tradition, the church must have been in existence about the year 1355, which is just a trifle late for a church in that style. Most likely it was built of the remains of an earlier Byzantine edifice, some of the Byzantine mouldings and features being preserved in the later building.

There are, certainly, evidences of work of a much later period than that, and a definite record exists, I believe, which shows that an enlarged Church of St. Catherine was consecrated about the year 1469.

My desire to see it was accounted for by the fact that in Bastia I had been told that in it were to be found some of the most remarkable relics in the world. They are said to comprise :—

Aaron's Rod which blossomed,
A piece of the leather raiment which was worn by John the Baptist,
A bit of the clay from which Adam was made,
Almonds from the Garden of Eden,
Manna from the Desert,
A piece from the cradle of Christ,
The rod with which Moses parted the Red Sea,
Several pieces of thread spun by the Virgin Mary.

and a few other things of lesser interest.

The story goes that, during a terrible storm in the year 1355, a ship from the Levant was wrecked on the coast near the commune of Sisco, and the crew had the greatest difficulty in saving themselves. As a votive offering for their deliverance from a watery grave they placed the holy relics, which they were carrying on the ship, in the Church of St. Catherine.

I made many inquiries as to whether it was possible to gain admission into the church, but was unable to find any one who could or would admit me.

"But is one not permitted to see the sacred relics?" I asked an old gentleman at last.

"There are no relics in the Church of St. Catherine," was the reply. "They are to be found in the Church of St. Sisco, higher up the hill. But," he added, "it is impossible to see them—and it is too warm to climb."

It was warm—too hot, in fact, to mount that trying spur of Monte Stello, and, as the good-natured old gentleman invited me to enter his little house, where his wife was preparing *déjeuner*, I postponed further inquiries till the afternoon and allowed myself the interesting relaxation

of a chat with my host, who seemed to have a memory which penetrated back into the dark ages. He was, as a matter of fact, eighty-nine years of age, and his wife seventy-six, and nothing would please them but that I must stay and partake of *déjeuner*, which, to tell the truth, I was delighted to do.

Inquiries in the afternoon soon gave me to understand that it would be impossible to see the relics. Some time ago they were removed from the now disused edifice of St. Catherine's and in their new resting-place were more jealously guarded than ever. Gregorovius mentions the relics, but does not say that he saw them. One priest I consulted said that no "ordinary traveller"—thus he flattered me—had seen the relics. He had not himself, but he thought that some pilgrims had.

After leaving behind the numerous *hameaux* of this neighbourhood, the country becomes, as the French say, more *savage*. The *maquis* to a large extent covers the land and there is not much shade. It was, however, quite a pleasant change to cycle kilometre after kilometre without encountering a hill which meant dismounting. The route still hugged the coast, rising and falling slightly.

Tiny villages are frequent, and on the road the lazy road-menders are seen here and there doing a little work. They are only too glad to have an opportunity to leave off work and chat on a few restricted subjects with the stranger. Men and women are at work in the fields, and those within hail invariably shouted out "Evviva, Signore!" as I wheeled slowly along.

Nearly twenty-six kilometres from Bastia is the Marina de Luri (or Santa Severa). From this place a good road cuts across the peninsula to Pino. The distance is about eleven miles and Luri is a little more than half way. I had decided, however, to visit Luri from the other side

of the peninsula. From Santa Severa northwards the scenery becomes still more beautiful, and the excellent cultivation of the land shows that there are "Americans" about. There is a distinct air of prosperity, too, about the Marina de Macinaggio, a little place which appears to be able to boast of some trade, which it has attracted doubtless on account of the fact that it is the nearest Corsican port to the Continent, and the only place of importance north of Bastia. It was from this spot that, in 1767, Paoli's expedition of conquest against the island of Capraja set out.

At that time Paoli was at the height of his fame and was ruling Corsica with the greatest success, to the consequent anger of the Genoese. The Republic, then, was hurtling towards its doom. For fifty years France had been her protector, and she now concluded a treaty with her benefactress whereby French troops should occupy for ten years Ajaccio, Calvi, St. Florent, and Algajola, and in accordance with this agreement the Comte de Marbœuf landed with six battalions. At first war seemed imminent, but amicable relations were eventually established between the Corsicans and the French. Capraja was, therefore, the nearest stronghold of the Genoese, since all the fortresses in the island itself had been handed over to the French, and it was decided to attack the Republic at that spot. The isle lies just a hundred kilometres from the coast of Cap Corse ; it is eighty kilometres in circumference, and at the time I am speaking of it had a population of a little over a thousand people, living in a town of the same name as the island. The town was protected by a formidable fort built in 1436.

The story goes that one Paul Mattei, of Centuri, was shipwrecked on the island, and that during his enforced stay there he informed himself as to the strength of the Genoese garrison and the weak points of their defences,

and drew up a plan by which he thought the island might be successfully attacked. On his return to Corsica he placed his information and plan before Paoli, who, being immediately persuaded of the excellence of the idea, at once gave orders for arrangements to be made for the conquest of the island.

On February 16, 1767, a vessel, with two hundred well-armed Corsicans and piloted by Caprajans, set sail, and disembarked its little army in the tiny Bay del Crepo. The Genoese commander had been warned of the pending attack, and had despatched a small force to attack the Corsicans, but this band was quickly disarmed by the invaders, who pushed on and invested the citadel. Paoli, hearing of the success of the expedition, despatched three hundred additional men to its aid, while Genoa was likewise not inactive. The Republic sent a fleet of twenty sail to the aid of the besieged. During the whole of March a wild sea howled round the island. On the 30th of that month the Corsicans took by assault one of the bastions of the fort, which, however, was able to hold out during April and the half of May. On the 3rd of the latter month the Genoese fleet managed to land a force of a hundred and fifty men, which the Corsicans quickly cut to pieces. On the 18th another squadron of forty ships appeared before the island, but was unable to help the hard pressed defenders. The result of the fleet's impotence was that the garrison surrendered and evacuated the fortress on May 31st.

Five hundred Corsican peasants had defied all Genoa and conquered! But it was not the Genoa of old. The vespers of that great Power were sounding dolefully; it was the evening of her day of domination. The once great Republic dared scarcely think of reprisals, so she turned again to France, her protectress, and made an arrangement whereby the period of the occupation of

Corsican strongholds by the French was prolonged, and finally the Republic sold Corsica to France for £2,000,000! Genoa's generations of war, devastation, murder and massacre had ended in leaving Corsica free, great, and happy. Then, by some sardonic freak of fate, her last impotent acts sealed the doom of Corsica as a nation! What defied Genoa, formidable or fading, was bent before the rising power of France.

It was at Macinaggio, too, that Paoli landed after his twenty years of exile in London. On the slopes of the mountains many pleasant little *hameaux* are buried in masses of olive and lemon trees, while the vine grows abundantly as far as the eye can reach.

The road then gradually leaves the coast, and soon from the main route there branches off a rough road to Rogliano, seen for many miles around on a high eminence. I was slowly negotiating this road—for at first it is not so steep as to make walking necessary—when, at a turn, two young girls came suddenly along on mules. At the sight of my machine the stubborn animals halted, nearly throwing their riders into the dust, and by their kicking provided what would in any other country save Corsica be work for the road-mender. I dismounted and stood in front of my machine, but the mules refused to move, and one of the demoiselles, both of whom were carrying baskets of oranges, took a large mellow fruit and threw it to me. I took this to be a present *en passant*, though it looked dangerously like a bold attempt to hit me in the eye. As I caught it another came spluttering at my feet, and a third I also managed to catch.

I inquired how long it was going to rain oranges, and at the same time refused to rob them of their fruit. However, we made a bargain, and for a large cake of chocolate, purchased at Macinaggio, I received four delicious-looking oranges.

"It's a new idea to ride up to Rogliano on a vélo, isn't it?" ventured she who opened the battle. "The road is too steep."

"But Monsieur can ride down again nicely, stupid," remarked the other.

"And break his neck," added the first.

"À Dieu ne plaise!" they both murmured as they turned their attention to the chocolate, telling me where the hotel was, and begging me to carry their greeting to Madame.

Then the mules thought it was time to report progress, and with pranks and kicks that would have unseated many a rider they carried off their fair burdens, who, with a merry laugh, wished me *bonne tournée*.

Such are the amenities of the road in Corsica.

I sat down by the roadside and enjoyed the excellent fruit, and then climbed up into Rogliano. It is a stiff climb, and as I had been on the road for fourteen hours the inn room was very welcome. The *auberge* is reached by climbing through several *hameaux* lying sleepily among cherry and olive trees. The cluster of hamlets which goes by the name of Rogliano looks as though it had been scattered on the hillside from some Titanic pepperbox, so grotesque is the position of many of the houses. The road twists up the hillside and dwellings cling to the steeps above and below, while far and wide to the east is shining Corsica and the glittering Tuscan Sea.

Next morning early I climbed still higher, above Quercioli, to a wide natural terrace, dominating the *hameaux*, where there stands an ancient convent. But the hooded, cloaked figures are to be seen no more; the soothing vespers are hushed. Long ago the convent was deserted, and now several families use it as a dwelling-house. Still higher from the top of Monte del

Poggio, over 1,500 feet high, can be seen what I think is the finest view of all the natural magnificence of Cap Corse. The Cap is one long panorama, but from Del Poggio is seen a picture, the calmness and charm of which must live for ever in the memory of any one who has fed his eyes upon its restful successions of colour. In the early morning sunshine the view extends far along the coast road leading south ; in the golden radiance of the east the sun, as I watched, rose "from silken coverlets of the tossed-back clouds ;" the sea's blue was delicately fringed by the faint line of the gently-stirring surf on the shore, and the wide silken robe seemed to be embroidered with flashing diamonds—little waves that caught for a meagre moment the lavishly-given eastern gold, to throw it starlike as they sank to the watcher far away. It was a scene of infinite peace, the silence delightfully broken by distant children's voices, the rippling music of a song-bird here and there, and the gentle tinkle of bells from a herd of goats hidden somewhere in the *maquis*.

It was still early when I reached the cross roads again. From there the route rises somewhat abruptly, but it is charmingly shaded. One hears many a pleasant song from the orchards as one passes ; charcoal-burners are busy in the mass of trees and the thick *maquis* undergrowth. The road turns inland to cut off the extreme tip of the Cap. Pines become more plentiful as one climbs higher, and the houses of "millionaires" fewer and farther between.

The villages are small in this part of the Cap, and the chief occupation seems to be the keeping of poultry, for hens and ducks swarm in great numbers near every tiny wayside cot, and they have not yet learned the art of evading the cyclist, having evidently a notion that only amongst the spokes of his wheels is safety to be found.

The pasturage is excellent, and goats and cows are to be seen in large numbers.

Another charming vista is that of the Valley of Tignese. It runs from beyond the western side of Rogliano to the *route nationale* in the north, and from there in a straggling line to the most northern point of Cap Corse. Down the valley from the road can be seen the Marina de Bargaggio, the sea and the tiny island of Giraglia with its lighthouse, the beam from which carries nearly twenty-five miles out to sea.

Soon the commune of Ersa is reached, with many tiny farms curiously perched on the tops of hills. The rocky coast of the Cap's extremity is clearly seen from this part, and were it not for the usual old watch-tower, it might pass for a little bit of Devon. Botticello is the largest of the *hameaux* in the commune, a pretty little place in a setting of luxuriant vegetation. Antimony is mined in the neighbourhood in considerable quantities, and there are also large quarries of micaceous serpentine-stone of beautiful quality.

At the Col de Serra, 361 mètres above sea-level, according to the road-post, there is a tiny *chemin muletier*, leading off the main road. Near by I stopped to chat with a Corsican boy seated on one mule and leading another. He suggested that, as I was a stranger, I should put my bicycle among the rocks and come up the path a little way to see what he termed the finest sight in all Cap Corse. I did as he suggested, and mounting the second mule, which seemed to regard carrying me as quite an honour, for he went very gently as compared with other mules I had come across in the island, we trotted up the path. We passed a mill and were not long in reaching a point from which the view was to be obtained. The Corsican laddie had not exaggerated matters. The haze of the forenoon heat, perhaps,

limited the extent of one's vision, but the rugged, almost Norwegian coast on the north lay sharply defined as though on a splendid photograph. The sea glittered a light blue without a wave. Between the coastline and where we were standing Nature had spread a carpet of exquisite workmanship. On the east the Tuscan Sea could be seen faintly through the valleys. The island of Capraja stood out clearly; Elba was a misty mass in the distance. To the south-west, however, the view was even finer. The whole of the western side of Cap Corse lay as though it were a picture tinted by a Turner. St. Florent looked like a sunbeam by its pale blue gulf; while on the extreme edge of vision, Cape Cavallo, miles along the coast beyond Calvi, could just be seen like a rampart. The gorgeous background was formed by the Col de Prato, beyond Morosaglia, and the snow-clad summit of the peerless Monte Cinto gleaming "in the blue of fifty miles away." From the *col* the route along the eastern side of Cap Corse begins. The traveller notices at once the striking change in the appearance of the landscape: on the east the country is a garden; on the west the rocky coast stands up bare and gaunt against wave and wind. The rough elements have worked their undisputed will with many curiously fantastic effects, whilst overlooking the shore are the mountain sides where the *maquis* reigns in absolute sovereignty. At Camera I halted at mid-day. It is one of the villages of the commune situated some distance from the coast where the port of Centuri stands. In a quaint little cottage, the nearest approach to an inn which the place boasted, I enjoyed an excellent lunch.

Centuri is the place where James Boswell landed when he visited Corsica. "The prospect of the mountains covered with vines and olives," he says, "was extremely agreeable; and the odour of the myrtle and other aro-

mattick shrubs and flowers that grew all around me was very refreshing. As I walked along I often saw Corsican peasants come suddenly from out of the covert; and as they were armed, I saw how the frightened imagination of the surgeon's mate had raised up so many assassins. Even the man who carried my baggage was armed, and had I been timorous might have alarmed me. But he and I were very good company to one another. As it grew dusky, I repeated to myself these lines from a fine passage in Ariosto:—

“‘ Together through dark woods and winding ways
They walk, nor in their hearts suspicion preys.’”

Centuri to-day is one of the most progressive communes in the island. There is a fine *château*, with a picture gallery of over a hundred pictures, and the commune also boasts a *bureau de bienfaisance*, by which the income of a sum of about £2,000 is administered. The place is famous for its crayfish. All round the coast near the port Italian fishermen are busy. The crayfish are kept in what are called *viviers*, or beds, until they are ready for exportation to Nice, Genoa, and Marseilles. There is a decided air of prosperity about the commune. Gardens are well cultivated; in fact, no matter what the soil is like, it is pressed into producing something. The houses, too, are built with some pretence at style, and the people are kindly and hospitable. Indeed, it was such an interesting place that I got no farther that day.

The next commune is Morsiglia, where Boswell passed his first day or two in Corsica, and the part of the route which I am about to describe was evidently vastly different in those days. “I got a man with an ass to carry my baggage,” says Boswell. “But such a road I never saw. It was absolutely scrambling along the face of the rock overhanging the sea, upon a path sometimes



MORSIGLIA.

not above a foot broad. I thought the ass rather retarded me ; so I prevailed with the man to take the portmanteau and other things on his back. Had I formed my opinion of Corsica from what I saw this morning, I might have been in as bad humour with it as Seneca was, whose reflections in prose are not inferior to his epigrams : 'What can be found so bare, what so rugged all around as this rock ? What more barren of provisions ? What more rude as to its inhabitants ? What, in the very situation of the place, more horrible ? What in climate more intemperate ?' Yet there are more foreigners than natives here. So far then is a change of place from being disagreeable, that even this place hath brought some people away from their country."

But other times, other routes, I suppose. The road is now an excellent one, even for cycling, and Seneca's string of queries could not now be applied to the countryside between Morsiglia and Pino.

Pecorile, the chief hamlet of Morsiglia, has a lofty position, where it is surrounded by shady trees, while below it is a fine bay with a rugged shore. A little farther on, Monte Cinto peeps out of the distance again, and the gulf of Aliso, a succession of little, picturesque fjords, forms an exquisite tableau. Just as the traveller is getting accustomed to *savage* nature, an oasis—so one might almost term it—breaks into view. Cape Minervio stands out boldly, and Nettino, one of the hamlets of Pino, a pretty little place, with a fine *château* and occupying a sort of natural platform, overlooks from amongst the trees a lovely bay with a beautiful stretch of sand. I had lingered long by the way that day and had not covered very much ground. It was my intention to have passed the night at Pino, but on arriving there I decided to push on to Luri. The inn did not appear to be a very grand affair, but Madame was good enough to consent to

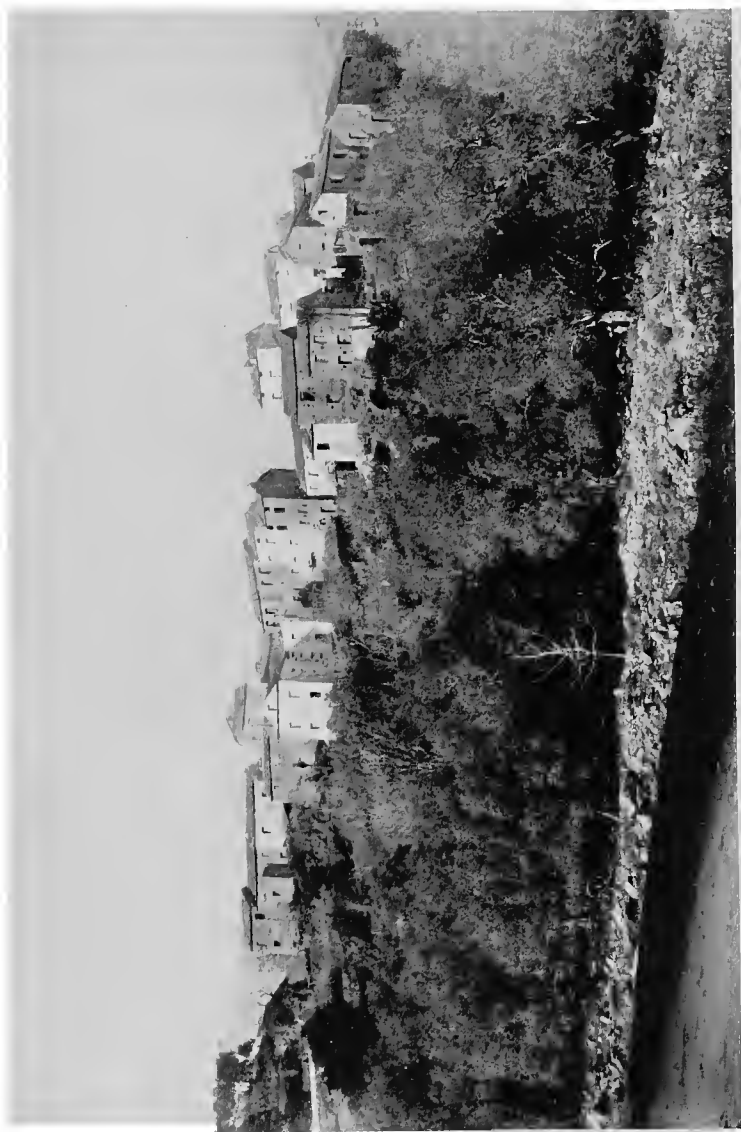
take care of my bicycle and most of my luggage till I returned. Having tied up a small packet of necessities and laid in a little stock of *cigars à un sou*—the purchase being more a *douceur* to Madame than a prospective pleasure to myself, for she refused to accept anything for putting up my *vélo*—I set off to climb up to Luri, about an hour and a half distant.

The late afternoon had just been a trifle cloudy, and as I climbed inland the mist suddenly came down somewhat alarmingly. Soon the sea and everything behind and in front was blotted out, and on entering a desolate gorge my pace slackened to an undecided saunter as the pall of mist rolled down in greater density from the heights.

A score of yards in front was all the distance I could see, and I was soon uncomfortably damp and cold. I have, however, a supreme aversion to turning back, though I must admit that the rolling spectral avalanches almost overcame it. I was about to give in when I walked into a light cart with a mule attached to it, standing by the roadside. The animal was gnawing at the scanty herbage, but there was no one in charge of him. Happy thought! The owner or the driver could not be far distant and it might be as well to wait and see if he were going in my direction. I sauntered round about, not going too far, lest I should be unable to return to the cart, but was unable to discover any house at which the driver might have called. So I waited five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour. The mule was beginning to share my impatience, and I must have waited twenty-five minutes when a stalwart young peasant came out of the mist.

“Ho, Monsieur!” he cried, “you are coming my way?”

“If your way happens to pass the Hôtel du Nord or



LURI.

leads back to Pino, yes," I replied, just as I recognised a young peasant with whom I had lunched at Camera.

I jumped up beside him and we were soon bumping along the road to Luri. Our pace slackened as the mist thickened, and even the mule got alarmed. On and on we went steadily but very slowly, and soon night was adding its quota to the darkness. Dim forms of wayside houses loomed out of the mist beside us and disappeared, and at last a welcome cluster of lights shone dimly with a peering welcome out of the gloom and my friend pulled up beside the hotel. After some persuasion he consented to "descend" and have dinner with me. It was an excellent little inn, one of the best in Cap Corse, I think. Madame was obliging to a fault, the courses were tastily cooked, the wine was *du pays même*, the conversation about Corsica, the coffee superb, the cigars strong and soothing.

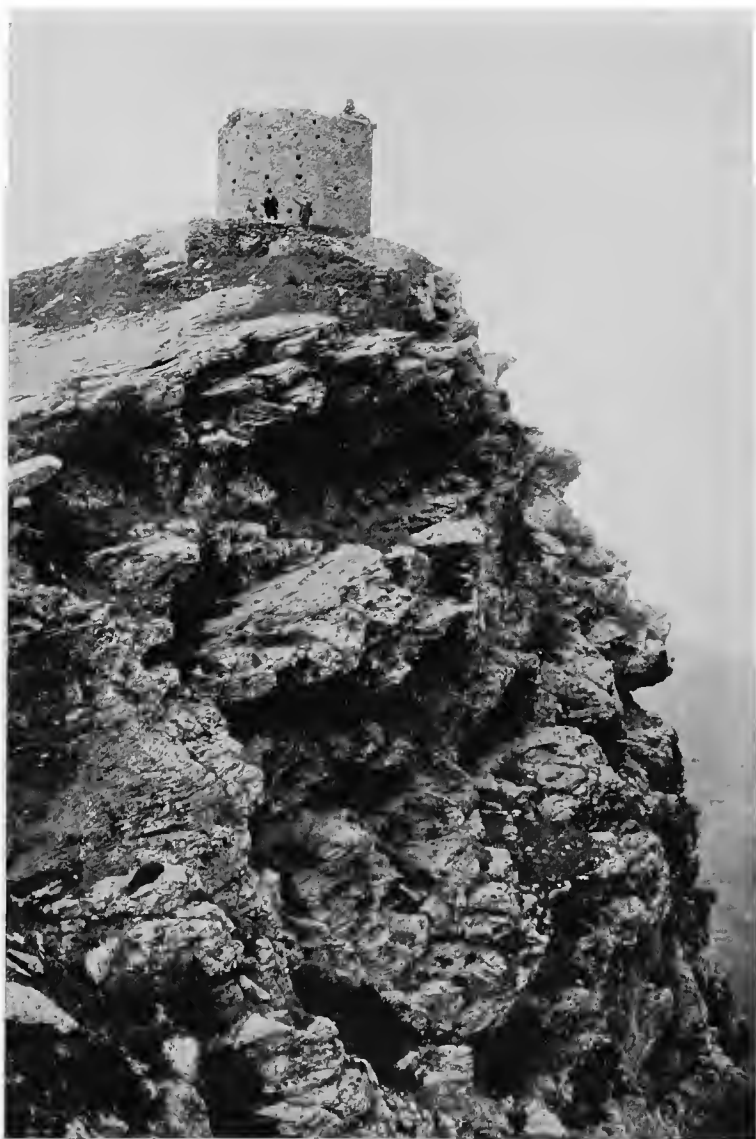
If Nature had been unkind enough to ring down her thickest curtain on the charms of Luri during the afternoon and evening, she rang it up again with the first morning light and showed me the heart of the garden of Corsica in all its faultless splendour. The rushing Luri gurgles noisily through its charming valley to the eastern sea. Lemoņ and orange trees grow in amazing abundance, and the people take the very greatest care in the cultivation of the trees, with the result that Luri fruit is the most favoured in all Corsica and is much in demand on the immediate Continent and even in America, where the returned "millionaires" have no doubt made a market for their produce.

An interesting "sight" in the neighbourhood is the Tower of Seneca. A fine view of it can be obtained from the hotel as it stands, an old ruined structure on a huge rock far on high above the road. The popular tradition has it that Seneca spent the seven years of his

exile in the tower. But alas for an interesting tradition ! How often does hard, cold fact place her icy finger on an attractive story in Corsica ! Gregorovius, who was a great lover of the classics, was told the story and he swallowed it wholesale, weaving round it several interesting chapters, but though I have a great liking and respect for tradition, though I hold to it to the very last, fact in this case is much too strong for me.

“Seneca the Philosopher,” says Boswell in his account of Corsica, “has left us two most horrid pictures of Corsica, very false, indeed, but executed with uncommon strength of fancy and expression. Stoick as he was, of a grave and severe demeanour, he did not escape the Emperor’s jealousy, but being accused of being one of the many gallants with whom the profligate Julia had been guilty of misconduct, he was banished to Corsica, where he remained for seven years ; and where in the province of Cap Corse they still show an old ruin, ‘Il Torre de Seneca’ (‘Seneca’s Tower’). Here he composed his books ‘De Consolatione,’ to Polybius, and to his mother Helvia, with several other works ; and here he indulged his fretted imagination in the following epigrams :—

“O sea-girt Corsica ! whose rude domains
 First owned the culture of Phocæan swains ;
 Cynus, since thus the Greeks thy isle express,
 Greater than Ilva, than Sardinia less ;
 O Corsica ! whose winding rivers feed,
 Unnumbered as their sands, the finny breed ;
 O Corsica ! whose raging heats dismay
 When first returning Summer pours her ray ;
 Yet fiercer plagues by scorching shores dispense,
 When Sirius sheds his baneful influence :
 Spare, spare the banished ! Spare, since such his doom,
 A wretch, who living seeks in thee a tomb !
 Light lay thy earth, in pity to his pains,
 Light lay thy earth upon his sad remains.



SENECA'S TOWER.

"O Corsica ! whom rocks terrific bound,
 Where Nature spreads her wildest deserts round,
 In vain revolving seasons cheer thy soil,
 Nor rip'ning fruits, nor waving harvests smile ;
 Nor blooms the olive mid the winter drear ;
 The votive olive to Minerva dear.
 See, Spring returning, spreads her milder reign !
 Yet shoots no herb, no verdure clothes the plain.
 No cooling springs to quench the traveller's thirst
 From thy parch'd hills in grateful murmurs burst ;
 Nor, hapless isle ! thy barren shores around,
 No wholesome food, fair Ceres' bounty, found.
 Nor ev'n the last sad gift the wretched claim ;
 The pile funereal, and the sacred flame.
 Nought here, alas ! surrounding seas enclose
 Nought but an exile, and an exile's woes.'

"He hath also vented his spleen against the place of his exile in the same extravagant manner in his books 'De Consolatione.' But we must consider that, notwithstanding all the boasted firmness of Seneca, his mind was then clouded with melancholy, and every object around him appeared in rueful colours."

Personally, I fail to understand how such a tradition could have gathered round the tower. Seneca's "epigrams," if nothing else, must convince any one that he did not live among the charms of Luri, for even a philosopher of his stamp would hesitate to overburden his "epigrams" with such a mass of inaccuracies, regarding which the lovely Luri flowing near by must have set up its continual musical denial, and which the far-spread beauties of Nature would, by their seductive glance, have driven from the most stony-hearted Stoic. Then, again, there is nothing Roman about the tower, and it clearly belongs, just as its neighbours do, to Pisan and Genoese times. The years of Seneca's exile were from 43 to 49, and it is far more probable, as indeed it is claimed, that his period of banishment was spent about or near

Mariana, where the Romans had at that time a small colony.

At the Col de Sainte Lucie a rough, steep road leads up to the tower, and early in the morning I scrambled to the height. At places it is almost necessary to go on hands and feet, and just before reaching the summit the road ends and the climb becomes worse than ever. But the reward is ample. At one's feet lies fairest Cap Corse. Elba, Capraja, and the eastern sea greeted me out of the morning light with a charming glitter; the western sea was just catching the radiancy of the rising sun, and the Cap lay, an isle of sunlit mountain tops and shaded valleys, "poised in an ocean of gold."

Like Gregorovius, "I cannot forgive Seneca that he has said nothing, noted down nothing, about Corsica's natural features, and the history and manners of the then population. A single chapter by Seneca on the subject would now be of great value. But it is characteristic of the Roman that he had nothing to say about the barbarous country. Man was at that time haughty, confirmed in his views, and unloving towards the human race. How differently do we now look at Nature and history!"

Not far from Pino is Marinca, the chief village of the commune of Canari. There is an interesting church there, with several pictures bequeathed to it by Cardinal Fesch. But the place of most interest between Pino and St. Florent is Nonza, where there is to be seen one of the most peculiar towers of the Cap. It differs from others in that it is square. High up it stands on a rugged *falaise* rising sheer out of the sea, and the houses of the little place are scattered oddly beside it. Each house has an exquisite little garden, and these plots give every indication of careful cultivation under circumstances which are not altogether ideal.

Nonza is very proud of the story of a great military feat performed there long ago, a feat which, I believe, has been credited to many places less likely to have been the scene of the deed. The French in 1768 had subjugated all the Cap with the exception of the tower of Nonza, which for a considerable time sustained a close siege. Attacking parties were driven back by a fierce fire, but at last the garrison agreed to surrender if allowed to march out with all the honours of war. This was conceded, and old Captain Cascella appeared staggering under a load of muskets and pistols.

"Why is the garrison so long in coming out?" asked the French commander.

"It is here, sir," replied Cascella. "I am the garrison."

As I left Nonza the wide, beautiful gulf of St. Florent became clear in the evening light with its bold headland to the west, behind which lie Ile Rousse and Calvi. High up on the left of my route could be seen Olmeto di Capocorso, the Olmeto which Mr. H. Seton Merriman mentions in his "Isle of Unrest" as "the virtuous," a "good boy," not to be thought of in connection with such bloodthirsty deeds as those which are wrought in the other Olmeto which lies a few miles behind St. Florent.

About this point the scenery changes, and it is easily seen why long ago the region called Cap Corse had its southern bound a little south of Nonza, the southern part of the peninsula being part of the region termed Le Nebbio.

Nature has placed a dividing line as clearly marked as any map-maker could have done on his map. The lively charm of the eastern coast returns to the roadside as the traveller runs down to the Marina de Farinole, situated on a beautiful bay of the same name and looking up to its other part, standing some distance inland in an amphi-

theatre of hills above which Monte Pruno towers. For a little the road still hugs the sea-shore, and then it turns abruptly inland and takes its way through the picturesque valley of the Serraggio, a river delightfully shaded at this part by oleanders, one of the few places in the island where they are to be found. A wide sweep round towards the sea follows, and at the Col de St. Bernardina the Col de Teghime road from Bastia is reached.

The sun was setting as I sped downwards from St. Bernardina towards the town of St. Florent. On the right the last rays from the west flashed their "good night" to Nonza and Farinole, as I took a farewell glance of the garden of the "Scented Isle."



ST. FLORENT.



NONZA.

CHAPTER XI

FROM ST. FLORENT TO CALVI

“St. Florent is a small place, with Ichabod written large on its crumbling houses.”

H. SETON MERRIMAN.

“Civitas Calvi semper fidelis.”

CALVI'S MOTTO.

THE Gulf of St. Florent is as large as that of Ajaccio; when one looks at its position, it seems strange indeed that it has not made the town at its top a seaport of the first importance. But ports such as Ajaccio, Bastia, and Ile Rousse have had numerous advantages over St. Florent. To start with, the town is handicapped as a centre of trade for the interior by the fact that, unlike the three places just mentioned, it has not yet been linked up with the Corsican railway system. Its climate, too, is unhealthy, and not so very long ago the mortality in the place from fever was frightful; even at the present day in the hot months of summer this scourge exacts a sickeningly heavy toll. The town itself, pleasantly enough situated by the sea, and with a mountain background, crouches beside a swamp and runs out to sea on a low tongue of land. The sands from the mountains, brought down by the river Aliso, have rendered the gulf treacherous in the extreme for shipping

of even medium tonnage, and this state of affairs has played and is playing great havoc with the prosperity of the place. Small wonder then that "Ichabod is written large on its crumbling houses." Napoleon was greatly struck, as indeed every one must be, with the fine position of the port. In Antomarchi's "Memoirs" he is stated to have said :—"St. Florent has one of the happiest situations I know. It is the most favourable for commerce ; it touches France and is adjacent to Italy ; its landing-places are secure and convenient, and its roads would receive whole fleets. I would have built a fine large town there, which would have been a capital."

To-day, however, there are, I should think, a scanty thousand people in the place. No Napoleon has ever tried to carry out his dreams ; the more energetic communities of Ile Rousse and Bastia prevent St. Florent from having any considerable trade or a large fishing industry. Fish are particularly abundant, both in the sea and in the river Aliso, and I spent a pleasant forenoon—and a successful one—by the river the day after my arrival. At all the dinners I had at the inn no fewer than three of the courses were fish. St. Florent lobsters have a high reputation to live up to, and I think they still manage to do so. To me, at least, a good lobster always recalls St. Florent. Most of the men in this quiet little spot are fishers, and it stands to reason that if three courses of every dinner in the town are of fish, business in their line cannot be altogether at a standstill.

St. Florent has played its part in the stormy past of Corsica. It dates from about the middle of the fifteenth century and Genoese, French, English, and Corsicans have in turn held and assaulted it. The first named were responsible for its siege from November 17, 1553, to February 17, 1554, when they captured it at the cost

of six thousand men. Then, and for a long time subsequently, it was a very prosperous seaport, and, with the exception of Calvi, the busiest on the western coast. But sharing as it did during many long years the Genoese sentiments of the neighbouring Cap Corse, it was part of Paoli's campaign against the Republic to rob it of its prosperity. He built Ile Rousse as "a gibbet on which to hang Calvi's prosperity," but he succeeded in destroying a good deal more of that of St. Florent than of Calvi, and, though in later years it did succeed in regaining a little of its trade, Bastia, with its railway and its fine shipping accommodation, prevents St. Florent from endeavouring to regain something of its pristine maritime importance, and it is quite resigned to the fate of being that most pathetic of geographical figures—a town with a past.

There is an excellent inn at St. Florent, which, as Mr. H. Seton Merriman says, "has its entrance in the main street, and only the back windows look out upon the quay and across the bay"—the inn in which Colonel Gilbert drank his coffee and listened to the idler's tale of how Count de Vasselot killed Andrei Perucca, who "made sheep's eyes at de Vasselot's young wife." At the side of the inn is the large, shady Place, and the main street runs from it to the end of the point of land on which the town stands. There is nothing to see and but little to do save to fish or chat with the idlers on the quay. On the day I arrived a squad of cavalry monopolised the Place and drained the town of bread. Fish, it is said, went up in price; the tiny shop opposite the inn, where gaudily coloured picture post-cards of an ideal St. Florent are sold, was raided and nearly cleared of its contents; the post-office sold its last stamp; the people of St. Florent, in fact, praised the War Office for entertaining the idea of manœuvres in Corsica and hoped

they would last for a long time. This enlivened the dreamy little place somewhat, and the inhabitants enjoyed immensely the company of the *piou-pious*, who, like their comrades everywhere, are jolly, interesting fellows.

I allowed the heat of the day to die down before I left St. Florent, as I only wished to reach Ile Rousse by nightfall. The road between the two rival ports is fairly good, as far as surface is concerned, but, cutting through a hilly region with a coast adorned by a dozen capes, it is a stiff ride for the cyclist. It is, in addition, largely uninteresting. The pretty view of St. Florent from the rise outside the town and the glimpse of the Ile Rousse at the journey's end are the only photographic inducements which the journey presents. Between the two places the country may be practically termed desert. Immediately outside the town the road leads across the swampy, fever-stricken lowland to the higher country across the inner part of the gulf, and the traveller soon leaves fertility to push on amongst bare rocks and *maquis*. A roundabout road to Bastia, by way of the Col de San Stefano, reaching the main road to the port half way from Casamozza, is passed on the left and a long stiff climb follows. Then one traverses what is called the Désert des Agriates, which well deserves its name. It embraces a wide sweep of country on both sides of the road, extending five or six miles inland on the left and to the sea on the right, a similar distance. Although it has an area of something like forty-five thousand acres it does not contain a single village, and only here and there does one come across a house, evidently thrown up hastily to accommodate a few charcoal burners or stone quarriers and soon deserted and allowed to fall to ruins. The only permanent inhabitants



ILE ROUSSE.

on the "desert" are a few scores of shepherds looking after small flocks of goats on scanty pasturage.

If, however, I were to visit Corsica again I think I should spend a week on the forty-seven kilometres which separate St. Florent from Ile Rousse. No part of northern Corsica is so rich in game, and the sportsman could have a most enjoyable time if he took a small tent with him, and was accompanied by someone to carry it and a few other necessaries. The land lies high, and the air is fresh and free from the damp of night. For the greater part of the year, and especially during the early summer, the weather is ideal for camping out. The less ardent sportsman could make St. Florent or Urtaca his headquarters and sally forth to the "desert" with the dawn. The *route nationale* runs directly through the game region, but apart from this the district has not yet been opened up by roads, and the hunter may wander at his own sweet will through the *maquis* and over the rocks.

Urtaca, ten kilometres from the main road along the Ostriconi, is an excellent centre for the sportsman, either for hunting or fishing. The Ostriconi and its numerous tributaries are what the French call *poissonneux*.

After the *route nationale* crosses the river wayside inns and the houses of *cantonniers* become frequent again, and on approaching Ile Rousse the country loses its arid appearance and vines and olive-trees bordering the road greet the eye with their welcome colour. Soon I reached the railway, and Ile Rousse appeared lying red and glowing, and thoroughly suggesting its name, in the fading light of day. A delightful spin down into the town brought me to the comfortable hotel, where all the diners seemed to be *en famille*. There was an old lady who had made the tiresome journey by rail from Bastia to see her daughter and her son-in-law, and she was being entertained in honour of the occasion. There was

"Madame"—so the waiter called her—who was in charge of a great consignment of photographic enlargements from a Corté firm for delivery in the town, and who was only too eager to expound, to every one who came to the hotel, the advantages of the offer she made of decorating the best room with gilt-framed enlargements of the heads of the house, of children away from home, of relatives, for the small sum of thirty francs per head. Madame was glib of tongue, and I fancy that there are very few houses in Ile Rousse which are not adorned with gilt-frame enlargements of some one of the family. A sergeant was busy talking "shop" about Algeria; a couple of young fellows from Bastia on holiday had developed such enormous appetites that it was difficult for the waiter to get away from their table. But the hero of the evening was an autocyclist, who looked upon my humble mount with the correct amount of ill-concealed scorn. With the French love of the importance which a uniform bestows, he dined in his loose, ill-fitting "oil-skins." For an hour, over coffee and cigars, we listened to his marvellous feats on the auto. He sniffed at my poor seven or eight miles an hour on the road, and in the end promised, with a very condescending air, to "pull me into Calvi" later in the week. A prophetic little bird prompted me to murmur with my thanks, "Nous verrons." He did not like what he took to be my incredulity, and promptly promised to "pull me anywhere I liked," to which I replied that Calvi would suit me admirably.

The waiter, too, was a character in his way. To all the admirable attributes of a French *garçon* he added a voice of Germanic timbre, and his orders were hurled through the little trapdoor to the kitchen in veritable thunderclaps. "Poisson pour un!" "Roti pour un!" "Légumes pour un!" he shouted with particular stress, and at last I was

compelled to thank him for giving a lesson in the pronunciation of the indefinite article much more practical than that of any professor.

Ile Rousse, as I have said, is the work of Paoli. In 1759 he founded the seaport, and his object in doing so may be gathered from a remark of his at the time: "Ho piantato le forche per impiccar Calvi" ("I have erected the gallows on which to hang Calvi"). The town of Algajola, midway between Ile Rousse and Calvi, was then a place of considerable importance, and it probably suffered a great deal more than its larger neighbour, for, while Calvi retains for itself to-day a fair trade, Algajola has, as an *entrepôt*, practically been struck off the map. At the time that Paoli reared Ile Rousse the Genoese were firmly established on the coast, and they did not allow him to carry out his design in peace and quietness. They sent ships and soldiery to harass him, and the builders had practically to work with their guns by their sides. Warehouses and dwellings, however, soon reared their heads, and Ile Rousse, which at first it was intended to call Paolivia, soon became the port for the rich produce of the fertile surrounding province of La Balagna. At the present time perhaps its main trade is the export of very large quantities of olive oil and of fruit.

Ile Rousse, which derives its name from the isles of red granite immediately off the coast, is quite a charming little place. Reaching the town by the route I took, the traveller arrives at a broad Place somewhat similar to that of St. Florent, but smaller. From this the main street runs down to the shady Place Paoli, in the centre of which are a fountain and a statue, in white marble, of the illustrious patriot. Beyond this is an elaborate market hall, a building with large pillars, and farther still, past the railway station, a fine beach with a rocky promontory, providing for those energetic enough to

climb up to the lighthouse a far-flung panorama of sea and coast and fertile country. The town and its neighbourhood abound in delightful shades, olive-trees and fruit-trees growing in extraordinary abundance. The place looks fairly prosperous, though part of it is very badly built indeed and the people are extremely poor. This is the part where the fishermen live, and they appear to make not the slightest attempt to work more than to provide the barest necessities of existence.

As I have said, Ile Rousse is a holiday resort, and it is well patronised by visitors from the larger towns in Corsica, and by a few from the south of France. A couple of vine-clad restaurants, tiny but very good, are picturesquely situated facing the sea, and a row of bathing machines had, when I was there, been brought from their out-of-season quarters and were receiving a fresh coat of paint. This was not the only indication of the coming season. The railings along the road to the lighthouse—part of which forms an excellent promenade—were being given a covering of colour. Supplies were being laid in at the hotel, and the shops were looking forward to their annual harvest.

Delightful bathing is to be had. Having no liking for bathing machines, I went a little way along the coast each morning, and had a dip so delicious that it was really difficult to resist the sea's tempting call to become a merman. If any of my readers are ever in quest of the spell of *dolce far niente*, then let them go to Ile Rousse, where that spirit is in the air. Nature, too, has given the town a fairyland with which to surround itself, and behind which the unrest and bustle of the outer world, penetrating even into many parts of Corsica, will call for an entrance in vain.

On the day of my departure from Ile Rousse my



CALVI.

autocyclist friend was strangely quiet ; he sipped his early *café au lait* and frowned. And perhaps there was reason for his showing a troubled visage. All the previous day he had been engaged in operations on his machine the intricacy of which baffled my lay mind, and still, on the morning on which we had arranged to depart, the "auto" had not yielded to his expert powers of persuasion. My humble *vélo*, which he had looked upon with no little contempt, was spic and span, and ready for the road. Monsieur was forced to delay his departure, so I decided to make a wide sweep inland and regain the coast *route nationale* at Lumio, where he thought he would be able to meet me about four o'clock that afternoon and "pull me anywhere I liked."

A few minutes after six o'clock, therefore, I set out on my little raid through La Balagna. Retracing the route a little by which I reached Ile Rousse, I took a roughish road inland and soon arrived at a charming little place with a charming name—Belgodere, a name which literally means "beautiful pleasure." Encircling it mulberry-trees flourish in great abundance. The little town, with its eight or nine hundred people, stands by the lovely valley of the Regino. A *route nationale*, which sweeps round in the rear to Ponte Leccia, takes the traveller past numerous little villages and through fine scenery to Muro. First the wanderer admires the picturesque situation, above the road, of the village of Ville-di-Paraso, then the wild gorge of the rushing Male ; later come the fertile, green plain of the Veduta and the striking *coups d'œil* round dainty Nessa and Feliceto. Muro itself is a prosperous-looking place, boasting a *campanile* and elegant houses, and having surroundings in which any one could dream away many delicious days.

At Carteri the "ever-faithful" Calvi and its gulf of

gold burst into view, and at Lavatoggia, a kilometre and a half farther on, the view of the country, hill and dale and mountain, is gloriously fine. Soon the route joins the coast road near Lumio.

Next to Cap Corse I must place La Balagna for beauty and fertility. It is a lovely land which, like La Castagniccia, has bred some of the island's finest heroes and stoutest fighting men. Corn fields, forests of chestnut, olive, almond, orange and lemon trees are spread out far and wide. The olive-trees in La Balagna grow to an enormous size, and yield fruit unequalled even in Italy. They have an appearance sometimes which calls to mind the banyan-tree of India, and it looks occasionally as though four, five, or as many as six trees were disputing the right to grow on the same spot. Big trunks rise from one enormous root, and oddly-shaped, thick branches spread out, bearing great quantities of fruit and offering ideal shelter from the noon-day heat.

The most abundant species of this tree is termed the Genoese—the Sabine and the Saracen being the description given to the other kinds. The Genoese olive-trees were planted largely throughout the island by the Republican conquerors, and by so doing they have left behind them a relic from days of conquest which will last when watch-towers have long been dust, and till Genoa and its deeds cause but the faintest echo across the widening gulf of Time. And to see them spreading over the beautiful Balagna, giving shade and bringing prosperity, to rest beneath them when the sun is high, makes one think kindly of the race that founded and maintained so long one of the great Republics of history.

I ran down to Lumio, a quaint place perched on an amphitheatre and facing Calvi across the gulf, daintily

beautiful, and decked with olives and diminutive fig-trees. But no one had heard of my autocyclist friend, so I went as far as Algajola for the double purpose of meeting him and of seeing the famous monolith lying, I was told, in a field near the road. This curiosity is a huge stone pillar lying a short distance, twenty or thirty yards, from the beach near Algajola. It must have been there for well over three-quarters of a century, for Gregorovius in his book says that, when he saw it, the monolith had been there "for years." The plinth is a few inches over sixty-two feet in length, and is nine feet ten inches in diameter. It is, I believe, for sale. Originally intended for erection at Ajaccio, it was found impossible to transport it to that town, so it was left on the spot where it was hewn with infinite pains. It cost something like £3,000 to cut, and the cost of carrying it to Ajaccio at the time would, it is stated, have been an additional £3,000. The quarry of blue-greyish granite from which the monolith was taken was at one time quite famous. The block base of the column in the Place Vendôme in Paris is from this spot, and so is the base on which the sarcophagus of Napoleon rests in Les Invalides. Granite from this quarry will also be found in the Chapelle des Medici in Florence.

Algajola itself is a piteous sight. Once it used to be a strongly fortified, prosperous seaport, now it is a ruined, almost deserted village. Its ramparts, mouldering to-day in the last stages of ruin, were erected about the middle of the seventeenth century by the Genoese on account of the town having been taken and pillaged by the Turks. Under the Genoese Algajola became an important place, prospering by reason of the wealth which La Balagna poured into it. At the time of the siege and surrender of Calvi—1794—Algajola was reduced by the fire of English warships, and to-day Time carries

on the relentless process of decay which English cannon balls began. Now Algajola does not shelter more than a hundred and fifty people.

So far there were no signs of the autocyclist, so I turned back to Lumio, and after a short stay in that curious little place, with its charming name and its evil reputation—for it was once the home of the greatest thieves and wildest characters in Corsica—I resumed my journey towards “the ever-faithful city.” I may as well dismiss the autocyclist here by saying that I never saw him again. Though we had, in the event of not meeting at Lumio, agreed to meet at a certain hotel in Calvi, he did not put in an appearance all the time I was there. On the way to Ajaccio he could scarcely have passed me without my hearing of it. I fancy he went by rail to Ajaccio, for autocycles are scarcely reliable things when they have to face the uncertainties on the roads of Vendettaland.

The ride from Lumio to Calvi is delightful. The road slopes gently most of the way, finally cutting across a broad flat sprinkled with willows, and carrying the traveller by a spacious semicircle into the town. Calvi from the distance looks like a little bit of a Moroccan city, cast off at some early period from the African coast, and which, stripped of its minarets and mosques, had fallen partly on a huge rock and partly round about. It is, one might say, the Constantinople of Corsica. It looks the most picturesque of Corsican towns—from a distance. Near at hand one finds that it is the least beautiful. It is a mixture of the terrible and the charming, the pretty and the pathetic. High in the air stands the stubborn citadel, the gallant defence of which by the Genoese has won for the town its proud title—“*Civitas Calvi semper fidelis*,” a frowning fort with cracked, tottering ruins, worn and wasted by rain and sun, looking down on the glowing, productive plain of Secco.

A gloomy, half-deserted military town it is, with the look of an African *kasbah*. It has two thousand inhabitants.

It was in the cool of a delightful evening when I dismounted at the entrance to the town to climb up the Boulevard Géry to reach the hotel. I asked the way of a *curé*, and we became friends at once. I always try, I admit, to make friends with a *curé* when I have a chance. He is always an interesting companion and a pleasant gentleman with a flood of talk and anecdote. Monsieur was no exception. He had a wrinkled face, wrinkled with good-humour and kindness. Knowing everyone and known of all, he might have stepped out of or into a page of Austin Dobson.

Monsieur le Curé down the street
Comes with his kind old face,—
With his coat worn bare, and his straggling hair,
And his green umbrella-case.

You may see him pass by the little *Grand Place*,
And the tiny *Hôtel-de-Ville* ;
He smiles, as he goes, to the *fleuriste* Rose,
And the *pompier* Théophile.

He turns, as a rule, through the *Marché* cool,
Where the noisy fishwives call ;
And his compliment pays to the *Belle Thérèse*,
As she knits in her dusky stall.

There's a letter to drop at the locksmith's shop,
And Toto, the locksmith's niece,
Has jubilant hopes, for the Curé gropes
In his tails for a *pain d'épice*.

There's a little dispute with a merchant of fruit,
Who is said to be heterodox,
That will ended be with a "Moi foi, oui !"
And a pinch from the Curé's box.

There is also a word that no one heard
To the furrier's daughter Lou ;
And a pale cheek fed with a flickering red,
And a "Bon Dieu garde M'sieu !"

This charming picture was recalled to my mind as I went up the street with the *curé*.

"Do you know," he asked, "that Christopher Columbus was born in Calvi?"

I confessed that I had heard rumours to that effect, but that I did not believe that there was much in them. My reply really opened the floodgates of the *curé's* oratory. When we had reached the hotel—the Hotel Christophe Colomb, by the way—I was half convinced; he talked about it all through the five or six courses at dinner; the *maîtresse d'hôtel* shrugged her shoulders in a non-committal sort of fashion when appealed to, and smiled at Monsieur le *cure's* attempt to make yet another convert to his favourite theory.

And I almost think he succeeded, for over the coffee and cigars I agreed to go with him next morning to see the house where Columbus "was born." The last two words, the *curé* insisted, were creed-like, inasmuch as they did not permit of qualification. One must not say in the hearing of the *curé* "is supposed to have been born."

Next morning, when I was sipping *café au lait*, Monsieur appeared again, ready to act as my guide. We crossed the broad, pebbled space sparsely planted with fig-trees and climbed up into the citadel. Passing through a few narrow streets, with old, curious houses, and many buildings ruined more than a hundred years ago by the guns of a British fleet, we reached that side of the *haute ville* over against the sea. There we came upon a house in the last stages of decay—the birthplace of the world's greatest navigator. On a small *plaque* fixed on the wall is the following inscription, somewhat difficult to read:—

"Ici est né en 1441 Christophe Colomb, immortalisé par la découverte du Nouveau-Monde, alors que Calvi était sous la domination génoise; mort à Valladolid, le 20 mai, 1500."

SUPPOSED BIRTHPLACE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.



So this little forgotten isle, not content with having given to history a world-conqueror, claims a world-finder ! And standing before this little ruin one is almost convinced that it must be true that here the great mariner had his first long young gaze on the sea, on those wide waters which were to fascinate him so mysteriously and at last to call him over unsailed deeps to the "fair confines of descending day," to make a land of dreams a world of reality.

"Why !" exclaimed the *curé*, "his first breath must have been ozone-laden."

Till I have been to Genoa, and till some patriotic Genoese has impressed on me that town's claim to be the birthplace of him "who first unfurl'd an Eastern banner o'er Western world," I can scarcely be expected to be impartial. I will have to admit, even then, I am afraid, that the claim of Calvi is neither airy nor to be despised. The claim is, briefly, based upon the following statements. At the time of the birth of Columbus a family of that name resided in the street in which the now ruined house stands—the Rue del Filo. The family was of fairly good standing, for the street took their name and was called the Rue Colombo. The Genoese, wishing to achieve the honour which Calvi had had thrust upon her, changed the name of the street and took possession of the registers in which the birth and baptism of Christopher were recorded. There can be little doubt that the name of Colombo was at the time quite common in Corsica ; it is even now. Though the name is Genoese, the people of Calvi are emphatic on the point that the family of the great mariner had, long prior to his birth, settled in the island.

The town itself is somewhat poor, and reminded me to some extent of the lower quarters of Ajaccio and Bastia. The houses are high and squalid, the streets

narrow, the shops a medley of merchandise which makes a visitor hesitate to enter them. Facing the harbour the houses are nearly all five storeys high, some of the flats being blessed with balconies, from which hang miscellaneous oddments put there out of the way or to dry in the sun, and from which all manner of rubbish may be shot on the street below. Calvi boasts a newly-built pier and, of course, an excellent harbour, and there is a fairly good service of boats to and from the Continent.

The surroundings of the town are particularly fine, and there is quite enough to occupy the visitor's attention for several days. The inspiring Monte Grosso, with its snow peak, rears itself behind the town, and a short sail takes one to the lovely grotto, the Palais des Veaux Marins, which recalls to some extent, though, of course, it does not nearly equal, the famous grottos of Bonifacio. The Palais is situated about three miles distant from the harbour to the west, behind the little peninsula of Revelata. The entrance is large enough to permit of a rowing-boat sailing in easily. Inside, the grotto opens out considerably, and the channel running right into it is of considerable depth. About thirty yards from the entrance the arm of the sea is cut by a canal running to right and left for some little distance. It is possible to land in the grotto, but the visitor can proceed but a few yards. The cavern at the cross-ways is nearly a hundred feet in height, and the total length of the excavation is a little more than three hundred feet. The colour effect of the rays of the sun on the waters of the cavern is most remarkable, and for this alone the Palais is well worth visiting.

Calvi, like its inland neighbour Corté, is a town with a glorious past. As the reader may have gathered from the



THE CITADEL OF CALVI.

historical parts of the preceding chapters, Calvi has always shared Genoese sentiments, like Bonifacio, though its adherence to the cause of the Republic was even more strikingly faithful than that of the southern fortress. Two great sieges stand out in the history of this other Corsican Gibraltar—that of 1553 by the Turks, and that of 1794 by the English. Prior to the first, Sampiero^{*} had enlisted the help of the Turks, and with his allies he was able to drive the French and the Genoese from all the strong places of the island with the exception of “the ever-faithful Calvi.” A fierce siege, a long succession of the most savage onslaughts, during which women fought as defenders by the side of men, could not reduce the citadel, and from their impregnable city the Genoese were at last able to turn the tables on their enemies and to establish themselves in the island once more.

The latter siege, however, is the greater of the two, and naturally the more interesting. I have already mentioned the period in Corsican history when Paoli called the English to his aid against the French. Calvi, again, was the last place to fall before the new power in the island. The garrison was under the command of the French General, Raphael Casabianca, who had under him a fine young fighter of twenty-five years of age, General Abbatucci. The defence was maintained by a mixed force of soldiers and sailors, and the men, women, and even children of the town bravely took their part. One historian relates a pathetic story of a boy of fifteen who, having fallen mortally wounded on the ramparts, turned to his despairing, weeping mother and said: “Pourquoi pleurer, ma mère? Je meurs pour la patrie.”

General Stuart commanded the attacking land forces, and Admiral Hood, who had under him Horatio Nelson, was in command of the ships of war aiding in the siege.

^{*} The Sampiero the story of whom is told in Chapter II.

For a long time the bravery of the attack was equalled by the heroism of the defence, till at last English tenacity told where Turkish ferocity had failed. That the struggle was a terrible one may be judged from the proclamation of General Stuart after he had carried Fort Mazzello (still standing to-day), which was practically the key to the position. Part of the proclamation was as follows:—

“A garrison, which the fire of the enemy and the fevers rife at this time, has reduced by three-quarters; a population without food save cats and rats for the last two weeks, with no artillery,¹ or at least no artillerymen to serve the guns, with munitions exhausted by the fire of the last three days; a town which for two months has stood a storm of 25,000 bullets, 4,500 bombs and 1,500 shells, absolutely ruined; such is the position of the besieged.”¹

General Stuart's conditions for surrender were accepted by hard-pressed, devastated Calvi, and the gallant garrison marched out proudly with all the honours of war; property was respected; the inscription on the gateway—“*Civitas Calvi semper fidelis*”—was allowed to remain, “as an honourable indication of the conduct, the character, and the virtue of the people.” That inspiring inscription can to-day be seen on stone which could tell the tale of more than two and a half centuries; it stands with the marks of that terrific siege still visible, the ruin on which Nelson looked. It was in this great struggle that Nelson was wounded in the eye, the loss of which stood him in such good stead years afterwards before Copenhagen.

In the neighbourhood of Calvi many brave English fighters sleep their last sleep, for even in Corsica—

“Wave may not foam, nor wild wind sweep,
Where rest not England's dead.”

¹ There were, as a matter of fact, only twelve pieces of artillery remaining then out of the original eighty.



MARIGNANA.

CHAPTER XII

BY THE GULFS OF THE WEST

“Silken sea-roads down the Golden West.”

ALFRED NOYES.

THE gulfs of the west of Corsica are almost entirely neglected by the visitor to the island. Yet the coast region between Calvi and Ajaccio is marvellously beautiful. In early summer the *maquis* bursts out into radiant flower; the mountain pastures are gloriously green; the neighbouring mountains keep their mantillas of snow.

On the day I left Calvi I had spent the early morning and the greater part of the forenoon wandering about the peninsula of Revellata, the sea view from which is really fascinating. To the east was spread the gulf of Calvi, a mass of silver, seven or eight miles across at its broadest point. The coastline beyond stretched away for several miles into the haze that was hanging like a purple curtain all around. Farther to the right a charming vista of La Balagna was visible, a lovely picture rimmed with dim mountains. On the peninsula is a lighthouse, and beneath it, in a corner of the gulf, is the little fishing port of Alga.

The coast route from Calvi mounts up into the *maquis*, and from it can be seen, even better than when visiting

the Palais des Veaux Marins, the beauty of the *falaise* of the Revellata as it glitters in the light of the speeding sun. With the peninsula in the rear the comparatively even coastline of Corsica ends and the rugged western shore comes into view, a long, majestic succession of gulf on golden gulf and cape on clean-cut cape, while the road twists in and out, taking their shape, as if the road-makers had wandered idly at their ease by every creek and headland, unwilling to pass by the beauties of this wonderful "côte d'azur et d'or."

Noticing the Capo al Cavallo not far distant from the road, I decided to have my usual little wander to spy out the land. Hiding my cycle among the rocks, I took a little apology for a road for nearly a mile to the semaphore on the cape. There the view was exquisite. In the foreground is a little Monte Cinto, and far in the distance in an almost direct line is its massive brother of the same name towering to a treble altitude. All around peaks piled on peaks rise above massive forests and wild extents of *maquis*. To the south is the Gulf de Crovani, which takes its name from a pretty little valley running down to the sea, the first of a series of superb vales, beautifully clad in green, dotted over with huge shining rocks and inhabited by fishermen and peasants.

For some time I rode along, enjoying to the full such charming country. Then, at a sharp turn of the road, the spell was broken; industry intruded on nature, and I came across a large *usine*, where a mine of argentiferous lead is worked. The little village clustering round the factory calls itself, of course, Argentella; and so does the mountain overlooking it. The Corsicans do not take at all kindly to the description of work which such a factory calls for, and one of the workers told me that, as it is very difficult to get the islanders to work at the *usine*, most of the men have come from France and Italy.

The road from Argentella for a considerable distance is extremely hard, and was sprinkled over, when I passed it, with sharp little bits of granite. Some distance from the village my back tyre went flat with a weary hiss, but at a little wayside cottage an old peasant woman regarded it as a great honour to be able to supply me with a basin of water, and soon the tyre was sound again.

The old woman, I had noticed, had, during my operations, been carefully regarding the black valise which I carried strapped above the back wheel of my cycle. When I had finished, she inquired what I had to sell in my pack, and she was obviously deeply disappointed to learn that I was a tourist and not a packman!

Soon the northern shore of the beautiful gulf of Galeria is reached, and spread before the traveller is the green valley of the Fango and the immense circle of fertile land shut in by the serried chain of the Paglia Orba. Excellent partridge shooting is to be had in this region. The road descends fairly sharply into the depths of the valley, beautiful with poplars and eucalyptus-trees, a mixture of loveliness and ruggedness, spreading out into the plain through which the Fango reaches the sea. The river is crossed by a fine bridge of three arches, and the road to Galeria branches off to the right. It rises a little for some part of the way, its surface a coating of sharp, tiny chips. I met a couple of native cyclists on the way, and naturally we talked of the condition of the road. They had solved the problem by having solid tyres fixed to their machines, and even these were badly cut. But evidently the deity who presides over the destinies of wheelmen considered that one puncture was quite sufficient for one day, and I reached Galeria with sound tyres.

Where a tiny river flows into the gulf there stands the usual Genoese watch-tower; but the town itself is situated

just a little up from the shore. The immediate approach to Galeria is along a badly-kept lane, the condition of which is on equal terms with that of the town itself. Tumble-down is, perhaps, the best word which can be applied to it as a whole. The houses, in many instances, looked so very battered that I was really surprised to find that they were inhabited. The streets—if streets they can be called—are rough in the extreme, and at the opposite end of the town, by the church, a wild army of weeds is invading the road, and no one seems inclined to drive it back.

As I entered the town a crowd of boys was engaged in that juvenile continental pastime of making a cat's life miserable ; but my arrival caused a diversion, of which pussy took advantage to reach the shelter of a large pile of timber. I asked one boy to direct me to the inn, and the whole crowd at once volunteered to escort me to it. I disclaimed all desire to be honoured by an escort in force, but I had to submit to overwhelming numbers. So, led by one section, and followed by another, I reached the tiny, comfortable *auberge*.

A few sous were considered by the crowd of urchins as quite a fitting reward, and next morning, on appearing outside the inn, one youngster approached and naïvely inquired if I wished to be directed by him and his fellows to any other place.

Round Galeria there are magnificent forests, and, with its excellent position as a port, it might do considerable trade by exporting timber. As it is, the town is a lost little place, with scarcely eight hundred inhabitants, and but a small trade is carried on. The region, too, is fever-stricken, and the result is only too plainly evident in the physique of the people. They take very great precautions against fever, but the enervating atmosphere in summer-time tells seriously upon them generally.



THE GULF OF PORTO.

Galeria, however, is well worth visiting. At the inn the traveller will find good quarters and excellent, if not very varied, food. The sea coast in the neighbourhood is charming, and the air in the uplands and in the forest very bracing, while all around is splendid in its solitude. A fine walk is that to Calca, about two and a half kilometres distant up in the mountains.

Focolara, six or seven kilometres away, is also well worth seeing. It is situated on a picturesque gulf of the same name. At a tiny cluster of cottages near Focolara I saw two young girls weaving by the roadside—a sight which used to be quite common in Corsica, but which is somewhat rare nowadays. It was a pretty picture, and the weavers thought it a great honour to explain all about their rude looms to the stranger and to show him “how it was done.” The material which they were making—a closely-knit, thick kind of tweed—had every appearance of extreme strength and durability.

The road from Galeria to Porto, my next halting-place, is perhaps the most peculiar in Corsica. As the proverbial crow would fly between the two places, the distance is just under sixteen kilometres. My cyclometer, however, worked out the actual distance by road at $55\frac{1}{2}$. For twisting and turning the road, I should think, would be difficult to match in all Europe. At one point, to advance a single kilometre in a direct line towards my destination, I had to wheel zigzags measuring six kilometres. Some distance farther on this has to be repeated, and between these two points there is one part of the road which twists in such a manner that seven kilometres of mixed riding and walking will only carry the traveller three kilometres nearer Porto.

The sun had scarcely risen a couple of mornings later when I again negotiated safely the granite-strewn road

between Galeria and the bridge across the Fango. For a couple of miles the route runs along this pretty little river, and then, throwing off a *route forestière*, which soon loses itself in the mountains, the main road cuts in between the magnificent forests of Luccio and Tetti—the former of which can be so conveniently explored from Galeria—and the traveller is faced with the task of reaching the Col de Parma. In the cool atmosphere of early morning the tramp is delightful. From the right, down in the valley, can be heard the rustling of the Ruja de Parma flowing to join the Fango. *Maquis* spreads far and wide on either hand up to and amongst the trees, whilst on the right the forest climbs up, with intervals of grassland, to Capo Tondo, about three thousand feet high, I believe, and beyond which Galeria lies. *Bergeries* are frequent, and I stopped a number of times to have a chat with the shepherds. Rough, happy people they are, eking out a scanty livelihood by keeping small flocks of sheep and goats; men of fine physique, coarsely clad, hard as steel, with much of the music of nature in their souls, and just some of the iron of adversity. They would share their last hard crust of bread with any one.

One house I visited on my way up to the *col* may be described as typical of many, not only in that part of the island, but all over Corsica. It was roughly built of stone, and had three rooms—two on a level with the ground and a low “loft” above, reached by climbing a ladder. The floor consisted of stones worn smooth placed on the ground, and the spaces in the wall let in quite as much of the sunlight as the tiny windows, of which each downstairs room had one. There was no attempt made to cover the walls inside, and one could see into the “loft” through the spaces between the rough, smoke-blackened boards. The furniture was similar in both rooms—a table, numerous boxes for chairs, a huge coffin-like chest,

whilst a number of pans and an old erratic clock shared the space on the broad top of the huge fireplace. The upper room held two beds and numerous bundles of straw, and the roof was constructed of roughly-cut, coarsely built-in beams of wood, thatched with branches of trees held in position by weighty pieces of wood and stone.

In this dwelling two families—nine persons—lived, and when I reached the doorless entrance to the house, in the company of the grandfather of the establishment, I halted for a minute to listen to a melody plaintively and prettily sung by someone inside. For there is music and happiness in these humble homes, and smiles and hospitality. How pleased they were to act as hosts to one who had come so far to see their land. It was rough hospitality, but ah! so genuine. The humble meal which I shared consisted of tasty beans from the tiny garden on the hillside, trout from the *Ruja de Parma*, tough but not tasteless mutton, hard black bread, and cold water from the mountain stream—wine is a great luxury. The food was well cooked, and, I might almost add, daintily served. There was nothing to cause even the most fastidious to turn up his nose. At the end of the meal there was certainly one thing which no visitor to Corsica could resist—the *broccia*. In these humble homes this Corsican cheese has a flavour which is almost too tempting, and the eldest son of the house—who had made it—had reason to be proud of his art; for though I tasted *broccia* every day in Corsica, the best I came across was in that humble cot perched on the forest-land looking down the Parma valley.

The heat of the day had passed when I reached the road again. Ravine follows ravine along the route. Pines and evergreen oaks and *maquis* are everywhere in picturesque disarray. At last the *col* is reached, and

the gulf of Girolata—another of the glorious gulfs of the west—is seen lying in the distance like a mighty silvern inset in a block of gold and red. A huge reddish wall of rock stands up in the distance on the right. It is the Pointe de la Scandola, while on the opposite side of the gulf the ruddy *falaises* of Capo Senino, overlooked by a mountain of the same name, appeared glaringly clear in the blazing afternoon sun. One approaches much nearer to the gulf at the Col de la Croix, about eight miles farther on—that is, eight miles farther on in a direct line, though the actual journey is nearly sixteen.

A twisting route has one great charm, and that is the infinite number and variety of tableaux which nature presents to the view of the wanderer.

The Col de la Croix left behind, the traveller enters a land of crag, ravine, and river, and if the road twists worse than ever, the scenery is still more beautiful. Ascent and descent in fairly equal proportions lead back to the sea-coast again, the route bordered by fantastic rocks, till a wide sweep inland and back again landed me, as the sun was setting, at the idyllic little village of Porto.

Pretty Porto suffers from being in the neighbourhood of, and in fact on the route to, that favourite resort of Ajacciens and visitors to Ajaccio, Evisa. But, having seen both, I think I prefer Porto. The village is thrown loosely on the right bank of the River Porto, and is delightfully shaded by eucalyptus-trees, whilst across the stream rises a massively grand mountain wall towering up into the clouds. The village past, the river flows through a pleasant little delta thick with vegetation, and at the mouth stands a rocky mount capped by a watch-tower. Porto has the reputation of being one of the stormiest places on the west coast, and on the day after



LES CALANCHES.

my arrival it was a particularly fine sight to see the waves dashing furiously on the rocky shore of the gulf, while vast banks of mist and cloud played about the lofty cliffs and rolled down on the little village.

Though the gulf of Porto is by no means the largest in Corsica, it is undoubtedly the most beautiful. No other gulf excels it in rugged splendour of coastline or shows such a picturesque array of *falaises* and peaks (of reddish granite), clothed largely with a soothing green verdure.

Creeks and bays and promontories lie in seemingly endless succession—a picture which should be seen in all the golden radiance of the setting sun. The little place, too, is not without its trade. From the great forest of Aitone a large quantity of timber is brought down to Porto for export, and charcoal, wine, oil, lemons, and chestnuts are despatched to various places. Granite is quarried, and a fine briar grows round about, largely used in the making of French briar pipes, which are so justly famous.

They tell you in Ajaccio that it is a very simple matter to get to Evisa. It is simply a case of driving a bargain with one of the *cochers* lounging by the Place du Diamant. This is easily done, for you must accept Monsieur's terms. There is nothing else for it if you wish to drive. If the next *cocher* is Monsieur's worst enemy he would not dream of intruding and offering lower terms for the journey. As an alternative you may go round the corner to the garage and book a place in the huge, three-ton heavy motor-bus which flies between Ajaccio and Evisa, wrecking the road—a demoniac monster in Nature's pageant.

But there is an art in going to Evisa—and in coming back—and neither *cocher* nor chauffeur appears to know

it. No part of Corsica did I more thoroughly explore than that region which lies between Porto and the forest of Aitone, and I think I discovered the art of reaching Evisa. Italy cannot be appreciated by rushing in a train to Rome, and this entrancing Corsican region would be far better neglected than hustled through by the ordinary route.

Early one morning I left my cycle to the care of the *auberge*-keeper at Porto, together with practically all my luggage, leaving at the same time the date of my return indefinite. Monsieur wished me *bonne tournée*, and I took the road to Ota just as the sun's light was beginning to peer over the grimacing fantasies which look down from the clouds on Porto and its pretty gulf. Ota is four miles away on the right bank of the Porto, and as the traveller plods along with all nature awaking anew, as the rosy fingers of the dawn draw the dewy coverlets of night away, the ruggedness of the route and the fine panorama of the gulf behind him, he feels it to be indefinably alluring to the eye. Enormous dun rocks overhang the way, and the road is hewn out of the sides of deep, gloomy ravines. The red porphyry walls, smitten into bizarreries of form, flame brilliantly in the magic morning light, whilst towers, left proudly high by Thor as he passed, gleam grey with age or green and golden with beauty. Now bathed in warm sunlight, now delightfully shaded, the route twists onward to Ota, beside which stands a huge peak of the same name, reaching 4,000 feet into the blue.

Ota is a charming little place with scarcely a thousand inhabitants. It looks prosperous, as indeed it is; for it is as well-to-do as any town of its size in the island. The surrounding country is a fertile garden, and Porto has an appetite which can easily dispose of all that Ota can send her. The principal article produced is olive



OTA.

oil, and large quantities of chestnuts—famed for their size and quality—timber, granite, wine, and lemons—an excellent range of products for so small a place—find their way down to the coast for consumption and for export. It was shortly after seven o'clock when I reached Ota, so I indulged in an excellent *café au lait* and a chat with mine host. As we talked the weather changed. Ominous clouds gathered, mists began to roll about in great banks, and a fine "wetting" rain commenced to fall. I had laid in a supply of biscuits and chocolate for my journey, but, when the sunshine faded and the landscape disappeared behind curtains of driving rain, I decided to stay at the inn for *déjeuner*. So I distributed the biscuits and the chocolate amongst the tiny children—what a crowd there was of them!—playing round the *auberge*, and they doubtless thought, in the Corsican equivalent, that "it's an ill wind that blows nobody good." Still, I had but little reason to grumble, for this was the first and only occasion on which the weather interfered with my plans.

At lunch-time a young peasant, who was going to Evisa with three mules early next morning, invited me, when I told him I intended to push on to Evisa that day if possible, to wait till morning, when he would be delighted to place one of the animals at my disposal. The offer of a mule to a pedestrian is, perhaps, the height of Corsican consideration. To the islander a pedestrian or a cyclist is an object of wonder. "Mais, ça fatigue trop!" was an expression I should think I heard a thousand times with regard to walking or cycling.

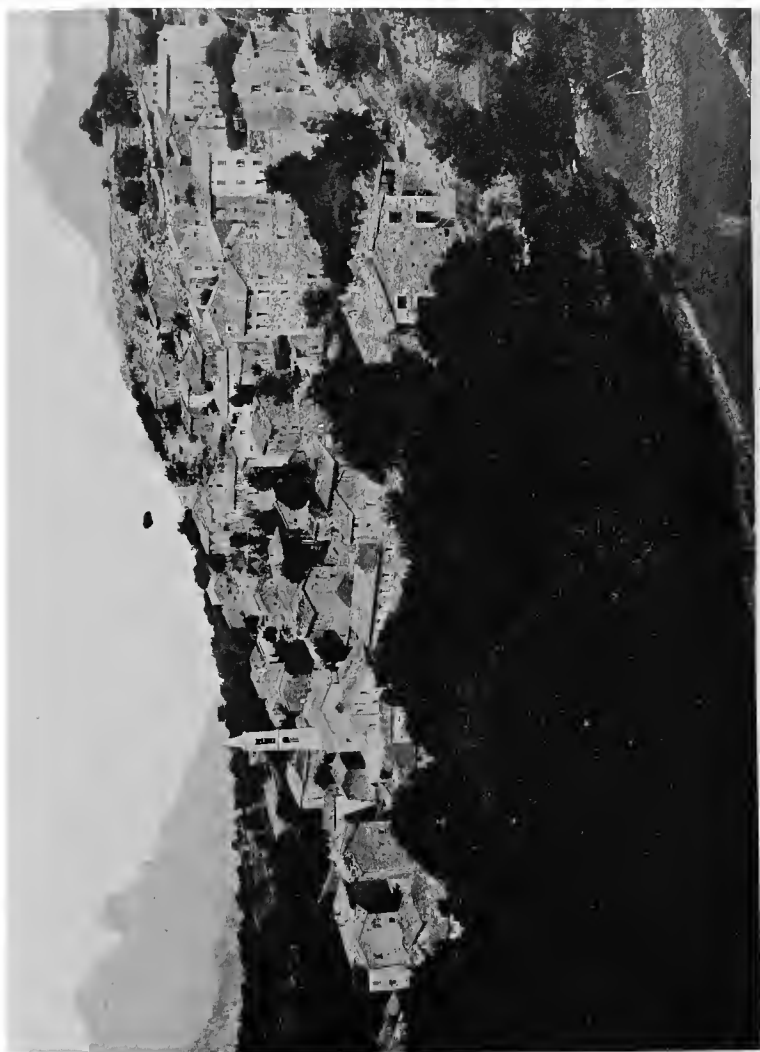
I accepted the kind offer conditionally on the weather not assuming a cheerier countenance within time to allow me to reach Evisa on foot that night. The distance is about twelve miles of fairly stiff road, and unless the

skies smiled again by three o'clock it would have been useless to have attempted the journey on foot that day. About two o'clock the weather grew worse. The rain came down in torrents, and the mist was thick as night upon the hills. In the distant north a violent thunderstorm commenced, worked its way to the west, and then released all its fury of fire, strikingly grand, above Porto and Ota, dying away in the south-west. When night fell it was still raining, so I promised to be ready for the road at five o'clock in the morning.

The mule deputed to carry me to Evisa was a "canny" beast, with but one characteristic that worried me. When the road ran between mountains Jacques walked in the centre; when it skirted a ravine he seemed to take an infinite delight in seeing how near the edge of the route he could walk. His brother, which the Corsican rode, indulged a similar weakness. The third was a youngster not yet accustomed to the saddle. A number of times afterwards I noticed mules behaving in the same manner, and I should think that the trait is one handed down from ancestors who had to carry their masters by narrow mountain paths, and who acquired the habit of walking on the extreme edge of the road in order to prevent the rider knocking against the rocks on the other side.

The road from Ota goes for some time along the right bank of the Porto, and then changes over to the left. The country through which it passes is an excellent sporting region, and on two occasions near Marignana—a hamlet about two miles from the road on the right—we saw a number of wild boars. They are more numerous in this part than anywhere else in Corsica, and they attract many sportsmen from Ajaccio and Corté, from both of which there are excellent roads into the district.

The scenery after joining the Evisa road is magnificent—the finest in all the west.



EVISA.

“Grandiose, n’est-ce pas ?” was my companion’s constantly reiterated exclamation, and the word fits exactly. Far and wide is a cunning parquetry of colours, blending into one another magically, over which the dazzling light of day casts a curious spell. Seen from the Col de Capicciolo (1,800 feet high) the valley of the Porto is a masterpiece, rivalling in seductive beauty even the Gorge of Santa Regina, but alas ! words are such very poor paint-brushes. The severe, majestic grandeur of the steep, reddish rocks, the far-thrown *maquis*, the spreading chestnut forests, are inspiringly grand even to one whose eyes have been fed day by day with the endless comeliness of all the “Scented Isle.”

Evisa itself is just a trifle smaller than Ota, and as one sees it for the first time it looks as though fairies instead of warlike men had selected its site, chosen its garb, and tricked it out to charm the eye. I do not wonder at its popularity with the Ajacciens. Lying in a tangled landscape of colour, it looks out on the severe mountains of Niolo, inland to the fine forest of Aitone, and seaward the gulf of Porto glitters. The climate up here in the mountains is ideally seasonable all the year round ; there are no great extremes either of heat or cold. As a centre for excursions in the west, Evisa is unrivalled, for, though there is nothing of particular note in the town itself, the surroundings are truly magnificent, with the forest of Aitone as the outstanding feature. A pretty saunter—a couple of hours will suffice for it—is to the Moulin d’Aitone. The way is by the Col de Vergio route, running east as far as the first forest road turning off to the left, which is quite near the cross-roads to the *col* and to Vico.

The road descends amidst lordly pine-trees, and the way is made velvet-like by the “needles” lying in layers of years. Many donkey trains go up and down, those

going to the mill being laden, most likely, with sacks of chestnuts, those coming in the opposite direction carrying firewood from the forests. The mill itself, standing with a beautiful cascade in front of it, is in a position of picturesque charm. Huge boulders have been tossed about in fantastic profusion by some Titanic power, whilst an enchantingly disordered array of pines yields plentiful shade. Quaint wooden bridges span the rushing, roaring torrent. If there is music in the falling of waters, it is to be heard by the Moulin d'Aitone.

The miller takes a delight in showing the visitor how chestnut flour is made, that sweet, moist powder destined to be made into *polenta* and even bread. But the miller's forte is fishing, and the pastime has made him in some degree a philosopher. His talk is interesting and refreshing. He was very busy the day I met him, but he gave me a fishing-rod, and I wiled away the greater part of four hours with it. I did not have a great deal of luck, only catching two trout, one, however, weighing nearly two pounds. Monsieur too, is no mean sportsman, and has brought down more moufflon than he can count with accuracy—lucky man! At the time of my visit he had a live moufflon in his possession, for there is, of course, a good market for specimens of this animal, a species rapidly getting scarcer. It was only five or six weeks old, a curious, capering little animal, quite tame and very stubborn. The only other occasion on which I saw moufflon was in the form of cutlets on the luncheon table at the hotel in Ajaccio! They are excellent.

Next day I tramped to the Col de Vergio, nine miles from Evisa through the forest. The forest of Aitone is, by the way, nearly 4,000 acres in extent, seven miles long, and between three and four at its broadest part, being watered by a river of the same name. Seen from the heights, the forest lies spread in a vast semicircle, bor-



IN THE FOREST OF AÏTONE.



dered on the south by the range of mountains which reaches its highest point in the Capo alla Rufa, about 5,500 feet high, while to the north a curiously irregular chain with a score of rugged peaks shuts it in. Beyond this range is the forest of Lindinosa, which another mountain barrier separates from the forest of Lonca.

As a background to all this forest grandeur is the great sierra, which the proud, snow-clad Monte Cinto dominates with a hundred mountain torrents rushing down, like chains of beads from a white, silken scarf.

It is a stiff climb to the Col de Vergio, but well worth the exertion it entails. The height is 4,800 feet above sea-level, the highest point in Corsica to which a road rises. Here one greets the Golo again. On one side of this curiously-shaped watershed the Porto rushes to the distant ocean. On the other the Golo, rising on the extreme left, flows away through a long, straight valley, and with aid of my glasses I could trace its course northward, then eastward, to where the Tuscan Sea glittered between fifty and sixty miles away. The forest of Aitone lies like a mosaic of priceless Eastern workmanship, walled by masses of grey and golden mountains placed in loose alignment.

From the *col* only a very small outskirts of the great forest of Verdoniello can be seen, and one must go four or five kilometres farther on to obtain a view of it in its entirety. It is at least three times as extensive as the forest of Aitone, and is famous for its fine *pins laricios*. In appearance it is more *savage* than the Aitone, more gruffly picturesque. It is, however, unpleasant to see the enormous spaces from which trees have been felled by axe and fire, and to note the great waste with which the work is accomplished. At the spot near which I turned, I watched five men felling a forest giant. It was a pine 12 feet or so in circumference at its base. When it fell

with a crash, bringing with it many branches from other trees, I paced it and it measured, roughly speaking, 130 feet! The woodcutters, having brought it down, thought it was time for lunch. They had some excellent *broccia*, which they asked me to share, and my biscuits and chocolate were looked upon as an excellent dessert to the rough but appetising meal of hard brown bread, *bolenta* (cooked on the spot in a lidless pan over a smoky fire!) and *broccia*.

Between Porto and Piana the traveller passes through one of the most curious districts in Corsica—that of Les Calanches. From the little seaport town the road rises in zigzags through the forest to a rocky region, a mile long, standing out bare to the winds and rain, which, as on the coast near Bonifacio, have carved fantasies mocking the wildest dreams of dreamy man. The region seems like a rock city of the dead, with a ghostly series of pictures in stone on its walls which might be the work of a race of men from another planet. Now there towered above me a huge mass like a petrified avalanche, robbed of its might as it rushed to destroy everything; then I could see a great balcony with a cunningly cut pulpit, whilst all around the wall was cut and carved to look like the pipes of the organ in a vast cathedral. Sometimes the road became enclosed by rocks on either hand, sometimes it skirted the base of what might be the wall of a ruined Indian temple. Now grooved, now corroded, now pierced through and through, obelisks and domes tower upwards, now fiery in colour, now dun and dreary. Here evergreen oaks have found a foothold; there the *maquis* subsists on a thin layer of soil. Vari-coloured mosses creep up tall, tottering spires. Silhouettes of animals startle one at every turn and freak-like sculpture, in derisive caricature of man, holds one



LES CALANCHES.

spellbound. It is Nature's nightmare in stone. A grinning human face leers down the valley, a great dog keeps the roadway, high up on the face of the rock is the outline of an elephant. This great vista of unshapely masonry sometimes looks as though a modern fleet had wrought huge havoc with its guns in a curious city of the Orient ; at other parts it appears as though it had been a giants' battlefield over which are scattered the boulders with which they fought, hurled from Titanic catapults.

This curious eerie region, perched high up between the pretty districts of Porto and Piana, is the "Broken Melody" in western Corsica's hymn of beauty—a mad, unrhythmic rhapsody in rock.

For three hours I wandered amongst the rocks, but the whole thing is too vast for photography, too wild and far-flung even for the painter. All the while a sharp rain fell, and, though I was soaked through and through, I found it difficult to leave the grim crags. Les Calanches must be seen while it rains, while Nature's myriad chisels are carving this vast fantasy anew.

With the coming of the dusk, as the stars tiptoed into sight, I left Les Calanches behind, and with the dark I rode into Piana—down from Edom to Eden.

Piana is the fair maid of western Corsica—a pretty girl in her teens, she may even be womanish enough to have you believe—coquettish and daintily arrayed. Round about and in it are extremely pretty little gardens, and, like many another little town, it stands in a semicircle on the side of a hill. It is not, however, so closely packed as numerous other places are, for the Pianese have made sure of room for their gardens. There is a comfortable inn just on the outskirts of the town, and from my window I could look across a cluster of orchards to where, under the shadow of the church, the main portion of the town lies.

There is little of interest between Piana and Cargèse. The country is pretty—boldly pretty—and fairly well cultivated, though some of it is low-lying and unhealthy. The road is excellent and the greater part of it is downhill, several sections being particularly steep. Approaching Cargèse, lovely views are obtained of the little golden gulfs of Chioni and Pero. Cargèse itself is situated on the granite peninsula forming the southern bound of the latter gulf and the northern reach of the extensive, beautiful gulf of Sagone.

Cargèse is not unlike Piana in general appearance. It is constructed in the semicircular style and stands a little above the seashore. It is a fine little place to stay in, its two inns being excellent, and is one of the many spring and winter resorts in the west, though the accommodation for visitors does not permit of many taking advantage of the excellent climate which is enjoyed on this part of the coast. Crayfish are a staple item on the *menu* and are excellent.

The story of Cargèse is an extremely interesting one, and is connected with that of Paomia, a village, the ruins of which can still be seen some distance farther on near Sagone. In 1675 several hundred Greeks, tired of their bitter struggle with the Turks, approached Genoa and asked for a strip of territory where they would be out of the reach of their oppressors. The Republic allotted them the district between Vico and the northern shores of the gulf of Sagone. The Greeks—some eight hundred of them—settled in and around Paomia, in a region then quite uncultivated. They set to work, however, and soon the countryside was a garden of beauty and prosperity. Naturally the newcomers remained faithful to the Genoese in all the struggles that convulsed the island, and for this reason they suffered many hardships at the hands of the Corsicans. At last, in 1731, Paomia was assaulted and



PIANA.

sacked by the national forces and the Greeks were forced to flee in vessels to Ajaccio. There the colony remained until 1774. In 1769, as we have seen in a previous chapter, the Comte de Marbœuf was one of the commanders who conquered the island on behalf of the French. The Count, approached by the Greeks, agreed to give them a settlement, and Louis XV., interesting himself in the matter, gave orders for a hundred and twenty houses to be built where Cargèse now stands, and the large majority of the Greeks settled down there. In 1793, during the Revolution, they were compelled to flee once more to Ajaccio, and not until 1797 were they reinstated by the English.

At the end of the eighteenth century, therefore, there were to be found in Cargèse a colony of four or five hundred people speaking Greek solely, preserving their ancient religion, manners, customs, and dress. But though the first century of their stay in Corsica wrought but little change in them, the second hundred years have sufficed to eradicate most of their Greek characteristics. With the final coming of the French, enmity between Corsican and Greek died down, intermarriages gradually became more and more frequent, the Greeks abandoned, slowly but surely, their national costume, their customs, and finally almost their language. To-day there is no clear-cut line between the two races; their fusion is all but complete.

But a little still remains to tell the observant visitor of the peculiar history of the people of Cargèse and the town's strange origin. Now and again as one goes amongst the people one hears Greek spoken, and that language is, I was told, still taught in school. The ancient religion too, remains, though the clergy officiate in the French and Greek languages. The mixture of the two races has had an extraordinary effect on the people

of the town and neighbourhood. The Grecian type is still marvellously prominent. The men are stalwart and of fine physique, and amongst the women one sees something more than a remnant of the splendid race of Greece. Many of the young girls have the figure of a Venus and the carriage of an Atalanta, whilst their faces are strikingly pretty and their complexions exquisitely pure.

In no other town of its size in Corsica are the people so busy. Not only do they believe in cleanliness as one of the highest virtues, but young and old work hard and long, and their fields and gardens bear witness to it. There are two churches in the little place—the Roman Catholic and the Greek on mounds facing one another. The ruins are to be seen of the house in which Marbœuf lived. He was created Marquis de Cargèse, and his *château* suffered like so many others during the course of the Revolution.

The run from Cargèse to the neighbourhood of Calcatoggia is one of the most enjoyable that is to be had on the west coast. The road keeps close to the shore all along the north of the gulf of Sagone, rising and falling gently—such a road as the cyclist dearly loves—with the mountain tops on the edge of vision on one side and the waves playing gently on the rocks not far beneath on the other.

Sagone is a little hamlet at the top of the Anse de Sagone—a big bight on the northern shore of the gulf into which the River Sagone runs. In times gone by the village boasted a bishop, but that glory has departed. Now, it only consists of a few houses, and the excellent anchorage in the gulf makes it the port of the district—a position which is almost a sinecure. A good deal of charcoal is made in the neighbourhood and exported. There are still to be seen the ruins of what is supposed



CARGÈSE.

to have been the Cathedral, but it is hard to say, as the date of the destruction of the town and subsequent rearing of the village of to-day cannot evidently be fixed with anything like accuracy.

A little way farther on, at a village with a name out of all proportion to the size of the place—Corallaggio—a road branches off inland to Vico. As I reached the spot a diligence, dusty and worn, stopped opposite the inn, and almost at the same moment the huge motor omnibus from Ajaccio drew up, snorting and smelling. It was curious to see the old and the new thus side by side in a quaint little Corsican village, and I think the holiday-makers from Ajaccio—for such the occupants of the motor-bus appeared to be—turned away with a newly-born but none the less dignified contempt from the ancient conveyance which till but a few months previously they had not scorned to use. But the old, weather-beaten driver of the diligence, too, had his pride, a pride deeply rooted in the past and much more justifiable. When I asked him what he thought of *le dernier cri* in locomotion, he sniffed most derisively.

“Never had so many passengers since ces choses-là began to run. Picked up three passengers the other day when one of them stuck fast on the Vico road. They make a lot of holiday-makers turn out for a few days in the country, but, of course, there is not room for them all, and I get those left over. But they do spoil the roads.”

Looking at the diligence and the omnibus, I never felt more thankful for my trusty *vélo*.

The chauffeur offered to allow me to hang on to the rear of the bus up the hills on the run to Vico, and when I thanked him and declined his kind invitation, a number of passengers shrugged their shoulders in silent amazement. They seemed to regard me as though I were a

mariner adrift on a raft in mid-ocean refusing to be rescued by a passing vessel. But my favourite perfume is not petrol, and allowing the bus about an hour's start—time for the *maquis* scent to return to the road—I set off for Vico.

As the bus lumbered away, a sceptical Ajaccien on the *impériale* shouted :

“ À Vico après demain, monsieur ! ”

“ À Vico ce soir, mon ami,” I replied.

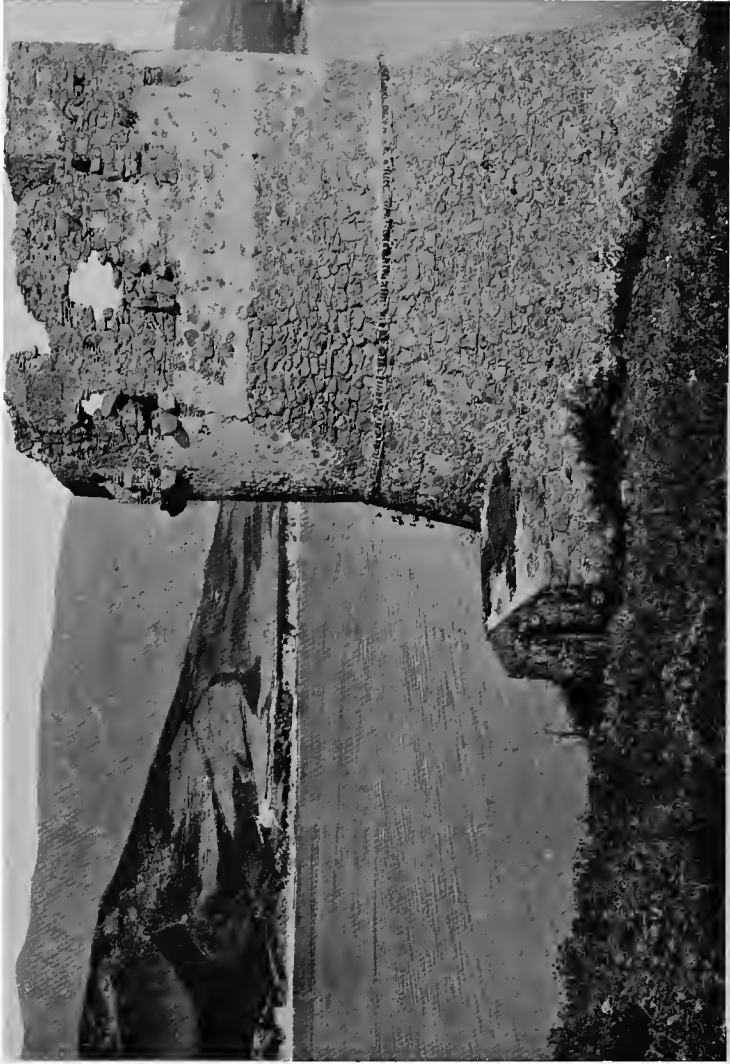
We dined together at Vico that evening and Monsieur was a charming host.

The road to Vico—fourteen or fifteen kilometres—is a particularly beautiful one. It keeps close to the left bank of the Sagone river for nearly half the distance, and then turns away from it, rising gently up into the *maquis*-clad hills. The richness of the verdure is really surprising. Walnut and chestnut trees, vines and fruit-trees of many descriptions are carefully cultivated.

On the Col de St. Antoine one can see right down the valley of the Sagone to the sea, and on the east across almost the half of Corsica to Monte Rotondo. Vico itself, prettily situated amongst trees and vines, is overlooked by the lofty Pointe alla Cuma (over 3,000 feet high). It is perched on the upper slopes of the valley of the Liamone. As I reached the end of my day's journey the sun was setting. It was the most glorious sunset I ever saw in Corsica, a land of golden sunsets, “stinging the west to anger red.”

“ High was thine Eastern pomp inaugural ;
But thou dost set in statelier pageantry,
Lauded with tumults of a firmament :
Thy visible music-blasts make deaf the sky,
Thy cymbals clang to fire the Occident,
Thou dost thy dying so triumphally.”^{*}

^{*} Francis Thompson's “Ode to the Setting Sun.”



GULF OF SAGONE AND A GENOESE WATCH-TOWER.

Vico, which has a population of something like 1500, has a past of which it is proud. After the destruction of Sagone, mentioned earlier in this chapter, the bishop of that place took up his residence at Vico, and in addition it has the boast of being the birthplace of three of Corsica's famous sons—Mgr. Casanelli, who was one of the most distinguished of the Bishops of Ajaccio, to whose memory an excellent statue, by M. Vital Dubray, is erected; Auguste François Vico, governor of Sardinia and an adviser of the King of Aragon, and Jean Vico, a celebrated surgeon.

I returned next day to the coast by a different route, and, beautiful as was the road by which I reached Vico, that between Vico and Calcatoggia—twenty-seven or twenty-eight miles—a more southerly route, is even more picturesque. The river Liamone, falling in cascades, forests of chestnut-trees and evergreen oaks, wide, gleaming vineyards, great *maquis* stretches, pretty, verdure-clad hills and rich orchards lie in refreshing succession, and every now and again charming villages tempt the traveller to rest awhile. At Calcatoggia there is nothing of particular note, but the view is splendid on sea and mountain, while the town itself, with its gardens and orchards, is a pretty little place to wander about in. I rode down from Calcatoggia to a tiny cluster of houses on the coast road, where, I had been told, there was an excellent inn, and I was not disappointed. Shortly after leaving Calcatoggia the remains of the Château of Capraja are to be seen. The *château* was the seat of the Counts of Cinarca in days long gone by.

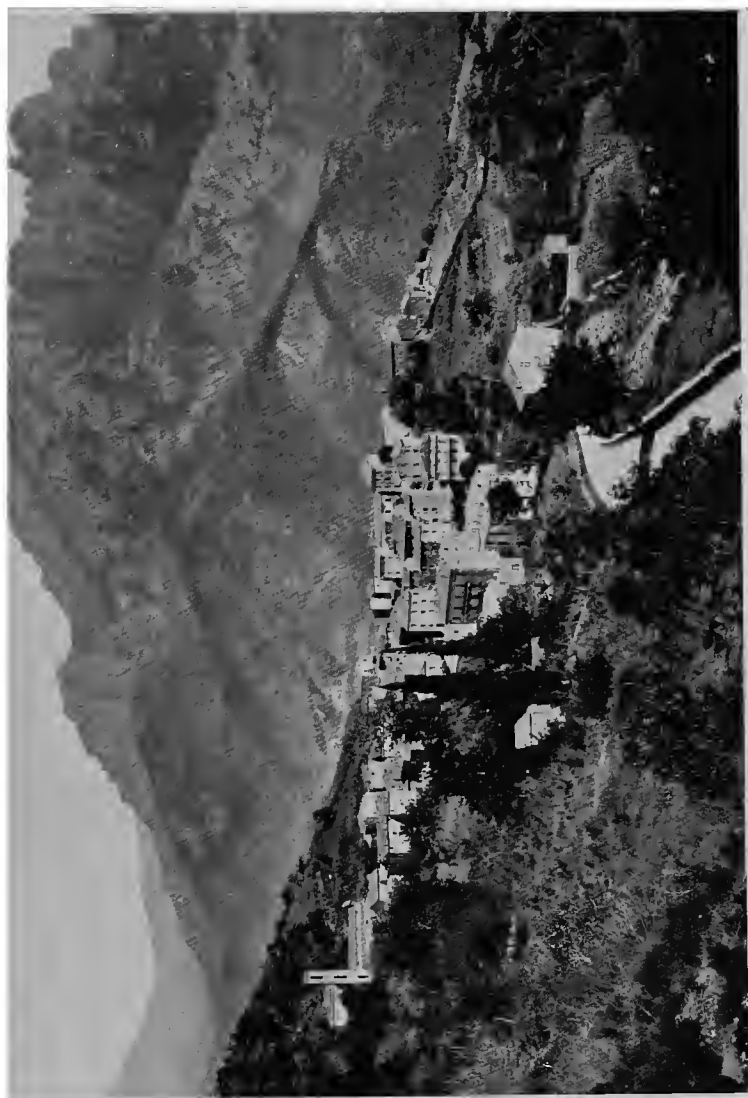
Towards the end of the thirteenth century, Guidice della Rocca, then ruling Count, and an ally of the Pisans, was besieged by the Genoese in his castle. He utterly defeated the republican invaders on that occasion,

and for many years was one of their most formidable enemies. In the end, like so many Corsican stalwarts, he was betrayed to his enemies, his own son acting the part of traitor, cast into prison, and beheaded. The *château* saw many fine feats of arms performed by the famous della Rocca family. The view to the south from the ruined *château* is extensive and beautiful.

Next morning, shortly after six o'clock, I stood on the Col de Carbinica. This height, nearly a two hours' cycle run—and walk!—south of Calcatoggia, is about a thousand feet above sea-level, being due east of the shining Gulf de Lava.

It is off the main road, and is about six or seven miles due north of Ajaccio. My object in coming this way was to visit the little town of Alata before reaching Ajaccio once more. I left my bicycle in a cottage and hired a sturdy lad as guide. We set off across the rough country, and though I might have reached Alata in an hour by a roundabout route awheel, I did not grudge the three hours we took to tramp it in a direct line over rocks and hills and through the *maquis*.

Alata, a disordered village, is famous as the birthplace of the great Charles André Pozzo di Borgo, who built, as mentioned in Chapter I., the beautiful Château de la Punta. He studied at the University of Pisa, and at the time the Revolution broke out was a lawyer in Ajaccio. His opinions were sufficiently outspoken and advanced to bring him at once to the front, and he was elected a member of the Corsican legislature. He held a number of positions, and, following on the failure of the expedition to Sardinia, was, with Pasquale Paoli, called to the bar of the Convention in Paris to answer what were virtually charges of treason. Both, however, refused to obey the summons, and during the subsequent rule of the English in the island, di Borgo held the high



VICO.

position of President of the Council of State. On the departure of the English the Bonapartists gained the upper hand, and di Borgo was driven into exile. Up to the time of the Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte and di Borgo had been friends; but, as the latter believed that Napoleon was responsible for the organisation of the revolt which caused the English to abandon Corsica, the two became bitter enemies.

Di Borgo was forced, ruined, into exile, and for some time he wandered about Europe. If only secret political history could be told, it would certainly be seen that the enmity which Europe cherished against Napoleon was very largely the work of Pozzo di Borgo. In every capital, from London to Constantinople, he stirred up hatred against the great Frenchman. Napoleon knew what a dangerous rival he had to deal with, for after the Peace of Presbourg he tried hard to extort a concession in the shape of the extradition of di Borgo, but in vain. It was the same tireless foe who persuaded Bernadotte to range himself against the great conqueror, an act which eventually led to the march of the Allies on Paris and the exile of Napoleon to St. Helena.

"I certainly did not kill Napoleon," said di Borgo, "but I threw the last stone at him."

Di Borgo was for a long time Russian Ambassador in Paris, and he died in 1842. He was well known at the English Court, where he was Ambassador for two years. In a postscript to a letter of Queen Victoria (at the time Princess), written on May 9, 1837, to her uncle, the King of the Belgians, she says: "Old Pozzo dined here last Wednesday, and he gave me a long, and I must say clever, dissertation about the state of France, during the dinner-time."

Alata is also the place where the happenings depicted

in Prosper Mérimée's "Matteo Falcone" are said to have taken place.

The surroundings of Alata are not very picturesque ; the situation is high, the soil rocky, and cultivation not very far advanced. I sent my guide home and stayed in the village till the next forenoon. By mid-day I was back at the *col*, and after a beautiful ride along a splendid, gently-sloping road, I reached once more the shores of the golden Bay of Ajaccio.

Back in Ajaccio, and the days growing hotter and hotter ! The town, like London out of season, was "empty."

The *château* and *châlet* dwellers had fled to Vizzavona and the cooler uplands ; in the Place du Diamant it was almost too warm to promenade ; the boats came in from Nice and Marseilles, but few watched their arrival.

"No one comes to Ajaccio at this time of the year," people say. It is too warm even to open the shutters of one's room, but when evening brings its refreshing breezes from the bay, all Ajaccio and his wife are in the streets and *cafés*. The little orchestra in the restaurant at the corner of the Avenue du Premier Consul is the sole musical attraction. The place is always crowded and the odour of black coffee is strong.

The hotels were deserted ; one or two were on the eve of shutting up for a brief period. I myself, together with a German journalist, monopolised the largest. We walked in solemn, ludicrous state into the large dining-room ; we took turns at entertaining one another ; the waiter took a delight in serving well the last guests of summer. We arranged the politics of Europe and laid at least one stone in the fabric of a future *entente*. The waiter, who was a Hungarian and impartial, interfered when discussions waxed too warm. In the hall, over coffee and



ALATA.

cigars, we discussed Corsica. My friend was actually writing a book on Vendettaland! Its translation into English or my scribble into German we agreed to regard as a *casus belli*. Then my genial friend took train for Bastia *en route* for the Fatherland and I seemed to have Ajaccio and its surroundings to myself for a couple of days.

My farewell to Ajaccio and its glorious bay was said in driving wind and rain, bringing a fresher green to the verdant uplands, painting with clearer white the shining city itself. Then as the little ship rounded the Iles Sanguinaires the sun suddenly, in its death-throe, caused the islands to stand out red in all the fiery harmony of evening. Corsica was sinking into sea and sky as it rose weeks before in the golden glory of morning's magic light, sardonyx-like, in its setting of far-flung radiance. From the west the setting sun hurled, heliograph-wise, its last good-night to the distant Monte Rotondo. Twilight hid the villages clinging on the steep *maquis* slopes; sea and land and sky became one in the purple haze. Soon only Monte Rosa and Monte Cinto stood out like two deep dimples in the pale, pillowed cheek of Evening. Then Night rang down her curtains and pinned them with a star.

Vale, Vendettaland!

Grecians of old. Gregorovius, that interesting old Teuton wanderer, insisted that the islander was wholly an Italian, but to-day, at any rate, there is a very great difference between the Italian and the Corsican. Pisans and Genoese endeavoured to stamp Italy on the island, but its inhabitants are physically and mentally vastly different from their neighbours across the Tuscan Sea. The Corsican *patois* may be one of the purest of Italian dialects, but the Corsican speaks French as well; his sympathies are entirely French; his characteristics in but few particulars Italian. He possesses an old-world politeness, refreshing in these hustling days, which has nothing about it parallel to the manners of Italians in similar circumstances. Even in towns, where politeness first has its corners broken off, to ask the way is to be escorted to one's destination; in the country, to talk to a stranger is to make a friend.

Corsica is just beginning to be opened up. During the lifetime of the first Napoleon the only roads in the island were miserable ones from Ajaccio to Bastia, from Bastia to St. Florent, and from Sagone to the forest of Aitone. It was not till the time of Louis Philippe and Napoleon III. that France paid any attention to the island. Since then magnificent *routes nationales* round and through the island have been cut, and from them branch off in all directions fairly good *routes forestières*. The railway has been built, the island's population has in a century increased by over 120,000, and trade is growing marvelously.

Before the island began to feel the influence of modern progress it was one vast maze of little worlds; every river valley was a tiny universe, separated by high mountains from the neighbouring vale, seldom frequented, rocky sheep-tracks forming the only means of communication. Each little group of hamlets—still called by the ancient

name of *piève*—grew its own cereals, wine, fruit, and vegetables, and kept its herds of sheep and goats. Each *piève*, owing to the slackness with which justice was administered, was a law unto itself, righted its wrongs and asserted its rights by force of arms, and lived on the crater of the volcano of vendetta and in an atmosphere of war.

Still, in country districts, it is customary for people to go about armed. Long wars for freedom and ages of internecine strife, together with a strong inherited passion for liberty, have left them, even to-day, when war has been robbed of much of its glory and romance, amongst the finest fighting men in Europe. To-day the island sends into the French army a larger proportion of men than any other department. At the end of 1908 no fewer than eighteen hundred Corsicans were serving with the colours as officers and non-commissioned officers. In the quaint little village of Evisa, half lost, with its eight or nine hundred inhabitants, in the western mountains, they tell you proudly that four officers and five non-commissioned officers from that hamlet fell in one day in the slaughter round Sedan. In Napoleon's Italian campaign, to quote only one, the great General had by his side a brilliant group of Corsican officers—Cervoni, Franceschi, Fiorella, Casabianca, Casalta, and Gentili—"a band of brothers" who undoubtedly made that campaign the great military achievement it was.

This warlike characteristic excepted—a trait which he shares to a great extent with the peasants of France, from amongst whom Napoleon drew the finest of his vast armies—the Corsican is totally unlike his Continental neighbour. Thrift, so feverishly practised in France, is practically unknown in the island. The Frenchman's whole ambition is to be "maître sur son fumier." The peasant, the Government official, the *concierge*, the busy

little madame in her shop, all classes in France have one household god, and that is thrift—one overwhelming desire to get together “a little property” to render the future less uncertain.

Not so the Corsican. With him ambition is made of other stuff. He does not aspire towards the possession of wealth or property, but of power and influence, towards the acquisition of one of those administrative posts which the French system of government so greatly multiplies, and which exactly suit the Corsican, with his love of power, his capacity for rule, and his desire to govern.

This desire breeds in the Corsican one of his prominent characteristics, and that is his feverish desire for education—a desire which, it must be admitted, ceases to trouble him once it has served its purpose of securing for him the coveted position, and which then turns into a desire to save enough money to allow him to buy an annuity and pose at home as an independent politician, whose views will be listened to with respect and awe because they are the result of official experience. For a time, at any rate, then, education is of vast importance to a large number of Corsicans, and it is surprising how early the necessity for it dawns upon their imaginations.

No other department of France sends such a large proportion of its children to school. I myself have seen on several occasions a crowd of children kicking at the school door because the teacher was a few minutes late in opening it. Shakespeare’s “whining schoolboy . . . creeping like snail unwillingly to school” was not a Corsican boy! By the roadside in Cap Corse I came across a young shepherd studying Virgil, and a boatman who took me for a sail at Bonifacio kept a big volume of French history at the bottom of his boat. At the little inn at Porto, on the west coast, I listened at *déjeuner*

to a long discussion on the influence of Savonarola in religion!

There can be no doubt that the Corsican is dowered with a fine intellect. Reared in comparative isolation, he can yet prove himself more than the equal in intelligence, in acuteness, and originality of imagination of the "continental" Frenchman. The result is that the Corsican is marvellously successful in Government positions; he is to be found everywhere; he is the Scot of France.

Then the Corsican is bred in an atmosphere of politics. Every one talks politics, and that in and out of season. The endless intrigues—the Corsican is a born plotter—of petty local politics keep his brain on the *qui vive* and his tongue wagging from year's end to year's end. The pitting of intellect against intellect, the crafty schemes to secure the success of the party to which he belongs, are just what make the Corsican an ideal petty official. This characteristic is only another trace of the past in the nature of the Corsican, and is an heirloom from the ancient social organisation of the race. As I have said, the independence of proprietorship does not appeal to him, for the reason that it implies a certain amount of isolation from his fellows. But to be in possession of authority, no matter how puny and unimportant, makes isolation impossible, makes him necessary to his neighbours, places him in a position to increase the prestige of his party and improve the standing of his family, to help his friends and confound his enemies.

The clan was at one time predominant in the island, as it is only within comparatively recent times that it has been merged in the present French political parties. It was an organisation handed down from times of war and disorder, each clan being directed by a powerful family, the head of which devoted himself entirely to the service of the association. It was at first an organisation for

war, becoming later an alliance for local political purposes. The powerful head of the ruling family did all in his power to add to the strength of his clan. The way of the adherent was made easy—often the full agreement regarding rent would not be insisted on; one of the family would be a doctor, another a lawyer, and their services would be absolutely devoted to the service of the clan; the member's wrongs would be righted, his rights respected. In ancient times the rights of a clan were obtained by force of arms, in later and more peaceful generations by having its nominees elected to all posts of administrative importance.

In return for what the clan did, blind political devotion was required from every member. The head of the association had, indeed, to be a leader of men; he was the keeper of the conscience of the people. Individual interests were entirely subject to the good of the clan, and its *raison d'être*, of course, was the need which people felt to have friends and allies, to exact respect, and to defend themselves when the law was loosely and even arbitrarily administered, as it often is even to-day. There was really no bound to what an all-powerful association could do. The mayor would be of its selection, as well as the great majority of the municipal councillors. The *juge de la paix* dared not oppose it.

But the clan was destined to disappear in Corsica as in other parts of the world, and it was chiefly the coming of French political ideas which gave the association its death-blow. The French party system has taken its place. It was only the petty local politics which received attention from the clan, and in fact it often—very often—changed its views “to suit the varying hour.” Everything was secondary to the advantage of the clan. The Corsicans, the most fiery and enthusiastic politicians in Europe, eagerly welcomed the coming of a new order

of things which prompted them to rise above the mere welfare of a small association and which placed before them a broader conception of the principles of politics.

The political party, however, has caused many of the worst features of the clan to survive. Though vendetta and banditism have practically gone, hatred remains. Family hates family, group despises group; there is the same passionate adherence to principles if not to men, the same tricks and stratagems, the same striving for power and hope for revenge.

The chief feature of Corsican politics is its seriousness. Politics in the island is not merely a battle; it is life. In England or France the voter gives a theoretical adherence to a particular party, and in the victory or defeat of that party he does not stand to win or lose a great deal, personally at all events. To the Corsican, however, victory brings very tangible advantages; defeat often means very serious personal loss. A tract of land taken over by the State for the railway was pointed out to me one day, which before the coming of the iron road belonged in almost equal proportions to two persons. The peasant who was a supporter of the party in power received eleven times the amount of money received by the other—who was not a supporter of the party—as compensation, the award being made by a jury!

Nearly all Corsica to-day votes Republican, and sends to Paris five deputies and three senators. Ajaccio, however, is still haunted by the spirit of Napoleon; the dutiful Ajaccien shouts "Vive Napoléon!" and votes Bonapartist. The political meeting is practically unknown except to a slight extent in the towns. The long speeches deemed necessary on the Continent, in which the whole policy of the party is expounded and lauded to the skies, and that of opposition exposed to ridicule and torn to shreds, are absent in Corsica. Party devo-

tion and the extraordinary liking which the Corsicans have for political debates and arguments amongst themselves render them unnecessary, and the energy of the politician is directed into the less reputable channel of intrigue. Municipal and general elections are fought on the same political lines, and the amount of underhand work which goes on is really extraordinary.

This activity is perhaps most notable in the making up of the voters' lists, and one young fellow, a goat-herd of Solenzara, gave me an example of how matters are sometimes "worked" in this direction. He lived during the summer in the uplands, in the winter near Solenzara, and did not belong to the party which then had the majority. In the mountain ward he was told that he would require to be registered in the division which contained Solenzara; in Solenzara it was pointed out to him that the proper place for him to be registered was in the uplands. In both cases the authorities refused to register his name. Then he came to live permanently in Solenzara and the powers that be consented to give him a vote. He was, as he said, "not a great scholar," but he recognised his name when it was pointed out to him on the list, and he was satisfied. When he went to vote on election day he was refused a paper and told that the name which had been pointed out to him was that of another man who had already given his vote!

In Lèvie I was told of another incident, the truth of which I subsequently verified. In a neighbouring village constituency there were only seventy voters on the register for the election of the local council. Forty of these men were shepherds who spent a period of the year away from home in the mountains in another division. They were told that they would have to vote at a coming election in that constituency. They were all Republicans, and they saw that if they did as they were bid their votes

would have little effect, as the return of the Republican candidates was certain. In the valley, however, their absence would mean Republican losses, and for this reason the thirty remaining voters were straining every nerve to make certain that the Republican party's supporters should be prevented from exercising the franchise in the valley. The forty, however, announced their intention of voting in the lowland constituency, and on election day they came down armed to the teeth. They voted, and waited until the return of their candidates was declared and rendered legal !

In another instance, in order to secure the return of his candidates, a mayor persuaded all his supporters to vote early. This having been done, he declared the polling closed before his antagonistic and less energetic townsmen came to exercise the franchise !

The Corsicans compared with the Italians and the Spaniards do not present quite that picturesque appearance which we naturally associate with Southern peoples. The peasant and the labourer are generally garbed in corduroy, with slouch hats and red sashes. The men in the towns wear black clothes, generally clumsy and ill-fitting. Amongst the women folks, too, there is a strange absence of colour, due to a large extent to the long period of mourning which follows the death of a relative. Five years is generally the length of time, but in the case of a very near and dear relation the period is mostly prolonged. A second bereavement often causes the Corsican woman to renounce colours altogether. The young peasant girls, however, are exceedingly fond of them. Nothing pleases them more than a gay coloured scarf to wear over their heads, mantilla-like. The variety of shades, too, which they contrive to combine in one dress is often positively alarming.

In the towns that inimitable French *savoir faire* in the



THREE GENERATIONS: A TYPICAL CORSICAN HOUSEHOLD.

matter of dress is visible to a prominent degree. The young ladies of Ajaccio and Bastia, and to a lesser extent of Corté and Calvi, present a dainty appearance which almost suggests that they have stepped round the corner from the Rue Royale. "Young men about town" prefer to ape English fashions, and do it badly. Hard felt and straw hats are in great favour, and the *chapelleries anglaises* flourish like green bay-trees. Any other article of dress to which the description "English" can even only remotely be applied is certain to have a ready sale.

The Corsican, rich or poor, is a believer in scrupulous cleanliness. No matter in what lost little village the traveller finds himself, no matter how poor and mean the little inn may look, he may rest assured that his meals will be well served, his bed leave nothing to be desired. Good meals and a good bed! What more does the wanderer ask of man? The rest he gets from Nature.

Another striking feature in the Corsican is the almost entire lack of art in his nature. Artistic feeling, save in one particular, seems to have been denied him. Corsican statues are generally grotesque; literature is practically absent; painting does not appeal to him; architecture is entirely neglected. Of course, the connection of the Corsicans with other nations was, until a comparatively recent date, the contact of war. Their intelligence, imagination, activity, and national resources were all thrown in bootless sacrifice to the god of battles. In one particular, however, they have taken their revenge on that destiny which withholds from them the graces of life. It is not too much to say that there is not another race in which the poetic sense is so deeply imbued. The charm of their country and the fierce passions engendered during ages of war appear to have inspired them with the gift of expressing themselves in rhyme and rhythm to an extent unequalled amongst any other people. Every

Corsican is a poet of passion and deep feeling, and this natural gift finds expression in songs of exquisite beauty.

“With a people among whom Death moves more in the character of a destroying angel than elsewhere,” said Gregorovius more than half a century ago, “presenting himself constantly in his most bloody forms, the dead must have a more striking ceremonial than elsewhere. There is something dark and striking in the fact that the most favourite poetry of the Corsicans is the poetry of death, and that they compose and sing almost exclusively in the intoxication of grief. Most of their rare flowers of popular poetry have germinated in blood.”

One of the most vivid memories which I carried away with me from Corsica was that of a funeral service at Bocognano. A young sailor of twenty-two years of age had come home to see his parents. He took ill and in three days was dead. The day before the burial the corpse was laid out on the *tola*, a table draped with black and decked with flowers. All night long watch was kept beside the body by a large number of relatives, and every now and again lamentations burst forth with a poignant note of grief which is unforgettable. Long before the hour fixed for the funeral the lamentations began in earnest, while outside friends and neighbours gathered for the last ceremony. Just before the body was carried to its resting-place the *vocera*, or song of lamentation, was sung, the mourners standing in a circle round the *tola*. Their expressions of grief were dramatic and wild, almost fearful, while the *vocera* itself was heart-piercing in its dirge-like tone and passionate earnestness. The circle retired, then advanced; the wild tokens of grief sank almost to calm and then rose again to the heights of agony. Sometimes the women threw themselves on the floor, beating their breasts and tearing their

hair. Then followed a deathlike silence, as deeply expressive of anguish as the loudest lamentations. Sometimes round the *tola* a strange wild dance, called the *caracolu*, is performed, but that I did not see on this occasion.

A young woman almost sprang from the circle and, placing herself at the head of the *tola*, chanted the *vocera*. In this case I believe it was previously composed, but it is very often entirely improvised. The others chanted the chorus. The finest of these fierce songs are composed and sung by young women, and it is by no means a rare thing to come across a number of girls spending their spare time composing these gloomy chants.

When the priests entered the lamentations were redoubled, and the mourning train followed the friars as they carried the body to the church, where it was blessed, and then to the grave, passionate laments being uttered all the way. The *conforto*, or funeral feast, ended the melancholy procession of ceremonies. These funeral rites are of very ancient origin, and do not, of course, constitute a custom entirely peculiar to the Corsicans. In the interior and south of the island they are still carried out with all their ancient horror and tragic circumstance, but in many parts time has reduced the order of things largely to what it is in France. The richer families generally build small mausoleums on their own land, or on ground specially bought, and there the members are buried. These little morbid Meccas of grief are often seen dotting the roadside near towns and villages, and are built much on the same plan—but, of course, somewhat larger—as those erections which are so numerous in such cemeteries as Père la Chaise in Paris.

As an example of Corsican *vocera* I quote one given by Gregorovius.

VOCERA

Of a young girl on the death of her playmate at the age of fourteen years.

Decked my playmate is this morning,
 With a garb of fairest hues ;
 For she yet may be espoused,
 Though her parents both she lose :
 Is she now adorned and ready
 For the bridegroom who her woos ?

All assembled is the *piève*,
 And they can do naught but mourn ;
 All the bells do peal so sadly,
 And a flag and cross are borne.
 But how could thy festival
 Thus be changed to grief forlorn ?

Now to-day my playmate leaves us,
 Travels to a distant land,
 Where our lost forefathers many
 And my own dear father stand ;
 Where each one of us must tarry,
 Where they wander hand in hand.

Wilt thou change thy home and clime,
 Leave the country which thee bore ?—
 Ah ! then is it much too early
 To venture forth for evermore !
 Hear thy playmate for one moment,
 Once so dear, in days of yore.

I will forthwith write a billet,
 And forthwith to thee will give,
 And I will not seal nor close it ;
 For I in the hope will live
 That thou then, on thy arrival,
 To my father wilt it give.

And by word of mouth then tell him
 News of his beloved ones all ;
 The little girl he by the hearth
 Left weeping for her father's fall,
 Has sprung up a comely maiden—
 So they deem her—fair and tall.

And say that his eldest daughter
Found a husband here below,
And that him a son she bore,
Like a blossom-covered bough ;
And that he his daddy knows,
And with his finger points out so.

That he bears his family name,
Which in honour high I hold ;
And he has such pretty limbs,
Fair and tender, brave and bold ;
All say, "O how like his father !"
Who the stripling wight behold.

And to my dear uncle say
That his village well has thriven,
Since by him at such great cost
That good well was to it given ;
And that we all of him think,
Every morning, every even.

Whene'er into the church we come,
To that spot our eyes we cast,
Near to yonder altar's base,
Where he found his rest at last ;
Then our hearts feel pangs of sorrow,
And the loving tears flow fast.

See ! to bless thee comes the *curé*,
With holy water from his hand ;
With uncovered head the others,
A mournful company, do stand.
To the Lord, in bliss departing,
Dearest, seek the heavenly land.

CHAPTER XIV

CLIMBING IN CORSICA

By T. G. OUSTON, F.R.C.S.

AN Alpine guide, François Devonassoud, once said to his patron, Mr. Douglas Freshfield, "Monsieur, I think that when le bon Dieu was building the Alps he must have left a bit over and thrown it down in the Mediterranean to make Corsica."

A description in a nutshell.

The outstanding physical feature of the island is its mountains ; it is, in fact, entirely mountainous with the exception of the narrowest strip of coast-line on the east, which only in one place—the Plain of Aleria—attains any notable breadth.

The visitor in winter and spring sees the higher summits clad with snow, which even the terrific power of the summer sun does not entirely dissipate from the northern sides, gullies, and ravines of the highest peaks. The mountain ranges thus form the natural waterworks and condensing grounds, where springs and melting snow give birth to roaring torrents, which, cascading down through rocky gorges, enter and fertilise the more open lowland valleys. Evening dews and an occasional thunder-shower would hardly compensate for the furnace-like power of the Corsican summer

sun, and without the mountains a bare, arid island would have neither past history nor present interest.

Mr. Renwick has pertinently divided the climate of the island into three zones—

- (1) Up to 1,700 feet,
- (2) From 1,700 to 5,000 feet,
- (3) Above 5,000 feet

—and remarks that “it is, of course, with the first zone that the visitor to the island is chiefly concerned.” As an exception to prove his rule, I was chiefly concerned with zone No. 3, on which as I have endeavoured to show briefly zones Nos. 1 and 2 depend for interest and almost for existence.

The mountain system of the island is bewildering at the first glance, in that there appears to be much mountain but little system. My chapter is on climbing and not on orography, but a small amount of the latter is necessary to elucidate the former.

Starting at Cap Corse, a central mountain ridge at an elevation of 3,000 to 4,000 feet runs southwards, sending off spurs east and west; then, bending to the south-west round the Gulf of St. Florent, it reaches an altitude of 5,000 feet in Monte Asto, to expand shortly into a dense cluster of lofty peaks surrounding Monte Cinto, 9,003 feet, the culminating point of the island.

South-east of this group is Monte Rotondo, 8,750 feet, practically the central point of the island, followed in a more southerly line by Monte d'Oro, 7,950 feet, and Monte Renoso, 7,850 feet, after which the elevations diminish, with the exception of Monte Incudine, which attains an altitude of 7,120 feet.

Monte Rotondo has ten and Monte d'Oro two named satellites over 7,000 feet, and the Monte Renoso group

includes seven named summits above this altitude, but the Cinto group possesses nine named summits over 8,000 feet and other sixteen over 7,000 feet.

A mountain may be said to acquire distinction—

(1) From the beauty, majesty, or architectural merit of its form, which is largely influenced by its setting ;

(2) From the character of the view which it affords ;

(3) From its altitude ;

(4) From the sport which it offers to the climber in attaining its summit.

Judged by these standards the Cinto group of mountains really has no rival in the island.

Monte Incudine's chief attraction is the fine view which it affords.

Monte d'Oro is well named. On entering the Bay of Ajaccio the "golden rose of dawn" on its distant summit welcomed us to the island, and later, from Vizzavona, its massive crags, still of golden hue in the afternoon light, appeared to send down a plain—but unaccepted—invitation to visit them. Joanne's Guide, in its description of the ascent, has the words "Corde très utile," which is suggestive of good things for the climber, but I understand the top can be reached, without difficulty, by more than one route unless the summit rocks are ice-covered.

Monte Rotondo is the best known peak in Corsica, an undeserved celebrity which it has acquired partly from the long-held supposition that it was the loftiest peak in the island, and partly from its easy accessibility from Corté. As its name suggests, the mountain is rotund and humpy, although it forms an imposing background to the superbly situated fortress town of Corté, as seen from the valley of the Vecchio. The view from its summit is said to be disappointing, but what it lacks in form and as a view-point is more than compensated





IN THE RESTONICA VALLEY.

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for by the magnificence of the scenery which surrounds the vicinity of its base.

The gorges of the Restonica and Tavignano are of superlative beauty. In both the torrents cut their way for miles, down from the uplands through steep, narrow, rocky chasms, above which the mountain sides rise for thousands of feet, clad with forests of the gigantic pines, and through which huge cliffs and bluffs of rock project in places, to be crowned against the sky by sharply pinnacled granite ridges.

In treating of the Cinto mountains it may be well to mention first some of their deficiencies. Taken as a group, their "setting" is not good. Little idea of their charms can be obtained until you are actually in their midst, and this may account for the fact that they are virtually a *terra incognita* to tourists, and only a few German and Italian and half a dozen English climbers (including our party) seem to have sought a close acquaintance with the more difficult peaks. Again, they are packed somewhat too closely for each individual form to show to advantage. Like a family of fine sisters, one is apt to stand in the way of and eclipse another.

The snow-world is practically absent during the summer months, but the proximity of the Mediterranean may be mentioned as a compensatory charm. On the other hand, the group comprises peaks as varied in form as they are unique in individual character.

The mountains enclose deep-cut, pine-clad valleys and rocky, awe-inspiring "kessels," walled in by stupendous cliffs which will hold their own with the best in the Tyrol, even if the peaks themselves cannot quite rival the monarchs of the Dolomites.

The chief summits of this group lie within an area some twelve miles long from north to south, and ten miles

broad from east to west. These measurements are of course as the "crow flies," and to cross the area in any direction would at least involve a day's arduous mountaineering. The roads hardly approach the fringe of this area; those from Asco and Calvi terminate at the north-east and north-west corners respectively; that from Galeria is continued as a mule track over the Col de Capronale at the south-western extremity, whilst that from Calacuccia skirts the south-east corner. Where the roads end mule tracks, in a few instances, enter a few of the valleys for a short distance and stop. Beyond this area, a faintly marked shepherds' trail through the forest, the *maquis*, or over some *col* may perhaps be detected. If so, "Take and keep it, if you can, happy man!"

Calacuccia is the best base from which to approach the mountains, as it has two inns, general stores of a simple kind, telegraph and post offices. It can be reached in a few hours' drive from Corté, *viâ* the Scala di Santa Regina—a wild, rocky gorge, and one of the sights of the island. An alternative base is Asco, but, for general access to the central peaks and for local accommodation, an inferior one.

The climber who would explore the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Corsican mountain strongholds must pay his toll by roughing it. He may sleep in a *bergerie*, in a cave, under the stars, or in a tent. The best peaks are not accessible in one day from any inn save perhaps by a *tour de force*, with the exception of Monte Cinto and the Cinque Frati.

One afternoon in August, 1908, found three friends, a native, Giuseppe Sabiati, and myself, loading four mules in Calacuccia with tents and provisions. Sabiati acts as a tourists' guide for the ascent of Monte Cinto. He is an obliging, trustworthy fellow, but we have no experi-

ence of his proficiency as a cragsman, and he does not use *la corde*.

Sabiati and I started ahead with the mules, one of whom, an evil beast, soon had his load reversed between his legs. The others stampeded, with Sabiati in hot pursuit. My cries for help whilst wrestling with the evil one brought my companions up at the double, not a second too soon for the safety of the camera and kit. Leaving the road at the village of Albertacce, a rough mule-track was followed up the mountain slopes, Sabiati keeping up piteous wails of reproachful entreaty to the animals, which, when a rocky ravine had to be negotiated, might have come from a soul in mortal agony. After three hours, Calasima, the highest and most isolated village in Corsica, perched on the precipitous mountain side, came into view.

"The shades of night were falling fast" as we passed through this picturesque, but dirty, Alpine village. The *patois* of a pretty maiden might have conveyed an invitation to rest, but to camp amongst goats, calves, fowls, dogs and pigs, to say nothing of all too probable insect fauna, was impossible. Absolute darkness pulled us up, however, half a mile farther on, and our camp was pitched by the meagre light of a couple of candles. There is no question of oversleeping in tent life in Corsica. When once the rising sun strikes the tent, out you go, and any bed-making process is postponed until sundown. Ejected in this manner the next morning, we found our inefficiently hobbled mules had all too efficiently hobbled away! It was nearly mid-day before a torrent of *patois* announced the arrival of Sabiati in angry triumph with the deserters.

En route again, we rounded a bluff crowned by five rock pinnacles and left the broad, open, sun-scorched valley of the Niolo to enter the deeply cut, densely wooded

Virothal, surrounded by sharp, precipitous, lofty peaks—a welcome sight to the climber's eye.

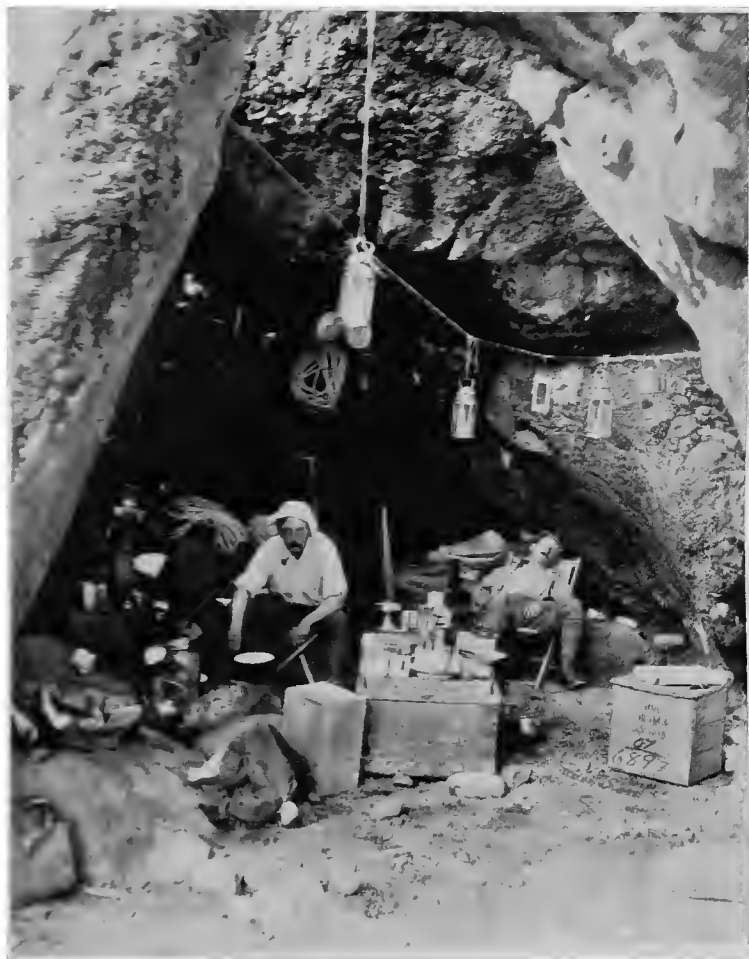
The five *aiguilles* just mentioned are called the Cinque Frati. They but little resemble their prototypes, the Funffingerspitze and Cinque Torri in the Dolomites, however, except in number. Though not so high (6,670 feet) as most of their neighbours, their striking and unique appearance (especially from the south-western extremity of the Virothal) is one of the features of the district. Sharply conical in form, they rise in a row, clean-cut against the sky; and, closely resembling one another, decrease regularly in size like members of a well-ordered family.

Their eastern sides are shorter, less precipitous and imposing than their western, and appeared to offer pleasant, if not difficult scrambling to the summits. Herr von Cube and party—whose exhaustive pioneer work in the district I would here like to acknowledge—had ascended the highest and most northerly one from the east. On the south side of the valley a castellated peak of dazzling whiteness, called Punta Licciola, glistened and glinted in the sun.

On obtaining a fragment of this rock, I found it crystalline and igneous in character, and I understand that it is white porphyry. Outcrops of this rock occur amongst the prevailing red granite or porphyry of the neighbouring mountains, but this seemed to be the only peak entirely composed of the formation.

Across the valley to the west the mighty tooth of Paglia Orba towered into the sky over 4,000 feet above us, easily dominating the whole scene.

In about two and a half hours from Calasima we found ourselves opposite the mouth of a curious cave formed by gigantic boulders, which Sabiati informed us was the "Grotto des Anges." The name struck



THE GROTTA DES ANGES.

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our fancy, if it flattered the cave. A brief survey, however, showed that it was hardly possible to flatter the beauty of its environment, or the suitability of the spot for a camp, or as a centre for mountain expeditions. Water was close at hand, for the stream of the Viro, 100 feet below, tumbling down between grand boulders, formed cool bathing pools in the ample shade of huge lariccio pines. So the grotto, about 30 by 15 feet in area, formed our delightfully cool sitting, dining, and storage room for the following eleven days ; but we slept in the tents which, however, we could almost have dispensed with under the circumstances. We were at an elevation of over 4,000 feet, and the cool nights were a refreshing and stimulating change from the blazing sunshine of the days.

Paglia Orba (8,410 feet), the noblest peak in Corsica, rising as it did right above our camp, naturally demanded our first attention. A rough idea of the general contour of the peak may be obtained by comparing it with an ordinary church, with tower, nave, and chancel, and the points of the compass also happen to coincide. The front of the tower, facing the Virothal, and also its northern side, form unclimbable precipices, whilst its southern side sends down a finely pinnacled ridge into the west branch of the same valley. This ridge appears to offer a very sporting route to the summit, and is well worth the attention of a strong party of climbers. The south wall of the "body" is steep, but being fairly well broken up by gullies and ledges, presents more than one route up, and this was the side by which our own ascent was made. The north and west sides of the "chancel" form smooth, vertical cliffs, which plunge down into the abyss of the Kessel von Tondo.

We wound our way for an hour, among gigantic pines, up the western branch of the Virothal. One fallen

monarch measured 20 feet in circumference and 120 feet in length. The walls through which the torrent issued gave a little trouble in crossing, but in another hour we exchanged the rough scrambling of the mountain side for our first patch of mountain *maquis*. This growth has stems of from five to six feet and about the thickness of one's finger, which are closely packed and have a "lie" in accordance with the prevailing wind. On close inspection a faintly marked shepherds' track could be detected leading through the succeeding masses of this growth, which were hundreds of yards broad. If the track were lost, which happened several times, a little distance could be made by a great effort with the lie of the stems (which was usually in the wrong direction), but speedily ended in exhaustion of strength and suitable unparliamentary epithets. To move against or across the "lie" was an impossibility.

Small wonder that the hero of a vendetta can snap his fingers at gendarme and bloodhound in this stuff.

Crossing the Col Foggiale, up the eastern slopes of which we had been toiling for two hours, we made for the rocks of the southern wall of Paglia Orba. Rapid hand and foot work for a few hundred feet was followed by a temporary check. The obstacle was a fissure or "chimney," 100 feet high, in the face of a practically vertical rock. After some apologetic remarks about want of training and first climbs, we roped up, and climbed the cleft. This proved the only real difficulty, though some slabs and ledges required care in their ascent, and we were soon on the roof of the body and on the summit of the tower itself, after four and a half hours of actual going from the camp and two hours from the Col Foggiale, 1,870 feet below.

All Corsica appeared to lie at our feet with the excep-



MONTE CINTO, CAPO LARGHIA, AND PUNTA MINUTA.

With head of the Virothal.

tion of Monte Cinto to the north-east, who seemed to say, "*I'm* monarch of all *you* survey," and dwarfed its more sport-giving neighbours, Capo Larghia and Punta Minuta at the head of the Virothal. The sea beyond Cap Corse was visible to the north, and on the north-eastern horizon a faint coast line could be distinguished. Southwards a confusing conglomeration of mountain tops rendered identification of individual ones difficult, owing to the heat haze, which obscured the southern end of the island.

Our tents 4,000 feet below looked so close and small, that it seemed as if a stone deftly thrown would have annihilated them. The view to the west was cut off by the long "roof of the church," and in this direction lay the redoubtable peak, Capo Tafonato, perforated by its famous hole.

To obtain a view of this we descended in its direction until we were on the roof of the chancel and the top of the cliffs which plunge down into the Kessel von Tondo.

We were then under the impression that the summits were virgin, and it appeared to us that the left hand (SSW.) summit was slightly the higher, which impressions subsequently turned out to be incorrect.

Descending by the chimney, I parted from my companions in order to take some photographs. Skirting round the end of the "chancel" and clambering over a rocky ridge connecting Paglia Orba with Capo Tafonato and called the Col de Trou, I found myself gazing awestruck into the Kessel von Tondo, the wildest and most savage scene in Corsica. The abyss is formed by the grandest cliffs of the steepest mountains in the island: Paglia Orba, Capo Tafonato, (western) Capo Rosso, and Uccello, thousands of feet in height. This kessel, with some of its northerly neighbours, is said to be a

favourite haunt of the now rarely seen wild sheep, the moufflon, in which remote recesses they have more chance of evading their human foe in their struggle for existence.

Believing myself in absolute solitude, I was startled by a yell ringing out and reverberating from cliff to cliff. Who could be in such a spot? Perhaps a moufflon hunter. Where was he? Some rocks crashing down drew my attention to a figure dashing madly along the precipitous rock-wall a few hundred yards away. He pulled up suddenly and appeared to cover me with his rifle! Had I disturbed his quarry, and was I, therefore, to be the quarry myself? Not fancying a rocky grave in the kessel, I took cover and looked round for way of escape, of which there was none, except over the skyline of the sharp edge of the *col*. Up he tore to me. I said "Bon jour" (though I was not feeling it), and he replied, to my surprise, by placing his rifle in my hand. Opening the lock I found it loaded and handed it back. Pointing to the mountain he said, "Paglia Orba?" I nodded. Pointing to the rifle, I said, "Moufflon?" and he nodded. Pantomime speech, aided by certain delicacies from the rucksac, cemented our friendship, and I showed him to my camera.

We foregathered with my companions at the Col Foggiale, where he led off down the valley, loaded rifle held aloft. No *maquis* or *détours* for him. He tumbled down the steep rocks at a great pace, always however alighting on his feet in a way that only a cat or native man of the mountains can, whilst three breathless Englishmen followed behind as best they could.

Dawn one morning found us wending our way northwards up by our valley stream. Our destination was the sporting-looking Capo Larghia, whose fine, rugged, double-towered summit, peeping through the pines

surrounding our camp, had long challenged us to friendly contest. A faintly marked track through the forest led in half an hour to the only level piece of ground in the valley, with the exception of that on which our tents were pitched. On this was a small, rough, dirty, evil-smelling stone-built shanty, the Bergerie de Ballone.

In another half-hour we emerged above the tree zone, reaching the bare, rugged, rock-bestrewn head of the valley, the Bocca de Crocetta, which here branches in the form of a Y, to enclose the bases of Punta Minuta and Capo Larghia, and we were able to complete our knowledge of its orographical details. The valley, with the exception of its southern extremity, is entirely surrounded by a mountain wall, made up by a large proportion of the highest and finest peaks in the group, which in turn are connected by lofty *cols*. Uccello and Tighietto, Paglia Orba's northerly neighbours, complete the western wall. They are fine enough mountain masses, but are in too good company to attract a great deal of notice.

Punta Minuta and Capo Larghia worthily fill their position at the northern head of the valley and rank in order of merit next to Paglia Orba.

The eastern wall is formed as far as the Cinque Frati by three lofty but comparatively uninteresting peaks, Monte Falo, (the eastern) Capo Rosso, and Monte Albano.

Our route lay by the side of a ravine corresponding to the right-hand (NE.) branch of the Y, a direction which leads to the Col de Crocetta, between Capo Larghia and Monte Falo. In another hour we emerged from the grateful shade of the latter peak into blazing sunshine, which gave us ample excuse for halts to admire the magnificent retrospective view of Paglia Orba, which

here showed its 4,000 feet of precipitous rock to great advantage.

A third hour's rough scrambling placed us at the foot of the two huge, imposing towers of Capo Larghia, which give the peak its characteristic and striking appearance. The towers are separated by a deep, narrow, vertical cleft; and bold or reckless will be the cragsman who first passes from summit to summit. The eastern tower shows an incipient bifurcation at its top, giving the mountain a triple-headed appearance from some viewpoints. Both summits had been reached by Herr von Cube and party a few years previously. They ascended the eastern and slightly higher one by climbing the rocks straight up from the position we then occupied. We, however, kept on to the Col de Crocetta, which was reached in four hours from camp.

On the northern side of the *col* was a snowfield, and, running north-east from the *col*, a long, lofty ridge appeared to switchback, with a general upward trend, right on to the summit of Monte Cinto. To the east, far down in the hollow of the sombre brown rocks, the turquoise-tinted surface of the tiny Lac Cinto shone like a jewel. Attacking the grand firm rocks of the eastern tower of our peak straight up from the *col*, several hundred feet of interesting, varied, and fairly difficult climbing, up "face," "ledge," "gully," "crack," and "chimney," landed us on its narrow, heady top. On the whole, this proved to be the most interesting summit view we experienced.

Our immediate situation, though less awe-inspiring than that of the southern peak of Tafonato, which we ascended a day or two later, was sensational enough to add zest to the distant panorama, which was not too distant to be effective. The rocks fell away almost sheer on all sides; to the south they plunged into the Bocca



PAGLIA ORBA WITH CAPO TAFONATO.

Rocks of Capo Larghia in the foreground,

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de Crocetta ; to the north into the wild, snow-patched kessel of Trinbolaccia, encircled by magnificently pinnacled ridges, which this peak and its neighbour, Punta Minuta, throw out on this side. We were cut off from the western tower by the formidable gap already mentioned.

To the south-west the spire-like form of Capo Tafonato, peeping round the northern side of Paglia Orba, was very interesting, in striking contrast to the view previously obtained of it from the latter peak. It was now obvious that it was a gigantic leaf, standing up edge on, and that it must be of the narrowest dimensions.

From the Virothal, and from most points east and north-east, Paglia Orba gives, in golfing parlance, a direct stymie to a view of Tafonato, and, owing to its greater height and massive bulk, somewhat eclipses its slender but fierce-looking neighbour.

Capo Larghia and Punta Minuta occupy the most central positions in the Cinto system, and from them radiate the chief ranges. These ranges may be suitably described as ridges having a lofty minimum elevation on which the peaks themselves rise at intervals. One main ridge runs north to Monte Corona, and includes nine named summits over 7,000 feet. From Monte Corona a branch runs east at right angles to Monte Padro, the north-eastern outpost of the district. A second, the most lofty one, already mentioned, runs from the Col de Crocetta or Capo Larghia to Capo Bianco, and bears five named summits over 8,000 feet, including Monte Cinto itself. A third, starting from the same point and already described, runs south to the Cinque Frati, starting with Monte Falo, over 8,000 feet. A fourth runs south-west from Punta Minuta and bears the summits of Tighietto, Uccello, Paglia Orba, Tafonato, ending at Capo alle Giargiole, all over 7,000 feet. The first three of

these separate the Virothal from the Kessel von Aghia Minuta and the Kessel von Tondo.

Punta Minuta, though less striking and distinctive in form than Capo Larghia, is a fine peak, and was climbed from the southern side facing the Virothal by Herr von Cube and party. A party including the same climber also ascended the western tower of Capo Larghia from the northern side, but I saw no reason why this peak should not be accessible from the Virothal, although the ascent looked as if it would be a difficult one.

By 2 p.m. we were again at the Col de Crocetta. The summit of Cinto looked deceptively near along its foreshortened south-west ridge already mentioned. The ridge was in bad repair, and, although our pace was a hot one over two subordinate summits, an hour and a half's going found us still cut off from the real top by a gap some hundreds of feet deep. There was no difficulty save that of time, but the obvious alternatives were Cinto and a cold, hungry night on the mountain, or warmth, food, and the Grotto des Anges. We retraced our steps, but it was dark before we located our grotto by an odour of frying trout, which showed that the fisherman of the party had not been idle in our absence.

The time was ripe for a visit to Capo Tafonato. An inquiry at the tourist office in Ajaccio had elicited the statement that the peak was climbed many years ago. Herr von Cube, who had climbed most of the higher peaks in the district, believed its summits virgin (at least in 1903), as did also our man Sabiati. Both had visited the hole. Such was our information in regard to the accessibility of the mountain. A later start than usual was compensated for by more rapid moving, and two of us demonstrated that the Col de Trou can be reached in three hours from the grotto.

To an expert cragsman the climb to the hole in good

weather is a pleasant and easy scramble, presenting neither difficulty nor danger, but it is no place for novices unless in the company of two experienced climbers, and for them at least a rope is an absolute necessity. The ascent is "exposed" and heady, and a slip, if unroped, would be certainly fatal during practically the whole of the route, and the hole itself is not a place calculated to soothe nerves already overtried by the ascent.

The descent, however, is not more trying than the ascent. The hole can be reached in fifteen minutes' rapid climbing from the foot of the rocks of the Col de Trou. Starting from this position, easy scrambling soon landed us, on the eastern end of a long, narrow, nearly horizontal ledge. The ledge led southwards on the face of the cliff, below, and beyond the southern end of the hole. The rocks above and below the ledge were practically vertical. It varied in width from about three feet to nil in one spot, where a small projecting buttress had to be passed by swinging the left leg round it whilst facing the cliff. Beyond this really simple little *mauvais pas*, the ledge soon showed an upward trend, and was shortly lost on the mountain face, which was here broken up into ledges and well supplied with hand and foot holds.

The line of least resistance then led nearly straight up to a level above the floor of the hole, and as we had, as it were, overshot our mark, it was necessary to double back and descend a little to a second ledge, which soon led us into the southern extremity of the hole. We were frankly startled as we stepped round a rock corner into the fissure, so impressive was the spectacle and situation, and I remember exclaiming, "This is one of the sights of Europe!"

It is almost as futile to attempt to make a word picture

of the spot as it proved difficult to represent it by photography. The aperture was about 100 feet long, 40 feet in height, by 30 feet in thickness, and, as this last dimension also represents the thickness of the mountain, the southern summit of which rises for some 400 feet above the hole, it follows that the mountain is excessively steep.

The floor slopes at a general angle of about 50° to the west, and a vertical transverse section of the hole would be roughly funnel shaped, with the broad end in that direction, so that the eastern aperture forms a narrow slit compared with the western one. The impression given was that of standing under a huge, rough stone bridge, and the knowledge that this bridge supported a considerable portion of a mountain above one's head was, to say the least, uncanny. Down to the east was the drop over the mountain wall which we had traversed by means of the ledge in our ascent; down to the west the first sight that caught the eye was the valley several thousands of feet below.

The picture presented was one of strongest contrast. The darkly shaded gloomy margins of the hole framed a brilliantly illuminated view of the greenly wooded valley, flanked by high brown rocky peaks, running down to the white breakers of the blue Mediterranean.

Legend has it that his Satanic Majesty was ploughing out the Corsican valleys. St. Martin rallied him on his crooked ways in general and furrows in particular. The devil thrashed the oxen in his rage, causing them to bolt. Mad with passion, he threw a rock into the air, which, piercing the mountain, fell by the shore of Lac Nino, where it may now be seen.

A more credible statement in connection with the hole is that on a certain hour of a certain day in the year the sun shines directly through the aperture, forming an impressive spectacle from the valley below.



THE HOLE FROM THE NORTH.

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If impressive in perfect weather, what must it be like at this spot in a winter storm, when incalculable tons of wind pressure beat against the vertical mountain wall, finding vent through one solitary aperture? One could imagine the force of a gust through this blow-hole being quite sufficient to project any unattached body, such as an out-of-season climber, through mid-air into the abyss with as much ease as a schoolboy projects a pea from a pea-shooter.

Retracing our steps for a few minutes, we clambered up to a gap in the rocks south of the southern summit, which was our goal, believing, as we did, that it was the highest point of the mountain. From this point onwards the climbing was continuously difficult and sensational.

The first obstacle was a nearly vertical rock wall, 40 feet high, the smooth surface of which only supplied a few tiny ledges for the fingers and toes at rather long intervals. This surmounted, horizontal ledges, a few inches wide, on the rock face led into a small cave in the remarkably honeycombed rock, which resembled petrified sponge. The cave was only an interstice in an extra large sponge. This honeycombing of the rocks was also seen on Paglia Orba and in the Tavignano gorge. The exit over the roof of the cave was safe (albeit sensational), owing to the magnificent grip this rock affords; in fact, so rough was it that one had to be careful not to leave portions of one's skin and clothing behind.

Confident we were climbing virgin rocks, a surprise now awaited us as great as that of Crusoe when he saw the footprint in the sand. We found an iron *piton* driven into a slab, with two loops of cord attached, and evidently quite recently placed there. We had been forestalled, but it was evident that our predecessors had

felt a great respect for the difficulties of the place. The loops of cord were, of course, to thread a rope through to safeguard the descent of the rock wall.

Had they reached the summit? If not, we could hardly hope to, as the point we had reached had severely taxed our climbing powers. A few minutes later we were pulled up by an extremely awkward place.

In order to reach the summit ridge, which was now almost within grasp, it was necessary to balance with the right foot only on a small projection of rock, when, by throwing the arms and body sideways to the left and at the same instant quitting the foothold, a good grip could be obtained for the hands, the body and legs swinging sideways without support below. There was no possibility of return when once the swing was taken, nor was it evident that the following arm pull landed one in safety. After looking at it for twenty minutes, however, we demonstrated that it did, and found ourselves in sensational safety on the narrow *arête*, a few feet broad, with appalling drops on either side.

The climbing still continued difficult and stimulatingly sensational northwards along the ridge, in places a mere knife edge, but rendered safe by hitching the rope, at every move, round some projecting rock. Success was not assured, however, until after wriggling up a "chimney corner" we found ourselves staring across a fearsome gap at the northern summit, which overtopped us by some 20 feet. Two superimposed stones on our southern summit appeared to have been placed there by human hands, probably by the inserters of the *piton* we had encountered, and we subsequently heard that a party of Italians had visited the peak two or three weeks previously.

The ascent of the 400 feet from the gap had occupied

two and a half hours. Descending to the point where we had reached the ridge, we hitched a spare rope line over a rock to "abseilen" down over the difficulty. When this was accomplished we found that the rope had jammed and could not be dislodged.

Time was running short, so we, as well as our predecessors, had perforce to leave our mark on the mountain, in the shape of 30 feet of rope line. In our rope-dislodging efforts my companion's panama hat was knocked off, which, descending like a parachute, strange to say, came to rest within a yard of our rucksacs, discarded at the gap in our ascent.

When we arrived at the same spot a superb spectacle was presented by the setting sun shining through a sea of cloudy billows rolling over the mountain tops from the sea, and a precious half of the remaining hour of daylight went in photography.

Hurrying down the remaining rocks, we raced down over the Col Foggiale to pass the *maquis* before absolute darkness rendered this an impossibility. Successful in this, a folding lantern enabled us with difficulty to find a way across the rock walls of the torrent and enter the valley forest before our only candle burnt out. Bumping, stumbling, and tumbling, good luck at last landed us, tired and weary, in sight of a moving light, and well do I remember the weird, Rembrandtesque appearance that the lantern-illuminated grotto and its occupants presented as we emerged from the darkness.

Naturally, we were dissatisfied until we had tried conclusions with the northern summit of Tafonato. The ascent of this, however, proved an anti-climax after the sport provided by its southern neighbour. Two days later, emerging from the northern extremity of the hole, we found a broad ledge leading obliquely upwards on the eastern face, which was easily followed. This

fault in the strata was continued to the northern side of the peak, where more broken up rocks led in turn to its western aspect. A moderately easy chimney, about 40 feet high, led right up to the summit pinnacle. As the direct ascent of this from the west was difficult, a descent of a few yards was made, the base of the pinnacle turned on the south, and the summit reached from the east side. It will thus be seen that, since leaving the hole, we had "boxed the compass."

On the summit was a small cairn, which we had reached in twenty-five minutes from the hole, to the astonishment of our friends, who were 1,000 feet almost straight below, near the Col de Trou, and who looked up and waved to us on hearing our shouts.

Sorrowfully realising that this was our last climb, we took a long parting view of wildest Corsica from this, its most remarkable and savage peak, then, tearing ourselves away, we reluctantly descended.

The following additional notes may be found useful or interesting :

It is advisable to start at dawn for any expedition, in order that 2,000 feet or so may be ascended before the sun rises over the mountain-tops and renders the heat of the lower slopes trying.

A gourd or aluminium water-bottle will be found useful in the hotter months. In excursions over the Col Foggiale, the last certain water for filling them is to be found about twenty minutes before the summit of the *col* is reached, and for those by the Col de Crocetta, about the same time before the bases of the towers of Capo Larghia are made.

Monte Cinto, as the most lofty peak in the island, will probably always attract visitors. Three routes to the summit may be mentioned :

(1) From Asco, in four to five hours.

(2) From Calacuccia, in seven and a half hours, the night being often spent at the Bergerie d'Ascia, two and three-quarter hours.

These are mentioned in order strongly to recommend a third as a much finer and more interesting expedition, additional details of which will have been gleaned from the foregoing pages.

(3) *Vià* the Virothal, the night being spent at the Grotto des Anges, in preference to the somewhat unsavoury Bergerie de Ballone. The Grotto des Anges is reached in about four hours from Calacuccia, *vià* Albertacce and Calasima, to which spot a mule with blankets, &c., may be taken if desired. After leaving Calasima, the mule track runs west, and then, rounding the south-western spur below the Cinque Frati, bears north, when the Grotto des Anges is reached in a few minutes. The cave is a few yards to the left of the track, and may easily be passed without notice, as its opening is not visible. It is formed by large boulders 25 feet or more in height. Leaving the grotto, the Bergerie de Ballone is passed in thirty-five minutes. A track is followed for some distance beyond the *bergerie*, until several streams descend to form the main one, along the sides of which the track has led.

The direction is now generally NE., and the right (NE.) side of a torrent which falls down through steep, rocky walls is followed in the direction of the Col de Crocetta, which is visible between Capo Larghia and Monte Falò, and is reached in four hours.

From here, traverse the crest of the ridge which runs NE. over two unnamed elevations to the final summit, which is about two and a half hours from the *col*, and six and a half from the grotto. The ridge is rough and stony, *détours* in places have to be made, and the hands have to

be used in places. The descent before the final asc is made may be rather trying to the patience, but situation on the ridge is a fine one and the excursion generally most interesting. The descent may be made Asco or Calacuccia.

For the benefit of climbers the following list of some of the most interesting ascents is appended, an attention being made to place them in the order of difficulty which in some instances will, of course, vary according to the particular route which happens to be struck.

Monte Cinto, from Asco, very easy.

Monte Cinto, from Calacuccia, very easy.

Monte Cinto, *viâ* the Virothal and Col de Crocetta, moderately easy.
Cinque Frati, moderately difficult.

Paglia Orba, " "

Punta Minuta, " "

Capo Tafonato, the hole and northern summit, moderately difficult.

Capo Larghia, either summit, difficult.

Capo Tafonato, southern summit, very difficult.

The following is a list of most of the chief summits of the island :—

CINTO GROUP, OVER 8,000 FEET.

	Feet.
Monte Cinto	9,003
Capo al Ciuntrone	8,900
Punta Gellola ... *	8,690
Capo al Berdato	8,620
Capo Bianco	8,510
Punta Minuta	8,490
Capo Larghia	8,420
Paglia Orba	8,410
Monte Falo	8,400

7,000 FEET AND UPWARDS.

Monte Padro	7,980
Capo Tafonato	7,810
Cima della Statoja	7,680
Punta Rossa	7,670

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